

## DON JUAN

By Gonzalo Torrente Ballester

### PROLOGUE

1. I can't remember what the origin of this "Don Juan" was; it must have been something that was very obscure and remote, one of the ideas that remain hidden in our consciousness and hide until they germinate in silence or die in it. What I can be sure of is that Don Juan came from a large dose of realism.

I am not a doctrinarian of art. I accept everything, except a pig in a poke. Because of my temperament and my education, I feel drawn toward the most basic realism and, with the same inclination, to everything opposite. The predominance of one of these aspects in the act of writing a novel depends completely on causes foreign to my will. And although it would be nice to use both and make a synthesis of their contradictions, the thing is that I wasn't given such a stroke of genius, and sometimes I feel like I'm a realist, and other times I don't. But, also by causes foreign to my will I have seen myself obliged, for as long as five years, to write a novel with more than thirteen hundred pages; this trilogy, with the title "The Joys and the Glooms," were read by about two thousand Spaniards. I confess that during that time I was often tempted to escape to fantasy through any unexpected link, and that whenever this happened, Don Juan was waiting in the doorway. A few times I put it aside, understanding that it was up to me to finish a work without betraying the original intention. But Don Juan remained there, much more ghostly than it is today, and it gave me signs of its presence and its hope that someday I would give it my attention.

I gave in to it when I had finally finished "The sad Christmas." That is to say, at the beginning of this year of 1962. The first thing I noticed was that, seen from up close, my "Don Juan" was no longer the same as during the several years it had encouraged me. It had changed without my permission, and I had to accept it as it was, instead of the way it had been. These kind of pranks *waste my imagination, which works on its own and gives us nothing more or less than what it creates, whether we like it or not. Don Juan is an imaginary person, without the least contact with reality. But even being imaginary, he seems to me more like a thinking person than an active one. All this did not cease to disturb me. Usually this type of character is a product of thought, not imagination; they tend to be symbols of ideas, not figurative intuitions. And what they think or say is copied from what the author thinks, and he himself does not want to say. However, my first big surprise came when I realized that neither Don Juan, nor the other characters in the story, thought like I did. And this didn't cease to please me because, even though I had put aside the realistic method, it permitted me to stay with the objective attitude that I had gotten accustomed to, when I wrote a realistic novel. From the start I had intended to write this story so that none of the characters—not even the anonymous narrator to whom I had given a few of my own personal experiences—would be a spokesperson for me. I think I accomplished that.*

Here is where this prologue ought to stop. But, having written this novel, I think that it would be proper to explain how I happened to create a new "Don Juan." Especially since Don Juan is not a common literary theme, when there is no great reason that supports his reappearance. With literary themes, it is necessary that there be some important reason in order to be popular. A novelist and a playwright are people focused on reality and are capable of including it in one of their plots, or in one of their episodes. They timidly offer a novel or a drama to the public. They believe—we believe—that what they create and publish adds something to what people already have. But their creation and their addition remain without notice or popularity when no great figure has bothered to fix on it. What happens then is that the writer renounces his personal view of reality, or of the truth, and converts himself into a follower of one figure or another that has already been accredited. That is, he attaches himself to the protection, close by or remote, of a grand figure in whose example, or in whose ideas, he can shield himself. A group of these followers constitutes a school. And, there have always been literary schools. Before this there was always room for independence, but now there is none. The sociology of the writer has changed very much, including that of the writer who is committed. That is evidently what I am, but not with a group or a school. I am sort of like a guerrilla, not a regular soldier. Which is, certainly, a type of commitment that is frowned on. This attempt to create literature in my own way explains, however, why a topic that is now mostly forgotten has interested me, and why I have spent six or seven months—with intermittences, that is true—of my life on it, without any great figure that shines its light on it and empowers my enterprise.

Quite a few years ago I started to write a series of narratives with the regular title of "Stories of Humor for Scholars." It was not that they were meant exclusively for that admirable group, whose main activity consists in accumulating a great amount of knowledge (because that's what scholars are); but I liked the title. The first of those stories, the only one published, was sold to very few people, and of course, I don't know if any scholar ever read it. I wasn't ever able to find an editor for the second one. So I stopped writing them, and there they are: "The Hostel of the kind Gods," "The sleeping Princess goes to School," and others which we could call literate narrations. They were not, as one might think, mere fantasies, but my attempt, in a parabolic way to create reality, or at least the truth. Or one truth. They, like this "Don Juan," were poetic works that were out of style, and their lack of readership didn't surprise me in the slightest. "Don Juan" was supposed to be part of the series, that "Don Juan" not this one, because the earlier one would have been different. The main difference, now I realize it, was that ten or fifteen years ago "Don Juan" represented a truth, and now, probably not. Or perhaps it is that then I was more sure of some truths than I am now. But it doesn't matter. The truth that I was aiming for then was, of course, an existential truth. Now, my purpose is merely literary: to add my own particular version of Don Juan to many other existences.

In a way it is traditional, and in another way it isn't. The reader will notice that in this story many common elements are combined with most of the known ones, (among them I include some that, if they refer to a Don Juan, he is not called that, like the Salamanca student of Espronceda, and the protagonist of the marvelous story of Merimeé.) If some day some scholar wants to take the time to analyze my story, I would like to remind him to keep in mind all the things he has learned from many of my many predecessors. But I believe I have also added something with my own work, by means of which, this Don Juan is "my" Don Juan. It is certain that, for the most part, my personal contributions are not images, but concepts. All right. For that reason, and only for that reason, I prefer to call this work of mine a "story," and not a "novel." A novel, as I see it, is something different.

Nevertheless, this "story" has a novelistic structure, and when I wrote it I used my novelistic skills. It does not have the style of a novel. Not even the style of the so-called "intellectual novels" popular some twenty-five years ago. I have taken great liberties and not the least is the inclusion in the narrative body of two "blocks" that break the proposed unity: one I call "The story of Leporello," and the other doesn't have a name, but I could call it "Poem of the sin of Adam and Eve." In spite of what the reader might think, both have the necessary relation to the usual substance of the novel. The fact is that they have grown a lot, perhaps disproportionately. Sometimes I have tried to reduce them, to substitute them, and even eliminate them, but I did not do it for professional reasons; they are well written, perhaps better than the rest of the stories. And, if one is a writer, why not accept the best that has come out of his pen, even if the "best" refers only to formal perfection. Perhaps the only part of this Don Juan that people will remember is his bad habits.

I have read many times that Don Juan was an individualist and I have always tried not to believe it. One passage of Tirso de Molina which is the heading of my third chapter shows what I mean. There are two ridiculous phrases that Don Juan and Don Gonzalo say: ridiculous in the dramatic situation when they are uttered; and that is especially true of in what the statue of Don Gonzalo proffers. And, nevertheless, both show the proof that Don Juan is not an individualist. On the other hand, his social aloneness is quite evident, that is, his total lack of solidarity with other men. And let's not mention his metaphysical solitude, or the professional solitude of the sin. But I am aware that "lack of solidarity" and "solitude" don't imply "individualism," although in him they could coincide with the same subject. This Don Juan wasn't like that; that "son of papa," devised by Tirso, only does what he does while he knows he is protected by his father. As a poetical figure, the character of Tirso is quite imperfect, a mixture of a crazy fool, and a superman wannabe. I, who have been inspired by him, have tried to remove his foolishness and concentrate on his other qualities. One is the recognition that he is a member of a clan, as he shows with his affirmation that he is a Tenorio; that is, that he has at his side the qualities and the individual obligations that are common in the others with his name. So, considering himself bound and obligated by the loyalty to a human group (even if it is limited to a family clan) is not, as I tried to demonstrate elsewhere, an indication of individualism, but perhaps even the opposite. What my Don Juan says in to his ascendants would be, I think, a logical fraud if he were to end up being an individualist, in addition to a loner. Condemned to being an individualist, to be that, and only that, per saecula saeculorum. As if he were, like they say, condemned to hell. With this I separate myself from the idea of Sartre that hell

is other people. For my Don Juan, hell is himself. But God save me from making this into a common idea, a “thesis.” Like many similar things, this is nothing more than a humorous idea.

I ask forgiveness from the literary theorists for his heresy that is, as I said before, only an escape, or a relief. I am now working on something called “The Strange Islands,” a novel in which I will continue to be, or at least I will try to be, realistic, objective, and critical, if these three terms can actually be combined in a meaningful way. When it comes to heresies, the new styles suggest something that, earlier, would have been considered scandalous; but don’t worry. Nothing is easier with a new book. As for me, personally, it doesn’t catch me by surprise.

## Chapter One

Perhaps in Rome there is a place that is as attractive for a certain class of people as the surroundings of San Sulpicio is in Paris. But I have never been in Rome.

One goes up the street of Rennes from Saint Germain. Down below, on the corner in front of the church is the terrace of “Aux deux magots,” and on the terrace are people, descendants of those who, more than a hundred years ago, were painted by Gavarni, Daumier, and Benjamin. Those people are like a certain kind of fish, or airplanes of reduced size, that can travel, pass by, and stroll, inside a place that is fully enclosed, that they don’t want to leave, or if they do, they do it timidly, or perhaps with fear. Those people have a strange cowardice—professionally daring—when they travel through the streets of the bourgeois middle-class. Those people, whose basic reason for living is extravagance, find themselves constrained and limited by it. Inside their district they can do anything they wish; outside it, they are precluded from things that an ordinary man or woman have within their reach. When Baudelaire displayed his green hair on those same streets, he enjoyed much more freedom. Baudelaire’s hair was an insult directed, for the most part, at the middle-class and his stepfather, a very respectable man. But since that time the middle-class has changed a great deal, especially with regard to extravagance. They no longer felt it was an insult; they let it go, and thought to themselves that, in spite of everything, certain kinds of attire used in the lower district did not cease to have their advantages during the summer season.

The environs of San Sulpicio are like a kind of pathway for the extravagant citizens of Saint-Germain because of the Theater of du Vieux-Colombier. They traveled through these environs mixed with the priests who come and go, going in or coming out of their religious bookstores and chasuble shops. It is not likely that anyone remembers Manón. As a matter of fact, Manon Lescaut is only remembered by foreigners who are interested in old literature, or a few older women, also foreigners, used to go to the opera when they were young. Manon is not a recognizable modern figure. Her way of understanding love has not had philosophical good fortune, and today the Caballero des Grieux is too emotional, too soft, and he is disliked because he revealed to women how soft and emotional all men are when it comes to love. Several hundred meters below San Sulpicio dozens of couples are kissing and caressing each other in a way that is crude and rough, but philosophically irreproachable. If they were asked about the nature of their feelings, they would respond with quotes from “L’Etre et le Néant.”

What is important, though, about the vicinity of San Sulpicio is not the memory of Manon, nor her antiquated way of loving, and being loved. Personally, I have always been attracted by religious books, and liturgical subjects. Here, everything written about God and Christ by German, French, Belgian, English, and Italian friars and priests, is arranged on shelves, and displayed in store windows, and offered like a succulent and unattainable banquet. God knows, it’s strange that there are those who are distressed, and those who are anxious to meet each other, then look at each other, and recognize each other without saying anything. They are usually people with an innocuous aspect. One has to be able to look them in the eye to see what is happening in their soul. When their hands reach out to pick up a book in order to take a look at it; when they turn the pages with a mixed expression of intellectual curiosity, and indifference; when they finally buy it and take it with them, only those who understand their distress can know the secret nervousness and the secret impatience with which they carry it to the most nearby café and go to the calm and quiet of a corner table to read it.

An honest man is always clumsy when he meets a virgin, and it doesn’t matter if he has had relations with other women or not, or whether he has had amorous relations with them or not. If those anxious, or nervous men had opened the book in the vicinity of San Sulpicio, they would find works of Theology. Their hands could turn the pages with the influence of their own will, and their

own mind. It doesn't matter whether they have agile fingers; it doesn't matter if they see an especially attractive girl pass by, since their hands will do the job by themselves. However, the book of Theology is like the beloved virgin mistress. The previous experience or the skill doesn't matter. The fingers still turn the pages determinedly, without waiting for the chambermaid to bring her the knife she had asked for: because, like the beloved mistress, the book can reconstruct or tear apart forever the life of that man. He will say, "Finally!" Or he won't say anything; he will throw the book away, and with it, his hope for the future.

Of course there are different kinds of men who are seen in the book stores of San Sulpicio. Of course, that Italian, dressed like an English servant from a nice house does not belong to the group of those who are distressed, but to those who are confident. He must be about thirty years old, and his alert and clever way of looking and smiling can only be imagined in the eyes a Sevillian, a Neapolitan, or a Greek, mischief maker. He surprised me from the moment I saw him, and he also interested me because, in his appearance, there was an endless combination of contradictory traditions: they were not combined but, nevertheless, they influenced him, smoothed him, and coexisted in him. Because of the tremendous cleverness that fellow had, if they let him do what he wanted he would dress in an improper and conspicuous way and then, at any moment, perhaps in the middle of the street, he would sing "Come back to Sorrento" while he played a mandolin. His hat, his jacket, his trousers, constituted something like a system of strict pattern that ruled out any bright colored scarfs, or sentimental songs. But the nervous agility of this fellow, dressed in this monotonous outfit, gave him such vivacity and charm that upon seeing him one expected to see him begin dancing with amazing vitality. Sometimes when we happened to run into the same pattern, I thought it must be a gypsy.

It's not inconceivable that an Anglo-Saxon butler conceived by Huxley would be fond of Theology; but the client of the bookstores of San Sulpicio was not a real butler. The truth is, that I began to believe that that fellow was not real, not even a real Italian, but some disguised character, a deliberate falsification. As he looked at the theological books his attitude showed an excessive intellectual curiosity that was rather superior, as if the material studied in those books was not good enough for a man of his intelligence. He chose books rapidly, he piled up volumes, and asked for others, and sometimes he exchanged words with a young English Dominican regarding modern biblical Trinitarian bibliography. The Dominican was surprised that a lay person could have such a great knowledge about things that were almost esoteric; the contradiction between his real self, and the appearance of an Italian, had passed him by unnoticed.

A Spanish priest who was a friend of mine once took me into the back room of a Protestant bookstore where a German theologian was talking about the Lord. About fifty people with greatly different appearances had gathered there. The speaker, sitting in the corner, opened a Calvinist book and after reading a few paragraphs he began to comment on them. He spoke clear, fluent French, and his words described the Lord as someone who was capricious and disgusting.

What I don't understand is, if that is what he thinks, how he can wander through the world so calmly, saying such nice things about the Lord whose will is something in which a man can have no confidence.

At first I thought it was my friend the priest that was speaking; but then I noticed that he was still by my side, evidently upset by what he was hearing, while the words we were hearing were so calm, and almost mocking. The butler who was sitting in the seat in front of me had turned around and was smiling.

"You are a Catholic, isn't that right?" he asked me.

"Yes, of course."

"Almost all of those of us here are Catholics, except for a couple atheists, and that one Calvinist. The wife of the speaker is that ugly woman there who is listening to him so enthusiastically."

"You know both of them?"

"Oh yes! I come here almost every Friday. Is this your first time here? Don't miss these conferences unless you have to. You will note that the Protestant theology, real theology, I mean, hasn't succeeded in getting out of the mousetrap that Luther and Calvin caught it in more than four hundred years ago. Although perhaps the image of a mousetrap is not best; maybe it is more correct to call it a fence of very high walls. The mice trapped inside have no choice but to dig now into the ground, or jump very high, toward heaven. Do you realize that jumping toward heaven is what this guy thinks he is doing?"

He didn't wait for me to answer. He turned his head back toward the speaker and listened some more. Every once in a while he took notes in an ordinary notebook with a black cover. That's the

way it was until it was finished, as if he had never said a word to me. We applauded. Very preoccupied, my friend the priest led me toward the exit.

“Forgive me. I shouldn’t have brought you to listen to these things.”

“Don’t worry about it, mister priest; the faith of your friend is not one of those who is influenced by someone who is a Calvinist.

The Italian fellow was still next to us, and he said hello to us with his sombrero in his hand, speaking fluent Spanish. The priest looked at both of us, as if he was saying to him: “Who are you,” and to me, “Who is this guy?”

“Does it surprise you that I speak such good Spanish? There’s nothing strange about that. I studied Sacred Theology, in Salamanca. That was a long time ago, but I haven’t forgotten the language.”

“Salamanca? You say in Salamanca?” The priest now looked at him with sympathy. “Cover your head, it’s raining.”

“Yes, it is. Thank you.” After a short bow, he put on his hat. “I studied with...”

He named six or seven teachers.

“Naturally I don’t share all their points of view, but I definitely owe to them that I have a basic understanding of theology. That’s what I tell a friend of mine who is interested in that kind of things. No matter how old that scholastic doctrine is, it is always good to remain connected to it, even if it is only with a thin cable, like a ship remains connected to a submerged anchor. It doesn’t matter if the cable becomes so strained that it threatens to break; if you take a short step backward that will always eliminate the danger.

My friend the priest was a scholastic and started to protest, but the Italian stopped him courteously.

“I beg you to forgive me, but if I try to explain we will begin a discussion that will last several hours, and I must go and see my master. Another day, if you want to. Because we will certainly see each other again, I am certain of that!

He waved goodbye and disappeared among the people.

The priest continued looking at the place where the Italian had passed through the crowd of people.

“How is it that you know him?” he asked me.

“I have seen him several times. He buys the best books of Theology, the most expensive, and the most unusual.”

“You know those teachers he mentioned were from Salamanca... three hundred years ago.” And to my astonishment he added, “If I remember correctly, all of them explained certain different kinds of theology in the first part of the seventeenth century.”

“Yes, he’s a fraud.”

“How do you know that?”

“Not for theological reasons, of course. But I’ve been watching him for several days. He gives me the impression that everything about him is a lie. At first I thought he was in disguise. Now I have doubts about his reality. If I had to explain it some way, I would say that he is a ghost.”

The priest laughed.

“That’s not a definition, but a cop-out.”

“It’s because you don’t believe in ghosts, but I do.”

2. Several days afterward I encountered the Italian again. He was walking down Boul’Mich at the time when it is filled with students, and it seemed he was well known by them, because all the groups greeted him, and he responded to all the greetings. That, however, was not the most shocking, but the way he was walking. You could say that he was dancing, and was doing it to the rhythm of some discordant song whose strange beat was in time with a some kind of cane that he was swinging with his left hand, while his right hand, that was holding a flower, was slowly moving—so neither then, nor now, have I been able to understand how he did that, because there is nothing more difficult than moving hands in different directions, at such different speeds. It gave me the impression that, if it wasn’t something that reached the diabolic, it was something more than mere virtuosity; and that if going down a street in Paris that way wasn’t because of some mocking purpose, it could only be some kind of deliberate propaganda. The truth is that I was never able to figure out what was happening, because the Italian never gave me time to recover from my surprise since he suddenly stopped right in front of me where he took off his sombrero and greeted me with great courtesy.

“How are you, sir...?—he said my name—I’m happy to see you. I telephoned your hotel a couple times, but never got an answer.”

And since my surprise must have been showing on my face, he added right away:

“It’s true that we have never been introduced, but that, after all, doesn’t matter. My master said he wanted to know you, and for that reason...”

A movement by his flowery hand explained the rest.

“Who is your master?”

“Please permit me to keep his name quiet for now. But then I could show him too you, on the condition that you don’t try to speak to him. He’s quite close by. If you would follow me...”

Why did I do that? What does one know about why we do things like that? Perhaps it was because the Italian pushed me gently, or because his friendly smile begged me to do it. Maybe it was out of curiosity, or maybe because of boredom.

He led me to a nearby café, and before entering he said to me:

“Follow me and don’t look around until we sit down. My master is with a lady, and...”

He begged my pardon for walking in front of him. So I followed him. It was a café like many others, small and intimate. Maybe, in fact, I had been there once before. He sat down in a corner with his back to the people behind him, and he pointed to a place next to the wall for me.

“From here you can see him. There on the right, next to the window. Do you see him? That’s my master.”

I couldn’t say that his master was anyone unusual, and certainly not bad looking. He seemed like a nice man who must have been about forty years old, and in good shape, wear a green suit; his hair and his mustache also looked green. From that distance, and the dim light, my poor near-sighted eyes could see nothing else. I noticed that he was wearing dark glasses like mine.

“How about the girl, can you see her too?”

“Her back is to me.”

“She’s pretty, but that’s not unusual for a woman in Paris. Nevertheless, I think you would enjoy seeing her up close.”

He made some mimicking gestures with his hands, which he was very good at, and he winked his eye.

“And my master, they always like him a lot. And don’t you doubt. You and he have a great deal in common. You will be able to understand each other with no trouble.”

Just then the girl got up, and I was able to see her better. She had a nice figure and a slender body, wearing dark trousers and a black sweater. She put on a grey coat, and then her gloves. The man had also gotten up, and his figure, as well as the way he moved, looked familiar to me, but I couldn’t say that he was anything like me. He was quite elegant, with an almost unattainable elegance, which his suit increased, rather than covering it.

The girl left the café with her head held high, and a lost expression. The man followed her courteously, without revealing any particular sign of love.

“And now do you know him?” the Italian asked me.

“No.”

“I’m sorry. Believe me, I’m sorry about that. I brought you here so that you would remember his name right away once you saw him. If you had said ‘He is so-and-so’ I would have said ‘that’s right,’ and then we could start explaining things. But if you were not able to figure out who he is, there is nothing more I can do. And, once again, I am very sorry. If I were to tell you who my master is, you would laugh at me and think I am crazy, or even worse, you would think I was joking. This failure makes me feel terrible, but here it is again. You don’t know how much I suffer from this type of situation. They happen all the time, but they are so logical!”

He stood up, and picked up his hat and his cane.

“You’ll find out in some way, in some normal way, I mean: smoothly, without surprise, without that feeling of absurdity that happens whenever you figure out something by yourself. But it has to happen soon, because you’re going to leave Paris one of these days... When are you leaving?”

“I don’t know.”

“Wait a few more days. You have come to see the theater; in a few days there will be the “premiere” of an important show, the kind of show they don’t have in your country. So wait. I will send you the tickets.”

He said nothing more and hurried off. I went over to the window and watched him pass by, once again walking like a dancer to the rhythm of a mocking ballet; he now had now changed his hands with the flower and the cane.

Someone was clapping behind me. At the same time I felt a heart beating, though that could have been an illusion. What seemed to be the waitress of the café had come up behind me and was looking over my shoulder, but not at the Italian who had now disappeared around the corner, but at the girl with dark pants and her courtier who had stopped.

The waitress probably was about thirty years old, and I liked the way she looked. She was looking at the other girl with a look of scorn and a look of frantic love, and she said something I couldn't quite understand, because, with French, I can only understand what they say when they use the words I am used to.

But her tone of voice and the way she looked made her seem interesting. I went back to my table and acted like I was leafing through a book, but in reality I was trying to watch the café woman who had taken refuge in a corner, saddened and infuriated. Some time passed; I didn't have any justified reason to go and question her, even though we were alone there. If I were in Spain, it would have been easy, because the moment I showed some interest, she would have told me the whole story of her love. However, I finally called to her, saying I was ready to pay my bill. She answered with moving:

"Thank you, Sir. Leporello has already paid it."

3. That gave me such a strong urge to laugh that I was afraid that I would hit her in the face, so I waited to laugh until I was out in the street; but out in the street I didn't laugh. The feeling of being faced with a muddle that was extremely comical disappeared right away, when I realized that I was not faced with it, but right in the middle of it, perhaps as the object of a joke. The name of Leporello was always associated with Don Juan Tenorio, and now the idea that Leporello was a fraud seemed to be related also with his master, and perhaps also—at least at the moment—with the girl who accompanied him, as well as the waitress in the café. They had been pulling my leg, or at least that's what they thought they were doing, although for the life of me, I couldn't figure out why they wanted to do that. While these ideas passed through my mind, from ridiculous scene in the middle of the sidewalk, and the hesitation there, I felt astonished and very irritated. If one of them could see me now, they would be very amused.

After I got control of myself, I went out and headed toward the restaurant where my friend the Spanish priest usually ate supper. I don't know why I thought about him, or why I was afraid I might not find him. I took a taxi and, when I got there, the priest was there, calmly finishing his coffee.

"Do you know who that guy with the sombrero is?"

The priest had already forgotten him.

"The guy who studied Theology in Salamanca... at the beginning of the seventeenth century."

"Your ghost?"

I smiled.

"Exactly. He's not a ghost, but a fraud, as he seemed to me in the beginning. He says his name is Leporello."

My friend the priest would have identified him more easily as Ciutti. Not even Catalinón would have seemed familiar to him, and even less Sgagnarelle.

"Okay. That is nonsense."

"I don't think that two fellows who, at this stage, pass as Don Juan and his servant are any kind of nonsense."

"I meant to say, imposter."

"Imposture, dear Father, is a way of acting in reality; just like any other. It has its own meaning and sometimes is interesting, and even important. In fact, when a man makes himself an imposter, the imposture he chooses is revealing. In the imposture you will find an indication of an intimate part of his soul."

"When a man says he is Don Juan Tenorio, what his imposture reveals tells me very little."

"What about the real Don Juan? Would he interest you?"

The priest shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows what he was like! The people like who I have known have never seemed attractive. They are sinners without magnanimity, simple fornicators, frivolous people. Don Juan is only an exaggeration of poets."

"Even though he was created by a theologian."

The waitress had come to our table. I ordered a simple meal, with no wine like that "quart' Périér" with my meals in Paris.

"Anyway," I continued, "Don Juan is not an ordinary person like you seem to think, but a man of non-transferable uniqueness, or, if you prefer, a person who is completely individual, and any similarity is just a coincidence."

"That doesn't interest me."

"For a theologian, that is a theme of great importance."

The priest looked at me with an expression that was close to anger.

"Literalists trying to discuss theology tend to misinterpret things, and you in particular tend to think that any simpleton is a great theologian. Give me a cigarette."

He asked me for one, because in my cigarette case there are always lots of cigarettes bought in Spain, and brought to Paris, for the compensation of the insufferable lords.

He lit it.

"A man who says he is Don Juan can't be of interest to a dramatist or a novelist any more than a theologian. He has to be a fool."

"You think that's what Leporello is? I would bet that he knows more about theology than you do."

"Maybe he is some Italian priest, a common defroqué."

"Even so... Can you imagine what must have happened to soul of a man who, in a situation like this, has arrived at the point where he calls himself Leporello?"

"I don't have enough imagination for that."

"Well I do. And if he is a defrocked priest, which I don't believe, even more"

My friend the Spanish priest put his hand on my arm and smiled sympathetically.

"I always considered you an intelligent person, but now I think I was mistaken. You're only talking foolishness. Can't you see all that is absurd?"

"Okay, fine."

"The only reasonable explanation I can think of is that that guy, or both of them, are trying to make a fool of you."

"Why would they want to do that?"

"I don't know. But anyone except you would have thought so immediately and would have punched that Italian in the nose..."

He stopped and thought for a moment.

"Although, of course, if he is a priest... But you could whack him with your umbrella, punch him without taking your glove off, or hit him a block of stone. In order for there to be an excommunication, certain things have to happen: manu violenta, suadente diabolo. A stick; a gloved hand, and above all the certainty that the devil is far away..."

He paused again for a moment, and then added:

"Now that you know that, leave me in peace."

4. That is what I wanted, to be left in peace. That night I tossed and turned in my bed, sometimes amused, sometimes irritated, and always preoccupied. If it happened that I was able to fall asleep, I woke up immediately, feeling confused like someone who finds himself in a different reality, and the silence and the darkness frightened me. I thought about Leporello, and pictured him on boulevard Mich with his cane and his rose, like a street juggler; mixed with my nightmare I saw images of a Spanish actor reciting words from a play, passages from Mozart, masked protesters and screamers, the puzzled and angry expression of my friend the priest, the painting of Salvador Dali with Tenorio as a background. And at one point, when I was calm and lucid, I attributed my nightmares to the fact that I had had too much to drink that night. That was probably true. Otherwise, I would not have remembered the sight of the Italian any longer than was necessary to forget him.

I got up late, feeling upset and confused. And the water from the shower wasn't able to snap me out of it.

When the chambermaid brought me my breakfast she told me: "There is a gentleman waiting for you downstairs."

"A Spaniard?"

"I think so?"

It could be one of the two or three friends that I met in Paris, to whom I had given my address. Or it could be the priest who sometimes dresses like a Spaniard.

"Tell him to come up."

I went back to my bed with my breakfast, and before my coffee, I drank the "quart' Périér" that I used every morning to cover my stomach pains.



Someone knocked on the door, I answered in Spanish, and Leporello came in with a black attaché case in his hand. He laughed politely, and then laughed even more when he saw my surprise. Without asking permission he sat down on the corner of the bed.

“Marianne told me how amused you were when you heard my name.”

“Marianne?”

“The waitress yesterday afternoon, who is also the owner of the café. Remember? And by the way, don’t look at a French woman again with such bold insistence, and if you do, make sure she knows how you feel! Although it would be useless if you did that with Marianne, since she is in love with my master and is not ready to stop loving him”

He made a playful gesture with his hand.

“The same thing happens to everyone. It’s really monotonous! Over three hundred years of looking at the repeated spectacle of feminine weakness. If my master was any other man, she would have abandoned him.”

“What do you want from me?”

“I want you to meet my master.”

“I’m not interested”

Leporello got up and went over to the window, turning his back to me and then was silent for a moment. Without turning around, he muttered something about some woman in the patio. Then, still without turning around, he added:

“You were not sincere when you said that. What you said was only because of the conversation you had with the priest, and after that, the fear that my master and I are pulling your leg. When Spaniards think someone is making fun of them, they don’t like it, and they are capable of starting a fight because of something like that; only my master has freed himself from that defect, and it’s certain that my lord has never made fun of anyone. Well... that is, he did make fun of someone, but he did it in a friendly way, so there was no reason to be angry.”

After that, Leporello quickly turned around.

“Would you like to come with me? I will explain to you the reasons my master and I have for wanting to do you this honor...”

He stopped for a moment and smiled.

“I beg your pardon. I only meant to say that I wanted to invite you for an interview.”

“No.”

“Are you afraid?”

I jumped out of bed.

“Okay, whenever you want.”

Leporello laughed.

“That’s the best trick to get sometime from a Spaniard. People like you will never understand that, between cowardice and courage, there are plenty of middle zones that are honorable and advisable: caution, prudence, and distain. What strange, charming people you are! My lord would have done the same thing. In fact, he has done the same thing all his life. The fear that they will consider him a coward is stronger than any well-tuned reasoning.”

He came over and patted me on the back.

“Come on, get dressed.”

“Would you, by the way, please tell me how you knew what I talked about yesterday with the priest, and what tonight...?”

He stopped me with a gesture.

“That’s part of my professional secret.”

“Well, I could answer you by saying that I will not go with you, as long as you don’t explain.”

“I promise to do that sometime, but not now. Dear friend! If so many denials were necessary to hide the identity of my master, how could I suddenly tell you who I am?”

“An imposter who says he is Leporello.”

“And, why couldn’t I be the devil? If you are going to discuss my imposture...”

I went over to the washbasin with the intention of shaving myself.

“Forget about that. It’s going to take a long time. With your permission...”

I sat down in a chair and plugged in the electric shaver I that took out of my attaché case.

“This way we will finish sooner.”

The electric motor was buzzing next to my ear.

“What I can assure you is that I am definitely not a defrocked priest like the priest thought yesterday. I’ve never had that honor.”

5. He pushed me into a little, old-fashioned red car.

“This is the kind I drive. The car of my lord is more luxurious, but it is also old-fashioned like this one. A Rolls Royce, you know?, from 1925, a grand car. Solemn and respectable with an interior quilted with blue silk pastel. Women are more comfortable in it and, of course, much more flattered than in one of those American cars that are ostentatious, and without class.

We drove in the fast lane. Leporello was a good driver, who also showed his skill with jokes, not about vehicular traffic, but about good judgment. In his hands the car was like the cane, and the flower, an instrument of play and even more, of risk, as if he enjoyed making impossible stunts, with useless audacity. Nevertheless, there was nothing mysterious in his way of driving, nor anything absurd, like in the way he handled the cane and the flower while walking, except perhaps in the desire to frighten me. However, I was not scared; in my heart I felt a sudden inexplicable feeling of confidence in his expertise that had nothing to do with reason, and when I realized that, it scared me more than the risks he was taking, as if the real risk was Leporello, and not his daunting street maneuvers. Each time one of them ended successfully, he looked at me as if he was expecting my approbation, and it made me think that his smile, which was calm, actually was not. I don't know why that was, nor does it matter now.

We arrived at the Isla de San Luis and, after having driven through it, stopped the car in front of a house built by someone in the seventeenth century for someone else at that time—perhaps a governor, or a magistrate—who inhabited it. He said we had arrived. We passed through a hallway, an interior patio, and up some stairs that were sumptuous and dark, a real abundance of worked oak wood, and then we were on the first floor. Leporello open the door and invited me to enter.

“My lord is not here now. We didn't come here to see him, but so I could explain to you the reason for which...”

“...you are doing me this honor...”

“Exactly.”

He closed the door. The vestibule was dark so Leporello opened the curtains on a window and I suddenly had the impression of finding myself on the stage of a theater, or if not a theater, somewhere that was still a stage, and that was neither false nor fraudulent, but of the most refined authenticity. Perhaps descendants of the Governor, or the Magistrate, had kept the vestibule of the house intact, although it seemed impossible; and not only the furniture, but especially its arrangement, had the look of something ancient, authentic, and untouched. A modern designer would have had a different sense of the arrangement. And as far as I could tell, the entire house was the same.

Leporello led me to a sitting room that, at the same time, served as a library.

“Take a seat.”

He pointed at an armchair that was so old it could have been very fragile. He understood my fear of making it fall apart just by sitting on it.

“Go ahead and sit down,” he repeated. “It's a strong, honorable chair, with a long history. Its leather had been in contact with illustrious buttocks that yours would not be shamed by.”

He continued to invite me with a gesture and words.

“Sit down. It won't break.”

While I was sitting down, he moved behind me toward the book shelves.

“It doesn't surprise me that you are feeling a little uncertain; and, besides, it's reasonable. It's like you were traveling down a road, and suddenly bumped into Don Quijote.”

In fact, I felt bewildered, and I felt stupid for the way I was sitting down with my eyes closed and my head in my hands, pretending that the noises that Leporello was making behind me gave me a true sign of his movements. I felt stupid for the way my brain was working, or not working, as if because of incoherence and inappropriateness, what he was saying had nothing to do with my situation, or with my relation to Leporello, or Don Juan. I remembered a song sung years ago with elegance, by a Chilean woman:

Bend over your little sombrero,  
and look down at me;  
bend over your little sombrero,  
and look down at me...

and in the second verse, she sang of Rio Magdalena.

“Do you remember you once wrote an article about Don Juan?”

Well, forget about the song.

“Yes, I wrote several articles about that gentleman.”

Leporello was holding in his hand a clipping from the newspaper fastened to a large sheet of paper, with blue letters like symbols.

“The others were not so pleasing, but in this phrase was something that pleased us very much.”

The phrase was underlined with a red pencil.

“Don Juan was very pleased by the compliment, which is also based on an accurate intuition; because, in fact, Don Juan has perfumed his hands on the living bodies of women, and has then carried the odor, as if he had taken it from a basket of roses.”

He sat down on the edge of the table while I reread the article. It had my signature at the bottom.

“When we read it we thought about writing to you, or perhaps going to visit you, but then my lord thought it would not be respectful for you to receive a letter from Don Juan Tenorio and Ossorio de Moscoso...”

He banged on the table with his clenched fist, an unnecessary gesture, as if he had made a mistake.

“Ossorio de Moscoso... did you know that is the second name of Don Juan? Well, when you are in Spain, look for his baptismal certificate, as well as that of his mother Dona Mencía. Of course, that would be in the archives of Seville.”

“There were never any Ossorio de Moscosos in Seville..”

“Look for it, and you’ll feel like a scholar when you find it; you will probably also find the marriage certificate of the same woman with Pedro Tenorio.”

“You know very well that the Tenorios of Seville were gone long before there were any parochial records.”

“Then don’t look for it.”

He took the paper, when I gave it back to him.

“I must confess that we had forgotten you; but a few days ago when we heard your name in the Spanish Embassy...”

“You saw me there?”

“My master did, yes. He goes to the Embassy sometimes, but he never does that with his real name; that would be scandalous. He changes it every ten or twelve years, using the name of anyone who is no longer here.”

“What is he called now?”

“I’m not sure, I think, Juan Perez.”

I started to get up, but Leporello stopped me.

“What’s your hurry?”

“I think my motives are clear. Isn’t that right?”

“Well, only apparently.”

“That no longer depends on me.”

“I am sure that Don Juan could convince you much easier in person, but as I already told you, he has left the house.”

“I suppose that’s natural.”

“You’re right. He does work outside the house. He must have taken Sonya to Fontainebleau, or somewhere near there. Sonya,” he added, “is the girl he was with yesterday. A very pretty Swiss girl, as you must have seen. Did you notice her...?”

He pointed at his chest and cupped his hand over his breast.

“She is a girl who is incredibly and uselessly pure, who is desperately in love with Don Juan. They say Nordic women are cold. There are no cold women, my friend! There are only foolish men who have a guitar in their hands and don’t know how to play it.”

“Your master must be a formidable guitarist.”

“Who would doubt it. But keep in mind that it is only in an instrumental way. Oh, don’t think I am playing with words! I mean that the melody that he makes with all those women has never been and end, just a means. And so the women in Don Juan’s hands have provided some unexpected melodies from themselves. Don Juan has many virtues, but the fact that even the weakest instrument sounds divinely in his hands, is what I admire the most.

He paused for a moment.

“Well, in fact there is another thing I admire even more, but right now it’s not important.”

I stood up and said:

“Until now you have told me nothing more than stupid things. I have to say that I was at least expecting something amusing.”

“I’m sorry about that.”

He got up off of the table and moved toward the door.

“It could be that we will see each other again, or it could also be that we will never see each other. But in any case, would you like to go and have a drink with me? Not here, but in a nearby café. My lord would invite you to some more elegant place, but I have always gone to ordinary cafés. I only have ordinary tastes.”

He stopped for a moment in the vestibule.

“Why are you so serious? Why do you keep being so annoyed? Neither my lord nor I ever expected you to believe us, but we felt we had the moral obligation to thank you, without hiding our names. But this insistence of feeling so insulted... Have you lost your sense of humor?”

6. Yes, I had lost it. When I got on the subway, I scolded myself for having let myself be led by the vanity I felt when Leporello showed me that article, and especially by the irrational belief that they could actually be Leporello and Don Juan Tenorio, like I also believe there can be ghosts, that people can sometimes return from the dead, and lots of other crazy thing that I have never been able to remove from the darkest corners of my mind.

I had agreed to meet my friend the priest in the café, and I found him there, irritated by the book of P. Congar that he had in his hands. According to him, all modern French theology, just like Belgian, German and English theology reeked of heresy, and he ended telling me that he had had enough, and he was leaving, and he intended to write a terrible book, an implacable denunciation of modernism in its actual terms.

“Here you have a book of a certain Father Teilhard, whatever his name is. Do you seriously think that the dogma can be reconciled with evolutionism?”

I shrugged my shoulders.

“I have never worried very much about that, although I am convinced that, before or after the anthropoid, clay will be part of my body. If sometime I bight my lip, it won’t taste like blood, but likew soil.”

We said goodbye. I walked to my hotel and took a nap that seemed quite long, until I was awakened by a telephone call.

When I picked up the phone it was Leporello.

“I have to see you.”

“Why is that?”

“Oh, don’t ask! After all that has happened, an explanation is necessary.”

I didn’t think so, but Leporello insisted so much that he finally convinced me. We agreed to meet each other at the Marianne’s café.

When I got to the café it was empty, but Marianne came out of the interior when she heard my steps.

“Leporello just called. He asked you to do him a favor and wait for him.”

But then he arrived almost right away. He sat down next to me and began to tell me that of course he was not really Leporello, nor was his lord Don Juan, but only a couple of jokers who like to tell people that’s who they were, but that they didn’t mean to do anything wrong, because they both expected to tell the truth, once the adventure was over. Both he and his lord wanted me to forgive them, and they were willing to do something to make up for it. He seemed to be sincerely ashamed and wanted to calm my anger with humility.

Marianne came and told us there was a telephone call.

“Who is it?”

“It was a woman.”

Leporello glanced at me with sudden anxiety that was almost as though he were terrified; it was a comical terror, expressed with a despairing expression.

“Everything has gone to hell!” he exclaimed.

He ran to pick up the phone.

“Who is it? Who are you? Are you Sonya?”

He hung up. When she heard the name Sonya, Marianne had turned her head and looked at him with concern. She grasped Leporello’s arm.

"Is something wrong?"

Leporello pushed her away gently.

"Someone's been shot," he told me, "come with me."

"Someone was shot! Was it Sonya?" Marianne asked.

"No. It was Don Juan."

Marianne shouted.

"I'm coming too!"

She took off her apron and put on her coat. Leporello helped me to put on mine.

"No Marianne. Don't you come too."

They argued. Marianne wanted to see Don Juan. She wanted to be by his side, she wanted..."

Leporello gave her a key.

"Go to the house and wait there."

"But what about the doctor?"

"I'll tell him to come. If he gets there before we do, just have him wait. In the meantime, try to get things ready for him. You know where everything is."

He pushed me out the door. Once we were in the car, he explained:

"Marianne used to be our servant. Don Juan put her in the café in order to get rid of her."

"Where are you taking me?"

"To Don Juan's other house. It's what you call a bachelor pad, or a small apartment. It's also a place full of history. It's the flat where well-known poet, who was a friend of his, used to live."

He paused a moment while he started the car, and then added:

"I think his name was Baudelaire."

I couldn't respond because now the car was running and making so much noise; we passed by streets that I had never seen, and places so unknown that it made me uneasy. Once, he turned and looked at me mockingly, and then he said:

"Don't think I'm trying to abduct you. What would I want to do that for?"

He stopped in an old street, in front of some houses with an eighteenth century style and design. Right in front of us was a black Rolls Royce that was empty. Leporello opened the door and sniffed around inside it. Then he lit a flashlight and bent over, picking up something that he handed to me. He did those things very quickly, like some professional investigator who needed to see everything immediately and learn what was in every corner and every seat of the car.

"It's Sonya's handkerchief. They're going to complain if the police find out who the murderers are. What a nice perfume she uses!"

I reminded him that his lord was probably bleeding somewhere.

"Don't worry. He won't die."

He lifted the handkerchief to his nose and took another smell. He took his time while he did that, and if he hadn't looked at me with teasing spark in his green eyes, I would have thought that in the perfume he had found happiness, and that he wanted to spend what remained of his life with it, until it was time for it to end.

"Here, see what it smells like. The entire secret of France for a Spaniard, everything about France that you envy, since you will never have it, is expressed in this perfume, although you might prefer to find it in poetry. Though it doesn't matter. Poetry and perfume are the two French triumphs of alchemy."

He smiled, as though he was trying to excuse himself for having slipped.

"What I meant to say was Chemistry."

"Your lord will have died by now."

"No, no, he won't die from just one bullet. And, nevertheless, how grateful I would have been if that was what happened!"

Without waiting for me to say something, he entered the front door of the house, and I followed, irritated, and at the same time like a sleepwalker, as if that door was the entry to a dream in which everything was real, although not logical; because what really upset me, what made me lose my footing and be "off side," was my fondness of being able to understand and explain everything by strict, orderly methods." The inspection of the car, the comment about the handkerchief, and especially the time spent smelling its perfume and pondering it, seemed to me something like a lyrical diversion, or the interpolation of a discursive delay of an urgent, dramatic urgency.

"Why are you worried? My lord is not going to die. I certainly know that!"

Then he continued immediately:

“For you, dear friend, it seems like two kinds of reality have blocked each other, but don’t try to suppose more of that one than what is already there.”

He calmly searched for the keys and put one in the lock, then waited a moment before he opened it.

“As for the other one, just accept it if you want.”

7. Don Juan’s bachelor pad consisted of a small vestibule that connected with three doorways and two living rooms, at an angle, lighted—as we entered—by small old-fashioned lamps—and furnished with the purest romantic taste; it also seemed like no one had corrected the way the furniture was placed, as if they wanted to preserve space for our ancestors. There were flowers everywhere, expensive fresh flowers; a baby grand piano, and rooms, lots of rooms, and really nice ones in one of which I found a painting by Delacroix of normal size, as well as drawings by Daumier, and a pair of sketches by Manet. There were also books, but I didn’t stop to look at them, because, in the next room, between the sofa and the piano, Don Juan had fallen on the rug, motionless, with the front of his shirt covered with blood. I ran to his side and got on my knees, then took his pulse.

“He’s alive.”

“I see.”

“But we have to call a doctor! Hurry!”

“Yes we must call a doctor, but there’s no hurry. Doctor Paschali usually takes care of my lord in these cases: an Italian with a bad reputation, but one who agrees to do it without saying anything to the police.”

He calmly got down on his knees and unfastened Don Juan’s shirt.

“It looks like it penetrated his heart.”

“Don’t be foolish. He would have already died.”

He turned Don Juan’s body over, without trying to be careful, and examined his back.

“There’s a point of exit. It’s better like that.”

Don Juan was still sprawled on the rug with his arms spread, his face pressed on the floor.

“Pistols are a good thing” Leporello continued. “Before, a woman who was deceived or felt the disagreeable need to stab her deceiver, which is not a feminine thing, say what you like, or poison him which is ugly and difficult, or call her father, her brother, or her husband to take vengeance. With any of that, things get very complicated, with dramatic results. Now, this is more straightforward, don’t you see; a little hole in the chest, and another in the back, and a patch of blood. What happened here would never be put in verse.”

“What do you know about the things that might have been said to your lord?”

“What do I know? This: Sonya is frugal with her words, she is not a chatterbox. But, on the other hand, she is not very careful; look...”

He put his hand under the sofa and removed a pistol.

“A six thirty five, made in Belgium. It probably has her fingerprints. If I call the police, Sonya will be arrested in less than an hour.”

“Why don’t you do that?”

Because Sonya is right. Yes, don’t look at me like that! She’s right. Everyone has a reason to kill my lord. For three hundred years I’ve known women who do reasonable things like this, or similar things.”

“Would you let me say something?”

“Of course. I have been hoping you would. But don’t stay on your knees. We can sit down and have a drink. Doctor Paschali won’t get home until seven, and it’s now... thirty five minutes past six. He lives in Neuilly. If we both leave at the same time, I will get there first. It’s the same as if my lord is spread out there, or lying in bed, but as long as he stays there, we avoid having Marianne faint, make a pathetic scene, and then embrace the body of her lover, or try to commit suicide if she thinks he’s dead. Now, though, she doubts and hopes, she feels depressed and lives an indescribable happiness that her depression causes. Haven’t you noticed the skill with which women are able to turn their depression into happiness?”

“That’s not what I want to talk to you about.”

“Yes, I know. You’re telling me that you don’t understand how Sonya could be flouted, but I am more interested in discussing women’s instinct of happiness expressed by a well-educated girl, and by an evil beast, Sonya and Marianne, for example. Sonya is the daughter of a steel magnate, a Russian immigrant who made his fortune in Sweden; Marianne is a poor servant girl.

"Sonya kills, and Marianne doesn't."

"That's only the way it looks!"

"Here's the proof."

Leporello walked over to a cabinet where there were glasses and drinks. He poured one and offered it to me.

"Here you are, Spanish cognac. I prefer sweet wine."

He stepped over the body of his lord as if he were the body of a dog, and repeated the invitation for me to sit down.

"The day that Marianne arrived, sent here by an employment agency, with nothing more than seeing her eyes, hearing her harsh and passionate voice, I thought a new melodrama had been started in our house. And when I had the opportunity to study her more thoroughly, I shivered with joy, because what was there promised to be a real string of fireworks."

"What did she have? Rockets?"

"Don't be a fool. Are you trying to pull my leg...?" He immediately changed his tone of voice. "I'll tell you what it was. Have you ever seen the inside of a chicken? Didn't it surprise you to see the number of little eggs, both large and small, that are waiting for their birth? Someone like me who recognizes the anatomy of souls, can see in them the hidden seeds of future acts, nurturing themselves with life, slowly developing, just like the little chicken eggs. And then one day, wham!"

"One day Marianne clucks, but she doesn't commit a crime."

"Exactly. And Sonya, in whose soul I have never seen a homicidal egg, doesn't cluck, and then lays it."

"Isn't that contradictory?"

"It's what happens inside of Don Juan, my friend. Don Juan, who they have said was sterile! I don't remember if it was yesterday, or earlier, we were talking about the harmonies that Don Juan is capable of provoking in the body of a woman; I forgot to say that he also knows how to plant seeds in their soul and nourish them. He made Marianne a person capable of sacrifice, and Sonya, a murderer. A good novelist, who had created them, would attribute the crime to Marianne and the sacrifice to Sonya; and if he did the opposite, the critics would reproach him. Because, naturally, the novelist would not be capable of imagining what has taken place here, from last night to this afternoon, or in other similar things that have happened for months in our house; nor even less the long, studied proceedings in which these things culminated."

He stood up solemnly; but before continuing to talk, he swallowed, with pleasure and a click of his tongue, a good swallow of sweet wine, so that the gesture gave the opposite impression of his solemnity.

"I'm going to tell you a secret: the success of Don Juan is due to his power to transform women."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"All human beings are transformed by their relations with others, and with lovers the transformation is much more profound."

"With one difference, my friend: the transformations of a man by the woman he loves, or vice versa, are implicit in the character of the one who is transformed, they are possibilities that the presence of the lover stirs up and brings into effect. But sacrifice was never a possibility for Marianne, nor a crime for Sonya. Don Juan planted those seeds, and he fertilized them..."

"Yes; and he nourished them."

"And he gave them reality. That is why he is original and great."

"Isn't it more that he injects false, random personalities in his lovers?"

"And now, do you realize that you have been talking about my master as though he really was Don Juan?"

I smiled.

"I'm only considering an hypothesis."

"No. You are speaking of Don Juan with complete certainty."

He looked at his watch.

"It's time to take him to the doctor now. In the meantime, will you wait for me here? I'm not saying that out of courtesy just so you can look around some more; it's because that's what I really want you to do. I'll be back soon."

Without waiting for my agreement, he picked up the body of his master, putting it over his shoulder, and then left. Looking out of the window, I could see that he put him in the car without worrying if they might be seen or not. And I'm not sure why, but I had the definite impression that I was the only one who saw them.

8. I took my time before I started to look around again. Sitting with a cigarette in my hand and the cognac within my reach, I was thinking that for several days a number of things I had done were perhaps related to the desires, and perhaps the designs, of the fellow that called himself Leporello. I was starting to feel like a toy in his hands, or like one of the characters of a bad novelist who thinks and feels like a novelist does. But my curiosity, or the desire to clarify things I didn't understand, or maybe simple obedience, made me forget about those thoughts and take the opportunity to snoop around. Leporello was gone for more than two hours, which was plenty of time.

Don Juan's bachelor pad wasn't exactly what I expected—there were no voluptuous couches, or elegant engravings—and it seemed like the dwelling of someone who wanted to be lost in the corner of the city where they could be happy with a memory, with hope, or simply with silence. It was not a special type of dwelling, constructed according to a certain method or style, but a dwelling whose elements had been combined in such a way that, belonging to a certain man with certain customs and habits, it could still serve others, without any of them feeling out of place or uncomfortable: like the words of a poet who expresses a feeling in a very personal way that, at the same time, also serves as an adequate and unique expression. That way he could compose a work of art, experience the feeling of great love, or in solitude feel how one's life is created by the substance of time. I turned on all the lights and looked around, and for several minutes I felt like I was really at home in the place I had always longed for, and because of that, many forgotten fears, many sleeping desires, and perhaps many people that I had forgotten, were awakened and filled my heart, taking hold of me until they filled my entire life. I don't know how I managed to calm myself, or how long that strange ecstasy lasted. What I do know is that that outburst of life took control of my willpower and relegated my intelligence to an obscure depository, a stockpile of useless junk. However, my sentimental soul was still alert and quick to protect itself from being influenced, or let itself be penetrated by it. Instead of searching for something, my self was filled with what was already there, by things that meant something. Mystical experiences must be very similar, just as captivating, indescribable, and enlightening. Directly, without deductions, without my mind confirming facts and consequences, I felt in the presence of, almost in contact with, the women who had passed through there, who had spent long hours of passion, and who had left the rooms feeling redolent with themselves. As we know, this type of essential contact belongs, by its very nature, to the order of what is ineffable.

I would try to define them if they were definable, and describe them if they were describable. The way these things are, in something of themselves, like an aura or an emanation, these women were beginning to be revealed to me, but they were revelations that were exceptional and incomparable. There, in Don Juan's bachelor pad, numerous women had been captivated like me—except for them it was by love—and they had been themselves, in their singularity, in the essence of their personal self, like one is in Paradise. And this last conviction that had come to me from somewhere, and which I accepted as something evident, shook me like a blasphemy, as I realized that, without God, and perhaps against God, what these women had experienced was of religious nature.

Then, I decided to open the door to the bedroom which, until then, I had not investigated. I saw a bed, several lamps on the night tables, and some ashtrays next to the lamps. I looked at everything with anxiety.

“What? Do you understand now?”

Leporello was standing behind me, with his hat on, more amused, and more mocking than ever.

“No, I don't understand.”

“I already told you that in you there are two orders of reality, but that only one of them is available to your intelligence. You have in front of you the working instrument of a professional conqueror. It's obvious that it has never been used. But you don't want to believe that.”

I let myself drop onto the sofa.

“Forgive me, I feeling rather sick. I'm...”

“You're perfectly all right. But it's not possible to make intuitive contact with several human personalities—which is what you have done—with impunity. It happens very few times, or it never happens, and men don't have the resources to withstand it. The sickness is nothing more than an escape.”

He pointed at the half-open bedroom door.

“And now, do you see why Sonya wanted to kill my master?”



"You said you were going to tell me..."

"I'm not going to tell you, because you already know. Don Juan is not able to sleep with his lovers. Don't look at me like that! Don't you remember what you have read about sexual impotence? The explanation is simple: he was born in Seville in 1599, about three hundred and seventy years ago."

The mystical tension had gone away and was little more than a faded memory. In its place was the feeling that I was being mocked again, the sense of being trapped in a farce whose contradictory nature was unintelligible to me, but ceased to be that way if I admitted how really absurd that man Leporello was, in the same way that Don Juan was.

"As you can understand," Leporello continued, "Don Juan hasn't always behaved that way. In years past there was not a single woman who would accuse him of fraud. It's true that they called him a trickster, not because of what he did, but for the presentiment of what he had done, because Don Juan was never a trickster then, like he is now. And neither had his special, and perfect way of loving reached the height that it has now. The actual power of Don Juan to make a woman happy is incomparable, except at the moment when happiness demands a carnal expression which, unfortunately, Don Juan cannot give them..."

He stopped for a moment and made an uncertain gesture with his hands.

"...because of his age, let's say. Because, if it wasn't for that, they would never be able to resist him."

He repeated the interruption and the gesture.

"Human nature, my friend, puts limits on the intensity of pleasure, and if my master were able to give it to women, he would be irresistible, and it would be deadly. However, since they don't know that, they long for fulfillment; but in this moment of desire my master, like a bullfighter, gives the bull a skillful flap of his cape, although he sometimes ends up hooked by the sash, and they have to take him to the infirmary."

He laughed calmly.

"And that's where I left him. In the hands of Marianne, and cured by doctor Paschali. And if you could have heard Marianne! She wanted to kill the culprit, and she immediately tried to commit suicide... Many would call that feminine logic, but you and I already know that it is reasonable."

And, then suddenly:

"My master is a dumb fool. He lets himself get into things like that without thinking of the practical details. I have got to get some money urgently, and I can only find it in a gambling den where I am forced to cheat. Do you want to come with me?"

9. I followed him to the door of the gambling den and then had started to leave, when Leporello called to me.

"You don't have anything to do right now. If you stay by yourself, your mind will be locked in a welter of thoughts, and you won't be able to sleep. I think you should accept things as they are without trying to explain them, which is what a discreet man would do; but that's not what you are. Nevertheless, I would like to remedy this situation, and I have thought..."

He paused for a moment.

"Do you have any girl friends in Paris?"

"No."

"What a shame! If women don't serve men as an opportunity to rest and forget, what the hell do they serve for? You need a woman today."

And since I smiled at him, he added: "Understand me. There are many ways to need a woman, and there are honorable ways, although they are the least recommendable. But yours tonight is a special need. What I would recommend is that you cease to think about yourself, and fix on another person, to help her, or maybe rescue her. An unlucky woman, charmingly unlucky... What do you think about Sonya?"

"I don't know her."

"Better. In certain situations, someone unknown stirs up more confidence than with a friend. Take her the handkerchief and the pistol. Here is her address."

I found myself alone on an unknown street in Paris, a gloomy street, with a packet in my hand whose contents were enough to get me in trouble with the police, and a piece of paper with an address. If the river had been nearby, I might have thrown it all into the water and then run away. I started walking. I wanted to get out of this place as soon as possible, and get rid of the pistol. A taxi came by, and I got into it. I gave the driver Sonya's address. The house was quite far away, on

a quiet narrow street with some elegant houses: I thought it must be part of district XVI. Here and there, were some luxury cars, parked on the side of the street. In front of Sonya's door there was a red sports car, with a black top.

"Yes, it's here," the porter told me, "sixth floor, left side."

He led me to the elevator. Sonya's floor was the last. It took me a while to decide. My heart was beating, and I felt like running away, leaving this adventure that I had scarcely started. I had to remember Don Quijote, and I had to remember the pistol I still had in my pocket. I rang the bell.

"Are you from the police? Sonya asked me with her voice trembling.

Before that, we had looked at each other in silence.

"No. I'm not from the police."

"Then why are you here?"

"I've come to bring you this."

I handed her the packet. When she opened it she recognized the pistol.

"Where was it?"

"Under the sofa. The handkerchief was in the car."

"Also the handkerchief?"

"Yes,"

She wiped her hand over her forehead.

"Thank you."

I started to leave, but she stopped me.

"Wait. What about him?"

"He's not dead."

"Come in, please."

She opened the door. I may have hesitated. She said again:

"Please, come in. Don't you understand that...?"

I entered; she closed the door and leaned against it.

"I want to know..."

She began to sob. And for a long time, while she was weeping, I didn't know what to do; I remained motionless, not saying anything, without giving her a hand. I examined her, and I also examined the place where we were: a small, dimly lit vestibule. There was a small sofa, a very beautiful watercolor by Duffy, and an old mirror with a dark frame. Something that was moving behind me made a long, thin shadow on the wall.

Sonya was wearing a gray skirt and a green sweater, and there was a small necklace, with beads that were also green around her neck. She was quite tall, a little taller than I.

It is difficult for me to remember what I thought of her then, because after that I have seen her again, and my first impression is mixed with more recent ones which change the older ones. But it doesn't seem like she pleased me, at least at first sight, and not not because she was very attractive, which I noticed and considered accordingly, but because I was looking at her as the frustrated lover of Don Juan, and what might have made me feel interested was what Don Juan had left in her, or what he had created and changed in her. Her sobs would have touched anyone, and especially me, since I am by nature quite sentimental; but at that moment I didn't feel like I was seeing a human person, but a literary character. She was the deceived lover of a man who passed as Don Juan and who, in some ways, acted like him. And precisely the nuance determined by "in some ways," was what attracted me and what would have led me to ask a swarm of questions, which Sonya surely would not have answered. The thought of the trick of the Trickster not only seemed new to me, but original, and it had raised my curiosity about her. Without me realizing it, since my conversation with Leporello the imposter had become interesting, and had perhaps become an obsession. Independent of my will, my words, and my actions, something inside of me had turned around, and something in my heart made me feel pleased that I had gotten mixed up in that affair.

"Would you like to have something to drink with me? I would like to ask you some questions."

It was Sonya who said that, not me; and she pulled me by the arm into a very large room that immediately became familiar though had never been in it before. There was something about it that was similar to the bachelor pad of Don Juan, but I guess you could say, a little toned down; as if the person who lived there had left more obvious traces of herself in the other house than in this one.

Apart from that, these quarters looked like the study, the living room (perhaps also the bedroom), of a well-to-do student with good taste.

I thought it would be proper to praise one of the rooms and some roses.

"Every morning I get them from Spain. He has them sent."

We sat down. Sonya was no longer crying. She had dried her tears, and, while I was saying a few clichés about the Spanish roses, she took a brush from a vanity case to remove the redness from her eyelids.

"Let me have a cigarette."

I gave her one of my Monterreys.

"He also smokes cigarettes like this."

I waited for her to ask questions, but they were nothing more than one would expect; if he was hurt very badly, and if he had gotten help in time. She never said his name.

After that she asked me who I was, and why I had brought her the pistol and the handkerchief. I told her a few things about my relations with Leporello and why I was involved in what had happened. I avoided saying anything about myself, or the name of Don Juan.

"Then, you don't know who he is?"

"No."

"Would you like to know why I wanted to kill him?"

"I don't have any right to ask you, nor do I know of any reason why I should try to get involved in other's problems. I am only here because a friend asked me to come, and because by coming here, I was doing a service to an unknown woman. But if the service requires that I hear it, I will do that."

"Do you know that a few minutes ago, when you came, I was seriously thinking about killing myself?"

"That seems excessive."

"I felt guilty, I still feel guilty, but I admit that I could be wrong. Nevertheless, I don't trust my judgement."

"But you trust mine?"

"You are not biased."

"But I have the impression that you are right."

"It's what I need. to go on living; an objective measure of my guilt. When I fired the shot, I felt justified. Later, when I was here by myself, I dismissed all that and I felt both criminal and ill-fated. I wasn't capable of measuring my guilt, nor am I now, and I still find many contradictions in the way I feel."

In spite of myself, I smiled.

"I find you much more rational than I would have expected from a woman in these circumstances."

These words seemed to make her happy.

"My passion has always been a problem for me, but not a great one, and I am beginning to recover. Perhaps it's not appropriate to call it passion, but I don't know what other word would describe it properly. Maybe fascination, or something like that. I have always been, and I'm sure I will always be, a cold woman. So it wasn't that I loathed myself, or the feeling of desertion, that made me think about suicide."

"Nevertheless, a half an hour ago you were crying."

"And I'll cry again! There are many things I can't easily forget, and there are some states of mind that revive with my memories. Perhaps they can only disappear when I convince myself that they never happened."

"Do you think that they were unreal?"

"Yes."

"With the unreality of the fantastic?"

"Oh, no! More like the perfect."

"In spite of the incident that provoked the shot?"

"You mean you know about him?"

I didn't know how to deny it. I saw how Sonya's eyes darkened, as though they were revealing something like a feeling of shame.

"Well his servant told me some things. I will consider it true until you tell me it's not."

"I would like to do that, but I don't want to lie."

"Don't you wonder how the servant, who was with me when you fired the shot, knew what had happened?"

"There are so many other things I would like to explain, that one is not important. What I ask myself now, what I have been asking myself every since you arrived, and what makes me feel guilty, is the doubt of whether or not I have been mistaken."

"About what?"

"About the feeling I have been the object of an amorous seduction, or maybe rather a courting; of having believed that two months of living together, two extraordinary, unexpected, and incomprehensible months of love, were really like that."

"Why do you doubt it?"

"Because in all that time the word love was never mentioned. By that I mean in the ordinary way, between a man and a woman."

"What else could it be?"

"I don't know."

Then I remembered the strange intuition I had felt in the house of Don Juan, of finding myself involved in something that was, at the same time, both religious and blasphemous, and that memory came back to haunt me..."

"Is there something wrong?"

"No. But if you still feel like explaining what you were going to tell me before, I would like very much to hear it."

Sonya didn't say anything. She got up and went to search through some papers on the table, and after a moment she handed me a notebook with a text written by a typewriter. I read what was on the cover. Its title was: "Don Juan. An analysis of the myth."

"My doctoral thesis. It was approved in the University of Sorbonne two months ago."

I started to look through it. She went back to sit down and was silent for a few moments. Then she got up and went to serve us some drinks and, without asking me, took another one of my cigarettes. I watched what she did without saying anything. During our conversation I had forgotten her feminine aspect. But as I looked at her now I realized she certainly had all the charms that Leporello had mentioned, as well as a few more, and I felt pleased to let myself be captivated by them.

"I don't know who you are, and it isn't important," she said, "but if you were my friend, or someone I know, I wouldn't tell you anything. The reasons are easy for you to understand who, I assume, are a Catholic and, when you confess, would prefer to do it with an unfamiliar priest. I'm also glad that you are Latin American. According to what I have heard, Latin Americans still value what they call the purity of a woman, and if they don't value it, at least they don't scorn a woman who lacks sexual experience. A man from my country would never ask me if I'm a virgin, but he would laugh if I tell him that I am. He would laugh even more if I told him I am deliberately that way, not because of some prejudice or of some inferiority complex. That is something I am calm about; my sexual conduct is not caused by anything obscure or, at least, none of that crazy stuff that the psychoanalysts talk about. As a child I was a believer, and when I stopped believing, the greatest difference between my friends and me was that they couldn't wait to be old enough to have a boyfriend, and I felt no hurry. I must say the my cold temperament did not oppress me; I received sexual information with indifference, and if afterward I tried look for a biological reason for virginity, I confess that I never found it. Later, I could have gotten married to anyone, and I never thought it was necessary to remain single; but matrimony had never counted as one of my urgent desires, nor had any type of relation that was amorous, or just sexual. I have already told you that for me it was temperamentally unnecessary, and professionally it was more comfortable. Love, and sexual relations, rob too much time from women who are dedicated to science."

I must have laughed, or maybe I simply smiled. So after that she stopped, and asked me:

"You think that is unusual?"

"Yes."

"Also monstrous?"

"No, just unusual."

"Perhaps pathological?" she insisted.

"Unusual is the word I would use, or if you prefer, unaccustomed. Not the result, I mean, but just the motives. For me, as a catholic, chastity has the same meaning as a sacrifice offered to God, and, maybe that is why I also consider it as a tribute to a person who is loved. Other than those two things, it seems stupid."

"And what makes you think that for me it is not also a tribute... well, not a tribute, but an offering? To science, of course."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I don't think about abstract things. Any offering to a living person is a form of love. It's possible that you don't understand me."

"Oh yes, I understand you! Yes, now; two months ago, perhaps I would not have understood you."

"And all that you just explained to me with such precision, and no sign of a trembling voice..."

"And why should I have trembled?"

"With a woman from my country, her voice would have trembled."

"I'm not from your country."

She lowered her eyes and remained silent for a short time, and during that time the expression on her face changed into a smile that seemed to come from something she had remembered.

"I know what Hispanic women are like, and how they love. I know how they think and how they feel, but I know that from books, because I had to read them for my dissertation, to familiarize myself with the mentality that created a myth. I confess that I did not share the absurd sexual morality you have, but I also despised it. Somewhat later I stopped despising it, but I still didn't share it. But I suspect that, in spite of your aberrations, you are closer than we are to the mystery involved sexual life. And now, you see, I have to laugh at myself, because I am materialistic and, rationally, I can't believe in mystery, but only in areas of reality that are still unexplored. But evidently I have now experienced this mystery myself."

With complete objectivity, I asked:

"Sexual mystery?"

"A mystery that sex is only a part of, or perhaps only an expression. That is what it has to do with it."

"There is something you haven't told me yet. What was it that made you think of Don Juan as an object of investigation?"

"Kierkegaard, Mozart. Later, Moliere. and some poet whose name I don't remember. Just intellectual curiosity."

"In the case of Don Juan, I don't think any woman can feel just intellectual curiosity."

"If that wasn't true for me, it was something that was in my unconscious, and is still there today. I assure you that I have never had any special intuition about the character of Don Juan, or about his significance. My thesis doesn't add anything; it summarizes, it systematizes, it brings together things that haven't been considered; it organizes them and establishes connections. It is a modern, scientific work."

She pointed at the dissertation with an ironic gesture.

"He says my thesis is mistaken."

For the first time that night, her words became more loving, like any girl, rolling her eyes, had said: "He confessed that he loved me"; and in the same way that ordinary girls remained silent, closing their eyes, as if they were trying to retain a fleeting memory. He told me that same afternoon that my thesis was appropriate in Sorbonne. Very few people were still there, but he was there with that same bored expression of someone who had been mistaken in his expectation to enjoy himself. He looked at me, and I couldn't help but wonder who he was, a friend, a person whom I had spoken with once, and now couldn't remember them. There was no one there who congratulated me, nor was here a lover who hoped to celebrate my little achievement with me. Afterward when I was alone, he came up to me, and like it was the most natural thing in the world, spoke to me, I don't know how long, without it seeming strange to me, nor did it surprise me when he asked me to have supper with him so we could continue talking. Until that point he had seemed like a stranger who knew a great deal about Don Juan, perhaps a professor of literature who knew more about something I thought I knew so well. But after we sat down in the corner of the restaurant I felt as comfortable with him, as if he were one of my best friends. It was then that he told me my thesis was mistaken, and that the real Don Juan Tenorio was nothing like the man I had described, then he thanked me and almost flattered me, and the pleasure I felt then was the first symptom of the fascination that grew every day since then; and it culminated, and then vanished, this afternoon. Now, I had a new feeling I could analyze as I listened to him, and it seemed as normal as everything that had happened to me, and everything that would happen. It was definitely that feeling of normality that made me remain quiet and receptive; and what finally made me forget about analyzing, and hand myself over to the complete spontaneity of surprises that were so enchanting."

And then abruptly she asked me:

“Have you ever been in love?”

She didn't give me time to answer. She quickly got up off the sofa and she kept on speaking with growing enthusiasm that she accentuated with her hands; and at times with a tremble of tenderness in the depth of her words.

“I didn't listen to him just because of the things he was saying to me, but because of the way he said them. The tone of his voice, the way he looked at me, his movements and his gestures, and perhaps something ineffable, wrapped him in an aura, and affected me sweetly, or perhaps me traitorously. Then I ignored everything that wasn't part of his ideas about Don Juan, and hadn't caught the attention of my mind; however, the caressing tone of his voice also caressed me. I thought I was responding and smiling at him so he would keep on talking, but in reality, my words and my smiles were guided by something new, something profound, that produced the disturbing and unknown happiness that now was growing within me.”

Then, she asked again:

“Have you ever been in love?”

“Yes.”

“Was that the way it started?”

“That's one of the ways it starts.”

“Is it a normal way, of one that is extraordinary?”

“It's the way everyone falls in love.”

For example, I myself; since some moments ago when Sonya had gotten up, since her words—each time more abstract—seemed to belong to her more completely, like a laugh or a sob, and not just the expression of her feelings, I felt moved and disturbed, and I began to fall in love with her.

“Don't forget what I told you before, that the way things were seemed completely natural to me; and during following the days, and also today, they still seem that way. Now, consider objectively how all that naturalness becomes, not only excessive, but suspicious and unintelligible. A human being can't live with the naturalness of an archangel, and yet that's the way I have been living during all this time. Right now, not only do I not understand, not only am I unable to explain it and, I also feel it and I remember it like something that doesn't belong to me, like something foreign to me, but something I desperately want to be mine. I swear that I can remember it minute by minute, and word by word, and that when I remember it, it touches me, but not like it was my own, but like I can be touched by a character in a movie with whom I identify for a couple hours, and whose fate I want to share. And, still, none of that was alien to me, and none of it came from outside, except the enchantment: its effect was something I felt in my body, in my nerves, and was mine like nothing had ever been before.”

“Are you telling me there was a new woman inside you, who now has disappeared?”

“No. It was always me. Everything was me, and still is, but like something that has been stolen from somewhere else.”

I laughed. Not because what she said seemed funny to me, but because I needed to laugh or do something improper, that permitted me to hide the secondary effects that the presence of Sonya was having on me. She was showing me the things about her that she had described with words that were pedantic, and still precise. But my laughter didn't seem to have irritated her, nor did she even seem to notice it.

“It was me who asked him, without the slightest embarrassment, if we could meet again the next day. I was so completely captivated by his presence that when he left me, I didn't feel like I was alone. In fact, I wasn't really alone, and it was the first time I felt like that. That night when I went to bed I surprised myself by speaking to him, and I laughed at myself for being so crazy; but I didn't stop speaking until I finally went to sleep, like someone speaks to God, while they pray. We spent all of the next day together, as well as the next two following days. On the fourth day he told me he couldn't see me, because he would have to do something outside of Paris, and that seemed perfectly natural. But my restlessness and my uneasiness created anxiety. I felt the hours pass, and I tried to pay attention to them, and for the first time I discovered what solitude is. When he called me at night, I answered, sighing.”

I interrupted:

“Didn't his name surprise you?”

“His name? Why do you ask me that?”

“Only to find out what you think.”

“I don't know what he is called, and until now, I never realized I didn't know it.”

She sat down on the edge of the table, lost in thought.

"I never asked him his name, nor did I think it was necessary to ask him; anyway, his name wouldn't have added anything."

"When Jacob fought with the angel, he asked her name, and I seem to remember that some prophet asked Jehovah the same thing."

"Neither Jacob was inside the angel, nor was the prophet inside Jehovah, like I have been inside him, and he inside of me."

"Inside who?"

"Inside him, inside him..."

She raised her hands and pressed them against her cheeks, surprised, confused.

"Oh, now I absolutely need to know his name, because the enchantment has broken! Tell it to me."

"I don't know it."

"Then, why...?"

She turned her back to me, went over to the window, and pressed her face against the glass. I saw how the spotlight of the Tower illuminated her darkened face from time to time.

"I would like you to make you understand," she said without looking at me, "that it hasn't been necessary for me to know his name."

"Why did you ask me then?"

"Because then I would understand him."

"When one is in love, the name gets in the way. The beloved is "her." And when the beloved is really yours, you invent a name for her, a name that is the key to love."

She quickly turned around toward me.

"Do you know that from experience?"

"No, I read it somewhere."

She would have raised her eyes if she heard the experience from me; discovering the unknown, would disappoint her.

Calmly walking over to me, her body gently swaying, and her soul distant, she sat down.

"We never spoke of love. In the beginning I thought that his way of wooing me was strange, but I soon forgot about it. That idea of wooing had seemed presumptuous, since it was so common. It was as though he belonged to a world of human relations that I, attracted by him to a world of superior relations, had abandoned. He never spoke of love. Then, on the second day when we went out together, when I told him that I didn't believe in God, he smiled. I asked him if he believed, and he told me he was Catholic. 'Does it seem wrong that I don't believe?' 'Oh, no, it's natural!' 'Well I think it's natural that you have faith.' We both laughed, and said nothing more about that topic. But sometime later, for no reason, he asked me about my atheism, and what I thought of the world, of human life, and my own life. Instead of being disturbed by that, I was hoping that he would convert me, because I longed to possess the same world that he possessed; but he never did. Just the opposite, he started explaining to me what Nothingness was, and Matter, and he asked me if I thought that Matter came from Nothingness and then returned to it, or if, on the contrary, I thought it was eternal. I was confused, because the words with which he told me this were not my own, and I didn't understand very well. In the end, I asked him why he was doing that, and he told me: 'I have to perfect your nihilism and teach you to accept the consequences.' 'But why?' 'To show you the amount of richness there is in your soul, without you knowing it.'" In the following days we spoke of other things, but just imagine, we did it in the same places where lovers usually meet: in gardens, in the corner of cafés, in solitary places, and always arm in arm, and, sometimes, embraced. He began to take me in his car to places outside Paris, and show me places I didn't know. Finally, to his flat. He had a very special manner, almost poetic, so that everything around us was alive, was brightened, and participated in our conversation, and almost in our life. In his hands a cigarette, a glass of wine, seemed like something new, something unknown, and seductive. Everything related to me, made me feel part of everything, enlivened by everything, but at the same time, subjugated by what he showed me—Nothingness—and linked to it by the same mysterious life with which things were linked to me. In my soul he was creating a religion of Nothingness. He told me, for example, that atheism can't stay by itself. 'Following the path of atheism also leads to Eternity. It is as incomprehensible to say that God is eternal, as it is of Nothingness, because what is incomprehensible is not God and Nothingness, but Eternity, and the Infinity of God, or of Nothingness. Speaking of either Nothingness, or God, you can say that they are simple, perfect, infinite, unchangeable, unique.' But don't think that he told me those things like my professor of Metaphysics would have done. No, he made me eagerly long for the Eternity

of Nothingness, and my own eternity and my own nothingness. And every time a feeling like that shook me, I felt intensely happy.”

“Unless I am remembering incorrectly, what he was telling you was a kind of Hindu mysticism.”

Sonya was furious.

“Why do you have to give it a name? Anyway, the one that you just gave it doesn’t serve me, nor does it matter. I called it love.”

I asked her to forgive me, and I sincerely regretted my new impertinence.

“Little by little, he discovered what he called the riches of my soul. With his words, with his presence, he made me feel like I was living as a creature in a universe to which I wanted to belong, I don’t know why. When I told him, he answered that it wasn’t possible yet, that there were many stages to get through...”

She banged on the table with an unexpected fury.

“It was all an enormous deceit! What I wanted was nothing like being united with the cosmos, or anything like that, but to go to bed with him, like any girl with her lover!

She sighed, and between her sighs, her voice murmured softly:

“Like any woman who is in love! I’m no different from the others.”

She was overcome. I offered her a cigarette, and then lit it. I handed her a glass.

“I desired him, but not only that. I thought that, united to him, I would achieve the superhuman love that he had talked about and made me long for it. Because of that, I forced myself to listen to him, and obey him. Many afternoons he left me alone in his house, and I was happy there, happy for the reality that surrounded me, and for the hope that was waiting.”

“Did you know that, before you entered that house, there were other women in it?”

“No!” she answered incredulously, with her tearful eyes wide open.

“That afternoon I was alone for two hours. I don’t believe in mysterious sensations, but it was evident that, in the middle of something that I can’t describe, or define, I became aware, almost audibly, and almost physically, of several different women, one of which was you, a little different, a little less important.”

“When I was living in my own house, it was nothing like being in his house. For me, it was almost like a temple. What I did there, when I was alone, has to be similar to what makes a believer pray, and I seem to remember that I did pray. I was on my knees, in front of the bed, looking at it, without feeling myself, I swear it, without any sexual urge whatsoever. Certainly, I was full of desire, but I didn’t think of it that way, only as a feeling of enthusiasm, or rapture, or who knows what! Other times, I sat down on the corner of the sofa, lost in myself and my mind empty, and I had the impression that I felt the Nothingness within me, like I was part of it, not completely though, because he wasn’t there.”

She took a few silent steps toward the back of the room until she stopped in the darkest corner.

“Yesterday he took me to his house. He talked for several hours, I don’t know how many, because I was asleep, perhaps because he wanted me to sleep. When I woke up the next morning, I was alone. As always, that seemed normal. I waited for him. I may have eaten something, or maybe I didn’t eat, because I was disposed. He arrived about noon, and he said “Hello” then started to play the piano. I sat down to listen. He didn’t say anything, but he played and played, until I felt myself surrounded by music. It was a music that was tactile, and penetrating. Oh, Yes! It was ordinary, well-known music, but it felt like I said. I felt its long, vibrant phrases touch my body and enclose it. It went inside me and lit up something, something that seethed and burned, and pulled me toward an obscure fire. My soul was filled with somber tunnels; I entered them and was pushed through them by the music, traveling through them, secure and blind, my eyes blind and my blood burning. It was like I was ascending toward a summit whose immense darkness shook me with fear, drawing me to a high spot inside of me in which the aforementioned Eternity and Nothingness were joined. Thus, I ascended, pained and distressed, until my nerves stopped feeling and began to vibrate like the cords of a weeping guitar, until I was touching the Nothingness with my hands and was nothing but music and sobs, at the point of disintegrating in an annihilating chord. That was all I could take. I stopped burning, I stopped hearing the blood, and what waited for me, without my knowing it, was a wave of interminable pleasure. It was the first complete sexual experience in my life, which astonished and overwhelmed me, and that I entered like an abyss. When I calmed down, the music was still playing, and it enwrapped me with its long, oppressive arms, but by then I was different. There was a whirlwind outside me, and another one inside me, and I moved with them, and followed them with a mind that was dark, and a heart that was burning. I found myself in front of him, naked; I put my hand on his arm and said: “Come



here.” Then he drew away, looked at me with a smile, and said: ‘What for? Go get dressed.’ Those words made me realize that I was naked, without knowing that I had taken my clothes off. My vertigo stopped, and I returned to myself, but I was still full of desire, and I said once again: ‘Come here.’ He paid no attention to me. He started playing again, and he laughed. I felt shame, an enormous shame, and I felt slighted, but that desire was still flowing through my veins. I insisted, and I may have shouted, and begged him. He looked at me. For the first time in two long months he had taken off his glasses, and I could see his mocking eyes, his cold eyes that, however, were not mocking me, because they were not looking at me, but at something that was behind us, far beyond us. I realized immediately, I’m not sure how, that I was nothing for him, not even an object of mockery. I hurried to go and hide myself behind the piano, and then, without stopping to play, he said: ‘There, next to your hand, is a pistol.’ In fact, my hand was touching a pistol. I shot at him, and I saw him fall. I don’t know if he shouted, or if he tried to escape. I had to get dressed and, while I did that, I calmed down a bit. I was able to go over to him and make sure that he was still alive. It seemed to me that I had not wounded him, it seemed to have nothing to do with me, nor with what had just happened. However, I still felt remorse for having wounded him. Then I called the servant in several places until I found him, and that’s all there is to say.”

10. Sonya Nazaroff—that was her whole name which appeared on the cover of the manuscript—might have been about twenty five years old. She was tall and slender, with white skin and blonde hair, a blonde that was somewhere between gold and ashen: her hair was smooth and silky, arranged with a bun on the back of her neck. I liked her face for its sweetness, but not her eyes that were more rounded than oval, with short eyelashes. She didn’t use makeup. She moved with agility, and with harmony, and also with carelessness: every time she sat down, her legs tormented me, because they were uncovered all the way up to her garters. She had her fingernails trimmed like a pianist, or a stenographer. And as for those features, that from the look of it were the same ones that pleased both me and Don Juan, were more romantic than classical, pointing right and left and center, and still tender, like two sleeping turtledoves, (and in the contradiction of those concepts is exactly where all of her romanticism resides.) But no matter what was the expert opinion about the overall impression—whose attraction Don Juan had already selected, guaranteed, and established—the most important thing about Sonya was her manner of moving and staying quiet, both naturally and measured, just like her rich soprano voice full of resonances and warm modulations. I was caught like a fool.

With her eyes wide open and her hands stretched out to me, she was waiting for me to say something, and since I was deliberately holding back, she asked:

“Don’t you have anything to say to me?”

“No, not now. But there is something I would like to ask you.”

That was just an excuse, since I couldn’t really think of anything, and the appropriate words hadn’t yet responded to my nervous efforts to find them.

“I have told you everything.” she said.

“Perhaps not. At first, remember, you told me you had experienced the mystery at first hand, but then you hardly mentioned it, except that the only thing you thought was mysterious was your first sexual experience, which was rather strange, considering the things that led to it, but nothing more than strange. And although I understand very well your motives for shooting him, you never explained why you then felt so guilty, and wanted to commit suicide. Then, finally, what did you mean, what were you referring to when you said that he never looked at you, that he didn’t want to mock you, and that you only considered his intentions as an instrument?”

“I am confused,” she said with a pleasing gesture of apology.

“Perhaps I can help you understand things more clearly.”

“Okay.”

She had changed. During the last part of her story, in spite of the devilishly intellectual tone of her words, and in spite of her precise and distinct concepts, she was upset, her voice had trembled, and she had become heated in the passion of her memory. I felt more close to her, and more capable of helping her, although I wasn’t completely sure about the nature of my relief.

“Let’s start with the last question. When you saw him without his dark glasses, was it that you had discovered you were not the object of his love?”

“It could be that.”

“And the mystery? When do you think it was that you experienced it?”

"When he began playing the piano. It was like he was pushing himself down a path where there was something that attracted me by its own darkness."

"Something..., what?"

"Something."

She suddenly gasped in realization.

"Yes, now I know! It was like it was pushing me toward death. The sexual climax made me want to die with happiness. It made me want to unite with him in order to die in his arms."

"Die, why?"

"I don't know. The happiness resulted in a feeling of humiliation. I already told you. That feeling of being nothing was what pleased me while that commotion in my body lasted."

"And now, what do you think about it?"

"I can't think yet."

"Nevertheless, it's undeniable that your life was enriched by a mystical experience that you had never imagined or desired, and with a sexual experience that was delayed, because you had postponed it, or rejected it. I don't think that you can set aside any of these things. And even more, you will not be able to live like you lived before, even if you tried to, even if you forced yourself to achieve it. They are two new aspects of your life. You won't forget them, and you probably won't be able to think about anything else, even if you try..."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"You've been reborn, different."

Sonya smiled.

"That's just a metaphor."

"Call it what you like. My opinion is that it will be a long time before you will be able to judge yourself morally, before you can make a fair and free decision. So, either love or detest that man."

"Are you saying I'm still in love with him?"

"I am sure that you are very impassioned. What does it matter where that passion is directed?"

"It makes me feel ashamed to think that someday I might go and look for him, and ask him to love me. Oh, no! I'll never do that."

"And, if you did it, it would be useless."

She raised her head, as though she was offended.

"You think I wouldn't be able to please him? They have told me many times that I am pretty."

"No, that's not what I meant."

I looked for a card in my billfold, I wrote my address on it and put it on the table.

"I ought to leave. If you need me sometime..."

Sonya stood up quickly and said:

"No thanks. I won't need you. You have acted correctly, and that was good, but..."

Her hands, her eyes, explained more quickly than her words.

"I don't want to see you again."

I accepted with a smile, perhaps I also said "Naturally!" pronounced with my lips on the outside, but inside I was looking for reason to make her want to see me again. I wanted to find it before I said goodbye. I overdid the formal courtesies as I went out the door; I asked her for a light for my cigarette on the landing of the stairs, and I remembered I had left my gloves inside... Sonya accompanied me to the elevator. It was then that my angel rescued me.

"Wait."

"Is there something else you have forgotten?" she asked me ironically.

"Yes. To tell you that that man says his name is Don Juan Tenorio."

I closed the door of the elevator and pushed the button. It seemed like I was descending with infernal slowness. I was afraid that she would get there before the elevator, that she would wait for me at the bottom and would slap me for having hidden his name.

She hadn't arrived at the lower hallway, but I could hear her footsteps coming down the stairs two at a time. I ran outside and turned into the first side street before she could come out and find me. I could hear her voice calling me...

When I got to the hotel, the hall porter told me:

"A lady has called you. Three times in the last five minutes."

"Tell her that I haven't arrived. Tell her that however many times she calls."

I explained that it was a joke, and that I just wanted to get some sleep.

"However, if an Italian gentleman calls..."

Leporello didn't call. He came to the hotel the following morning and waited in the vestibule for me to come down.

"What have you done to Sonya? She called me in the middle of the night and demanded that I take her to his house."

"Now?"

"The deadline was right after dinner."

It was only a little after eleven thirty.

"Then, we could eat together and talk about it then."

"Yes, we could do that. I'll invite you. Please let me! I know a good Italian restaurant where they make the best spaghetti in the world."

"How is your master?"

"Don Juan? Is that who you are referring to?"

"You mean you have more than one master?"

Leporello smiled mischievously.

"No, not at the moment. Don Juan is much better. They gave him a blood transfusion this morning. From Marianne, of course... He's quite happy, poor fellow! He told me something like this: "Now that our blood no longer can mix together in pleasure, it can at least do it in pain."

"Horrible, no?"

"Moving, I suppose. You can't tell me she's not beautiful. A woman capable of loving a man that way, deserves to be happy."

"Difficult, with Don Juan."

"But what about me? Haven't you thought about me?"

"It's him she loves."

"There is nothing easier than making a sentimental transfer. Last night you yourself left Sonya an intriguing theatrical effect, which I know was quite easy. So what? Wouldn't it be the same to make a transfer?"

We had arrived at Champ de Mars, right next to my hotel. Leporello pointed at an empty bench.

"If you want to discuss things, let's sit down. This morning I don't feel like taking a walk. I'm feeling a bit disorganized. Looking at the trees by the river in the spring, which is what you would like, damages my nerves. I'm not a man for spring, which I believe is a diabolical invention of the protestants. In our Mediterranean lands, there is no spring, there aren't different seasons, like we are now suffering."

"Not me."

"Whatever you like. I am. But, we're forgetting that we were going to talk about poor Sonya. Let's see. Why aren't you satisfied with what I openly told you last night? It should be enough for you to know the techniques of my master."

"The techniques of your master..."

"What do you think about them?"

"They are very baroque. What he has achieved in two months with the complicity of the Cosmos, someone else would have done in two weeks, without the necessity of mysticism nor metaphysics. Simply because Sonya was ready."

"Today my master is baroque by vocation; but at another time, he was irreproachably classical. However, circumstances change, and today he enjoys his virtuosity. He is an artist who plays with his omnipotent powers. Have you ever seen a violinist who plays the "Kreutzer Sonata" with a single chord, and forces the pianist to accompany him with a single key? That's my master."

"With a procedure like that, anyone would see it as a symptom of decadency. A work of art in which technical values predominate is always decadent: it reveals imaginative impotence and sterility."

Leporello laughed uproariously. He laughed so loudly that some women that were nearby with their children were angry, and started to leave.

"Don't be a fool, man! You deserve..."

The women hurried away, and Leporello watched them scornfully.

"No, no. Even if I deserve it, it doesn't suit me. I chose you because your interest in theology was appealing—that always shows a man of quality—and, because my master is very grateful for the beautiful things you wrote about him. But, fundamentally, if I have insisted on your friendship, if I have revealed a large part of his great secret, it was only so that you would take care of Sonya when my master rejected her. I always thought you would do that successfully.

I smiled, reluctantly. I thanked him, halfheartedly, and got up.

“Don’t get upset, man!” He grabbed me by the jacket and made me sit down again. “Don’t start acting like an offended Spaniard! Eventually, I am going to do the same thing with Marianne that I hope you will do with Sonya. Do you think there’s something wrong with that? Didn’t you mean to take the risk of courting her? What does it matter if she thinks the same as I do? Sonya is a wonderful girl. She doesn’t deserve rejection, nor misfortune, although, for that matter, neither did any of the women my master rejected. They were the flower of womanhood. It used to be that Don Juan’s love had a tragic effect on them; now though, his treatment has changed, because he is not in such a hurry and can plan his conquests more carefully, while he treats them as he wishes, and it shows them the way to be happy in the arms of another man. And that, my friend, shows his great power of creation! Do you think Sonya could have been happy before she met him? Sonya was an intellectual, more dried out than a pile of leaves, and, being twenty-five years old, she didn’t have enough imagination to make her sexy. Now she is like a flower that has just blossomed and opened itself to the morning dew. Can you imagine how her first kiss would be? If you cast her off because of some Spanish prejudice, I would think that I have been mistaken, and that you are an idiot.”

A few minutes ago he reminded me of the Luis Mejía, of Zorrilla, and his words, “it’s impossible that you have left her...,” and I may have even said that out loud. Leporello extended his hand, making a harsh, insistent gesture.

“It’s not the same,” he said, and he emphasized it with an expression of desperation. “You, the Spaniards, are impossible! But, my friend, when that’s the way they are, they carry things to their final consequences, to tragic consequences and reject them, like my master did.”

“What does this have to do with your master?”

“You’re entering the zone of meaningless questions, or stupid questions. If you feel like Don Luis Mejía, it’s Don Juan who you are dealing with; but if you can’t change what you’re doing, or what you’re thinking, who else but my master is to blame?”

He gave me some pats on the back, and I lowered my head with embarrassment.

“Come on. Calm yourself. With that poorly formulated question, you were thinking about something else. What was it?”

“The only one I could ask...: who is your master?”

“Don Juan Tenorio.”

“That’s just stupidity.”

“If he is not Don Juan, who is he?”

“An ordinary don Juan.”

“I don’t believe in imitations.”

“The individuals of a species don’t imitate, they participate.”

“Don Juan is not a species, but a concrete individual of incomparable individuality. The others who call themselves Don Juan are only fakes, simple quantitative fornicators. My friend, you have undoubtedly heard that, to be what one is, it is just necessary to be yourself, and my master does not need to go to extremes.”

“Because it is not able.”

“Because he doesn’t need to.”

“It’s ridiculous that Don Juan uses indirect methods, even if they are original and very complicated, to start what Sonya called her first complete sexual experience.”

“Doesn’t it occur to you that he does it in order to avoid a physiological catastrophe? My master is very careful with his victims.”

“I still think he is impotent.”

“That is a stupid, worn out cliché that is unworthy of you. If you once believed that for Don Juan, the seduction of women was never an end in itself, but a means, how can you now...?”

“For Don Juan, yes; for your master no.”

“My master is Don Juan.”

“And who are you?”

“Me?”

He broke out laughing, but this time his laughter sounded like the laughter of a villain in a melodrama.

“Once you insinuated that you might be the devil.”

Leporello rose up and looked at me with total seriousness, with all the solemnness he was able to show. He took off his hat and bowed to me.

“And now I assure you that I am.”

I stood up in turn, and I gave him a salute with the same ceremony.

“Pleased to meet you. So why don’t you do something devilish? It would be easy, for example, to transfer me in a flash to the top of that tower.”

“Don’t you understand that, if I could do that, I would?”

“Then you’re not a devil because, as you know, since the devil is a master of theology, he has power over bodies.”

“Listen to me: certain prerogatives are denied me. I have had to abandon them in order to be able to love. But, if you had any sense of the extraordinary, you would have already been amazed by my diabolical knowledge of your thoughts, and those of others. Haven’t you wondered, for example, how I have been so well-informed about what happened between Sonya and my master, and between Sonya and you?”

“When something can be explained rationally, it is not necessary to consult the supernatural.”

Leporello let himself drop on the bench, feeling discouraged.

“You are a blockhead. But still, can I ask you, at least as a premise of my work, that you consider me a devil?”

“And what would I gain by that?”

“I will tell you a story. I’ll tell you...” he hesitated, “I’ll tell you how and why I met Don Juan. It’s a story that is unknown by everyone.”

“You think that would matter to me?”

“If you really want to know what the life of Don Juan was like, this story of mine would serve as kind of prologue.”

Again he patted me on the back affectionately.

“Go on, cheer up. The spaghetti in the story will give you an incomparable luncheon. You will have the best tasting pasta you have ever had. And also, you will find out how the life of Don Juan has its roots both in heaven and in hell.”

“Like most other lives.”

“Yes, but in another way.”

Without waiting for my agreement, he ran out into the street and stopped the first taxi; then he made a gesture, telling me to come and, when I did, he put me inside, with insistence, but also with delicacy. He gave the name of a street and a house number, and he then brought me to a restaurant where a few Neapolitan workers were having a lunch of macaroons. We went into a private room. When the waiter came, he ordered a meal and wine. “I hope you will make an exception in my honor,” he said to me. “This Perrier water that you drink is a horrible venom.” The spaghetti smelled delicious. He began to tell me what he called “The History of Garbanzo Negro,” which he assured me was his, but he referred to him in third person, as if it was someone else. As he did that, his voice that was usually so spontaneous, stopped sounding that way, and he spoke with the mild-mannered tone of voice of Spanish actors when they perform classical theater; this tone which, for some unknown reason, they suppose was the same as our great-great-grandfathers.

## CHAPTER II

### The story of Leporello

1. Because Garbanzo Negro always called himself that, instead of Chícharo Verde, which he liked best, it is a story that is several thousand years old, that goes back to the origin of garbanzo and has a close relation to the problem of who came first, the individual, the genre, or the species; a story, on the other hand, combined with poorly interpreted legends, and with so many gaps in its documentation, that in large part must hypothetically reconstructed and based on conjectures rather than facts, suitable for poets and similar to their imagination. One must keep in mind, nevertheless, that the character called Garbanzo Negro, in his active years, didn’t use his name, but a carefully chosen alias, or rather the name used by the proprietor of the body in each conjecture. Let us say besides that—depending on what was suitable at the time—for a long time this Garbanzo has been a kind of specialist in endings, something like a bullfighter who only takes part in the kill, leaving the rest of the fight to the stand-ins and amateurs. Then he only used to make use of a suitable body that was a relative, a neighbor, or a friend of the victim, so that relationship, the friendship, or the location, permitted him to enter, leave, walk around or assist in the vigils, or administer needed remedies; he would not lose sight of the patient, looking after him with care,

and when the dying soul, cared for beforehand by others, was reaching the end, Garbanzo Negro placed a death blow on the upper body, or else made a final thrust with the papers ready for the entrance to hell. Since his reputation of being expeditious and efficient had grown, Garbanzo Negro only participated in well-known bullfights, with bulls of great charm, which means, high-class characters, of those who were esteemed in hell, and whose acquisition was important for quality, for notoriety, and because the Opposing Party had placed great insistence on removing them.

In spite of his successes, and his reputation as a good worker, Garbanzo Negro had an obsessive preoccupation. He had never had the luck of making contact with a useful body, a body with that could benefit him, or could give him satisfaction in the short time he was able to live with it. Included among his most resounding interventions, were ones that the devil could shamelessly take pride, when the body had been miserable, sickly, or simply infirm. When they sent him urgently to Rome to take care of Cardinal-Deacon Ricci, who was close to death, he hoped that they had reserved for him the body of the beautiful Catarina, who was visiting there. But he ended up with the stubborn, the ungainly, the extremely annoying body of an old servant suffering from distorted articular rheumatism, whose pains could have been considered hellish. Once before, in Florence he had gone to help Simonetta, a prostitute with a strong intellectual mind, in whose amorous proximity the most notable men of her time had held lofty discussions; but with his definitive shenanigans, Garbanzo Negro had hooked up with a fool that the sick woman held in great esteem, and with his charms he had amused her in her moments of sadness. Blind in one eye since birth, she had an enormous hump, and her mind was mentally handicapped. Last of all, no more that twenty years ago, they had entrusted to him the final care of Father Lord Tellez, a great Augustinian theologian, when the friar was about to die. He took care of the body of one Friar Hieronimus Welcek, of German origin, and Father Welcek who suffered from a gastric ulcer and ate like a breast-fed baby.

It turned out that on that occasion the chronological expectations of hell didn't play out, and after a dangerous moment of agony in which they thought he was dead, he started recovering, and, by the skills of an incredible Jewish doctor, he finally regained his health as if it was nothing, in spite of his seventy years, and the terrible weakness of his body. Two months of convalescence were enough to restore him, according to the Trinitarian Theology group in Salamanca. Then, one day, Father Tellez, walking with a cane, moving with great effort, climbed up the stairs of the cathedral and resumed his relations as if nothing had happened; Garbanzo Negro thought there was nothing for him to do there and so he returned to hell; but down there they felt that the health of the Augustinian theologian still should be looked after, and so Garbanzo returned to Salamanca where he took care of the stomach ulcers and gave him milk and baby food for a long period of time: as long as it took Lord Tellez to die. All this went on for twenty years; Garbanzo found no pleasure at all while he stayed in the convent, because he had been ordered that he was not to ruin the reputation of the good friar by getting involved in impious affairs, or whoring adventures. He spent some more time, tortured by boredom and sorrow, and, finally, when he found nothing better to do, he began to study theology as a student of Father Tellez. This was a strange part in the history of Garbanzo; those treatises written in very poor Latin, without any literary skill, contained ideas about Divinity that no devil had been able to use for his purposes; and that old shaky codger who seemed to fall apart with the slightest movement, knew more about God than anyone else, although, with the personal limitation that he was secretly an atheist. If his ulcer had caused a little less pain, Garbanzo would have stopped longing for the death of his lord; but that accursed stomach seemed like a hot coal, and if during the day it only made his face make a grimace, at night it made it impossible for him to sleep peacefully, always awake without any way to turn off or shut down the pain. Garbanzo cursed the longevity of his lord to whom, however, he owed so much as an intellectual. But gratitude had never counted as one of his moral habits.

Like Father Welcek, Garbanzo represented one of the rare characters of Salamanca. In his role as adjunct professor he was universally detested by the student body, and while they scorned his ideas they unquestioningly followed those of Father Tellez, and there was never the slightest sign of originality in his lessons, always limited by the mind of Friar Welcek which was neither original nor brilliant. He also had the obligation to confess to the sophists of the school; and there was never any punishment as severe as he imposed, nor was there ever any narrower path than his in matters of whoredom. It was said, however, that after his body appeared to be dead, he never questioned any doctrinal matters, and that, in this respect, he had always showed an indifference that reeked of heresy, but this was part of his legacy.

2. The Holy Office made an intervention in the matter of his death, though indirectly, and purely instrumental. One night, after telling the angels about the causes of pain, Garbanzo Negro was able to calm him with a crust of dry bread. He took advantage of the good weather to study an unclear point for the relation of the Three Divine Persons. Salamanca was asleep, and through the window he could hear the current of the river, and the music of the wind in the trees. The light bothered the sickly eyes of Welcek, so on those occasions Garbanzo Negro used his prerogatives to study in the dark. This time he heard some footsteps in the cloister. Garbanzo thought some priest must be feeling indisposed, and he looked for a place to have him rest, but the steps stopped in front of the door and someone called out.

“Come in.”

A shadow entered the room.

“What happened? Has the Father become sick?” Leporello asked.

He jumped out of the chair and knocked over the stack of books that he had been looking through.

“Father Welcek is looking for you,” said an unknown voice. “Would you be so kind as to turn on the light.?”

And while Garbanzo looked for the lamp in the darkness, the unknown voice added:

“A strange smell of sulfur.”

“That comes from my lamp. I just turned it off.”

Just touching the wick was enough to make it light up the room; he had done that with his back turned so as not to disturb the visitor.

“What is it?” Garbazo asked, turning around; then he noticed that the visitor was dressed as a prefect of the Holy Office.

Without knowing why, he felt the tremor of fear.

“What is it?” he repeated.

“They are asking for you, father, and pardon the inconvenient hour, but it’s something that must be taken care of right away. Would you please accompany me?”

The German made a sour face.

“My stomach is killing me. Can’t it wait until tomorrow? The Lord Inquisitors ought to understand that these are not the hours to bother a Christian.”

“My lords are asking you, Father Welcek, to forgive this impertinence, but they would like you to accompany me. My superior has been told, and he gave his consent.”

“Then, there is no other remedy. Is it cold out tonight?”

“No, it’s quite warm.”

“Can I go without my cloak?”

“Maybe it will be cold in the prison.”

“Prison?” Welcek’s body trembled without any help from Garbanzo, and the latter thought that if that was the beginning of a process, a perforation would kill the friar’s body; after that, hell would take care of him. Because he wasn’t ready to argue with the inquisitors; and even less, to put up with tortures, on top of the ulcer.

“All right, we’ll go wherever you want,” he said, putting on his cloak.

After a brief dispute in the doorway over who would go out first, they went out of the cloister and entered the street.

The prefect walked with cautious silence, and the devil was thinking that this setback was going to be inconvenient, because he wasn’t finished with his course on theology, and it would be difficult to have another opportunity for this simple apprenticeship. But what more could hell desire than to count a great theologian as one of their own.

A gentle moonlight covered the city, and the two shadows, that of the prefect, and that of the priest, traveling rapidly looked like something supernatural, and someone who saw them approaching from a distance, took advantage of a portico and nearness of a cross in case, as it looked like, they were members of another world. Garbanzo felt the sign of cross like a shot. He would have gladly given the frightened man a shove; but the prefect who was in front of him seemed in a rush, and he had to follow him out of respect for the Holy Office.

They entered the palace of the Holy Inquisition through a small, covert door, and right after they entered a cloister with two crosses, they were received by a Dominican friar.

“Good evening, Father Welcek, and sorry to bother you, Your Reverence, but we need your help.”

The prefect had disappeared.

Since the words of the Dominican seemed friendly, Garbanzo decided to take a chance.

“What’s wrong?”

“Follow me and you’ll see. The Holy Inquisitors are waiting for you.”

He led them through a side corridor and, after going down a dark stairway, they arrived at a cave which, because of the humidity, must have been beneath the river. There in the dim light was the Holy Tribunal, its members seated behind a table, looking stricken, mysterious, and sorrowful. Coming to face the inquisitorial reality, which until now he only knew by ear, his hair stood on end.

“Go ahead, Father Welcek,” they told him in Latin “Go ahead and sit down, and give us a hand, because we are in need of help.” One of the inquisitors stoop up and pointed to corner of the cave.

Do you see that Fleming who has just arrived from Salamanca? We suspect that he has come to introduce Lutheran papers, and that he is a heretic himself; but he uses an uncanny language, and there’s no way to understand him. We are thinking that he is a German, like Your Reverence.”

“I don’t see anyone,” Welcek responded in order to annoy them, since he not only saw the Fleming who was spread out in a corner, but also the partner who was hiding in the body. For the moment, he couldn’t identify him, but it gave him the hint that there was something diabolical in there.

“Would Your Grace like to use this lamp?” the inquisitor asked, offering it to him.

He took it and shined it on the fallen body, which, at the same time, pushed with his foot.

“Who are you, and what brings you here?” he asked him in Flemish.

“I’m Polilla, and I have come to talk to you.”

“Couldn’t you have found a better way to do it than this?”

“I never thought that these friars would be so stubborn. The body of a merchant seemed excellent for the occasion, but these fellows have put it in an awful state. See if you can get them to leave me alone. Tomorrow I have to give this body back, and it is very sore.”

Welcek turned to the expectant inquisitors.

“He is a Flemish merchant and he is called Ruysbroeck. What is it that your worships would like me to ask him?”

“Ask him about the Tridentine Catechism.”

“May I sit down?”

“If Your Reverence thinks it is necessary...”

“Remember, I am ill.”

They brought him a footstool, and he sat on it.

“Look, Polilla: we are going to have to do something in just a few minutes, and I hope they will let you go. Meanwhile, since they are going to hear you more than me, you can try to tell me something about your purpose. Speak to me in succession, as if you were giving your teaching lecture. It must appear as if I am giving you an exam on catechism.”

With a moan, the Fleming’s body turned over a bit.

“What is it that the friars want to know?”

“If you are a heretic.”

“From their point of view, I suppose I am. I am a Calvinist.”

“Is that possible?” Garbanzo asked with surprise.

“For several years I took care of a French Huguenot, and he converted me.”

“But that’s ridiculous! We’ve always been Catholics.”

“That was before. Since Luther, there have been some extraordinary points of view. It is true that Lutheranism can’t convince us; it is too sentimental. But, my friend!, the logic of Calvinism is implacable. One of us could not think more logically. And what things it reveals about the Enemy!”

Garbanzo looked at him with scorn.

“You haven’t heard Father Lord Tellez. What he says is definitely logical, profound, and wise! I have been able to confirm that no one knows more about God than he does.”

“Catholicism is behind the times,” Polilla responded with a sigh. “Oh, how my ribs are hurting! Ask the friars if they won’t let me stand up. I can’t keep on talking spread out like this.”

Welcek transmitted the request, and the body was gently lifted up and leaned against the wall. Ruysbroeck uttered a deep sigh, and looked at the inquisitors with eyes that were beset with anxiety.

“Catholicism is behind the times,” he repeated, “and in hell I intend to recommend greater attention to the new heresies. From our point of view, they are much more convincing.”

“If there was an inquisition in hell they would condemn you to it. That would certainly be something: a heretic devil!”



“Like a Catholic devil. But don’t you believe that is already common knowledge? Give credit to those friars for that. I can’t stand up, and my body hurts terribly. I need to give it up and rest a bit. Besides, the matter that brought me here is urgent.”

Welcek turned to the inquisitors.

“Reverend Fathers, in this man I find the proper correctness of doctrine. I also find him to be a true servant of God. He is a Franciscan tertiary.”

“Did Your Reverence ask him about the exact points of the Holy Trinity? In these countries the mistaken ideas of Calvin are quite common.”

“The good man has never heard the name of that spawn of Satan.”

The inquisitors spoke with each other for a moment.

“We thank you, Father Welcek. You can go rest then.”

“And when you have some free time,” added the one who seemed to be the leader, “I would like to chat with you a moment about some transcendental topics. I understand that Father Lord Tellez has found a true successor in you.”

“Father Lord Tellez honors me with his confidence.”

“However, he strays from some of the ideas of Doctor Angelico.”

“But he is very close to Saint Augustine.”

“That’s what I want to discuss with you. When might I have the pleasure of meeting with you? You know we appreciate you and, cannot forget the service you have just given us.”

“Whenever you want, Your Reverence. Just let me know when you’re ready.”

“May God bless you, then. And take care of your stomach!”

“Thank you. May he bless you too.”

Garbanzo started toward the door, but he stopped when he heard Polilla’s voice.

“Are you just going to leave me here?”

He turned back to the sufferer.

“The friars will take care of you. Perhaps tomorrow they will let you go. You know where I live.”

“What does the merchant want?” one of the inquisitors asked him.

“He asked me out of charity if I would take him with me. His ribs are hurting and he is very hungry.”

“Tell him that is not possible. Many papers have to be written before we can give him liberty, and and he has to sign them. But he will be given a bed and something to eat, and if he wants it, a little brandy, after he is massaged with a concoction of vinegar and salt, which is excellent for things like this.”

“You heard what he said,” Welcek said to Polilla.

“Well, I can’t stand it any longer.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Die.”

The body of the merchant gave a great moan and fell to the ground. The friars came to his aid, and one of them said:

“I think he’s dead.”

They all crossed themselves respectfully.

“Well, it wasn’t that bad. We flogged the bigamist yesterday until seventh bell, and now he’s walking out there like nothing happened.”

“It depends on who they are.”

One of the inquisitors had kneeled and was reciting the prayer for the dead.

3. Father Welcek was walking through the hallway when the spirit of Polilla caught up with him, or maybe, Polilla himself, since he was now nothing but a spirit.

There was a burst of wind, like that icy wind that strikes your neck and makes your calves shake.

“Wait till we leave,” Welcek said in German.

And the prefect who accompanied him assured them that he was talking to himself like those who are mentally disturbed.

The Augustinian entered the street, and until he had distanced himself from the Inquisitorial Headquarters, he didn’t say anything more. He walked quickly toward a dark corner where he could speak without disturbing the eager devil, and he went to make up his mind behind the dark tower of the Jesuits, at the time when the moon was behind his back.

“Now you can tell me what’s going on, and what it was that brought you here.”

“I have come to tell you about a change in destiny.”

"That's only to be expected. Don't they know there that Father Tellez will die any day now?"

"In hell they have now lost their interest in that priest, who is a piece of cake, and they have thought of you for an honorable job."

"Who is going to die?"

"It has nothing to do with death, this time, but to accompany a young boy from a distinguished family."

"I am not interested in boys. They taste like piss."

"The one they are interested in seems to be called to have an interesting future."

"I don't have any knowledge of what creates a career for a young boy."

"You will acquire it."

"Besides, there are many unemployed people. Why don't they look for someone else? You, for example."

"I wouldn't serve."

"I don't know why not."

"I'm a Huguenot, and I don't believe our intervention is needed to guarantee anyone a place in hell. Men are born predestined, don't you know? Or, if you prefer, they are chosen. The Other says: "This one's for me." And he leaves the rest for us."

"Garbanzo Negro shuddered inside the body of the friar. "That's a dangerous idea. Don't you know, if that were true, it would leave the rest of us unemployed?"

"So what?"

"Dear Polilla, Creation is a Cosmos; as we know, it's an Order where everyone blows his horn and, all together, compose a universal harmony. In that allocation, it has fallen to us to be the tempters, and tormenters. Even little kids learn that in school."

If he had still possessed a body, Polilla would have looked at him with scorn.

"You are out-of-date. Creation is not a Cosmos, but a Whim. The Other created it because He had the urge to have it be full of gratuitous beings whose horns clash with other horns, creating a universal brouhaha. The real God is a dissonance."

"That is barbaric."

They remained silent.

"All right!" Garbanzo said after a few moments of silence, "who is the bird I am supposed to take charge of?"

"We'll get a look at him in a moment."

"And will I have to keep on taking care of Father Welcek?"

"I don't think that suits you. You must accompany this person until he dies, follow his thoughts, and keep track of his actions; and above all, you have to witness how Grace operates in his soul, and how it couldn't operate any other way; how, in other words, this man saves himself because he couldn't help but save himself, and when the Other opens the door to heaven, utter a shout: "That's not fair!" with all the voices of hell. In other words, you must demonstrate that this man is not free, that he is predestined to be saved."

"And will you tell me what the purpose of this is?"

"It deals with a dispute between us and you, and this is going to serve as proof."

In those moments the ulcer of the Augustinian hurt like a stab that spread through his entrails to his back. Polilla's proposal offered a chance of liberation.

"One advantage is that this job doesn't involve much work. Did you bring instructions about what I am supposed to do with the body of this priest?"

"No, I didn't."

"In that case..."

Garbanzo Negro uttered a cry of happiness, and the body of Welcek dropped onto the flagstones, lifeless.

"To hell with it!" he shouted, as a goodbye.

"But, you're just going to leave him lying there?"

"An why not?"

"It doesn't seem to me like a proper ending and, even less, that it was expected."

"Well, if you had to experience all the stomach pains that I have..."

Polilla contemplated the fallen body with something that seemed like compassion, although of a different kind: something like one feels on seeing a work of art that could have been perfect, but was finished in a muddle, because of the will, or the stupidity, of the artist.

“One can see that you are a Catholic, but one of those who have no remorse” he said then to Garbanzo, “and that one death or another is all the same to you, even if it is a metaphysical betrayal. But we protestants have looked very deeply into what death is, and we have found that there are several important ideas that will blossom at the proper time, and they will reveal to people views of great productivity. At the moment, one of our greatest poets has devised a maxim that will revolutionize our view of morality: it is, “Be faithful to yourself.” Have you ever hear anything more pristine, and more encouraging? This means: you have been predestined; so be faithful to your predestination. Or, put another way: when a man is born, along with his birth are all the actions of his life, including his death. It’s true that most people must make choices, and they can do that with the illusion that it was done freely; I admit that in certain moments what one does can manage to be relatively free; but if one goes deeply into himself, he will choose what actually corresponds to him, like a good dramatist moves his characters according to a principle of necessity. And what happens for the one who chooses wrong is the same as with a bad poet; the result will be that in this case his life will be completely false. Imagine a fellow whose instincts lead him to a murder, to lust, or to robbery, and who tries to live like a saint of God. His pipe dream, as you people say, will consist of being a perfect robber, or a perfect fornicator, and in doing so he will recognize the duty to himself that I mentioned before; but if someone comes along and tells him: “That is the law of God; obey it,” and he tries to do so, he is condemned to imperfection, which is the greatest sin of all.

“Is that what protestants say?” Garbanzo asks him, quite astonished.

“They don’t say it yet, but they will. And they will also say that each man carries his own death with him, and to die in a different way is a falsification, the worst one for certain. Because of that it hurts me to see this fallen body when you know very well that his death is supposed to occur with great pain because of a perforated intestine, after which he receives the proper sacraments. You are still in time.”

“Yes, I’m still in time,” Garbanzo murmured somberly.

“It’s just a few hours until tomorrow. It’s then when you must look for Leporello and embody him after ejecting his soul, and then enter the service of Don Juan Tenorio. If Father Welcek dies later, that’s fine. You still have a chance to distinguish yourself by helping him die piously; they will say he died as a saint, and maybe someday they will even canonize him.”

“I am going to distinguish myself in a different way.”

“How?”

“You’ve given me an idea. You don’t know how I have suffered! A miserable body that only gave me pain. I didn’t even have the consolation of using the brain, because it wasn’t very intelligent. If you only knew, Polilla, how much I hoped the this stupid friar would be a brilliant genius! I would have been able to grow in knowledge or, at least, it would have permitted me to stand out in the University as a professor. But I didn’t even outscore Father Tellez in science, instead, what I learned I knew from what he said, or I read it in his books; not even in the Faculty have I been able to be more than a simple booster, a sort of windbag scorned by everyone. Body pains, my dear Polilla, and enormous humiliations to my personal dignity! And those are real problems, and not the Calvinist nonsense that you are offering me now. The one responsible was this priest. And I want to take revenge on him by letting him die a different death than the one he was awarded, a death that leaves my conscience calm. If you want to enjoy it, follow me.”

And he slipped back into the body of Welcek.

“What doing will always be monstrous,” Polilla responded.

The father rose up, and Garbanzo looked out of his eyes with cold fury.

“You’re really not interested?” Polilla asked.

“No.”

“Then, so long.”

He rose up and shot off through the air. A trail of light like a meteor, trailed behind him then vanished immediately. Those who were aficionados of nightly contemplation mentioned a rain of stars that night in the Salamancan sky.

4. Exercising his prerogatives as an archangel satisfied Garbanzo for a while, and so, for a while, he enjoyed circling around in the heights. But that didn’t last very long, because the air carried him toward the nearby district where Celestina had her brothel, and as soon as he spotted it, he swooped down over the house.

It was late and most of the prostitutes had retired, but a pair of charming students were still enjoying themselves, along with other lovers, in the ultimate pleasures. The others, assembled by the voice and the order of Celestina, were praying the rosary on the ground floor with the windows opened, as was the custom, so that passersby could bear witness in this house they faithfully honored God. They prayed with drowsy voices, saying Hail Marias between yawns, until one fell asleep before the litanies began, to the irritation of Celestina, who always demanded total respect for religious things.

They were in the Paternoster room, when there was a ruckus in the kitchen. Annoyed, the mistress sent a girl to find out what was going on.

When she returned, she reported: "A pan was knocked off the stove, the logs were scattered, and the kitchen smells like hell."

"Some student prank."

Those who were there stuck their noses out through the doors; Celestina rudely dispatched them and said that, when they were done praying, each one should go back to their homes, and each student to their dormitory, without wasting their time on foolish things.

"And the rest of you, start praying."

After that the edges of things began to bend. The words of the prayer also seemed like rubber, and they emerged slowly and twisted; the seats of the chairs became soft and sank down, and the floorboards, as though they were also made of elastic material, began to sink little by little; time also hesitated and seemed to pass more slowly. Then the air was no longer resonant and drained out of the entire room, which was then filled with a kind of suppressed air in which the words had to crawl, and even then, only came out like a whisper.

It was then that Garbanzo made his solemn entrance. He appeared covered with soot up to his eyes, and the borders of his habit were singed. His solemnity filtered through the table where the worshippers were gathered and then moved up and down; but like a Baptist, first his head with which he looked all around while the girls interrupted the prayer, frightened, with fits and shouts, and knocking over the chairs; then his torso and his arms that were making a fuss; and finally, what remained of the body. He remained seated on the table with a slightly nervous attitude. All of them had fainted, except the mistress.

"Good evening."

Although the way in which he appeared surprised Celestina, it didn't frighten her. She put her hands on her hips and confronted the priest.

"All right. What is it you want at this time in this house, Your Reverence? And why do you come in that way, like an apparition, without knocking on the door like a civilized, Christian person?"

"I'm neither a Christian or a civilized person. I am a sorcerer and I have come to this house to enjoy your merchandise. As for the way I arrived, it was what I wanted, and that should be a sufficient explanation."

"And those habits?"

"Along with being a sorcerer, I am also Father Welcek, the Augustinian university professor. You must have heard about me sometime."

Celestina looked again, with a sign of recognition.

"Look, Father, if you're a sorcerer that's up to you, and I have no reason to meet with you; but if you are a priest and want girls, for cases like this I have discreet house that people who are well-known can use without causing a scandal. Leave right away, Your Reverence, I'll give you the address and, with a bit of patience, in a half hour you will be able to choose the girl you like and enjoy yourself with her as long as you like, paid for in advance, as is the custom. But I don't want to see you in this house dressed as a priest for a minute longer."

The girls looked at each other, and hurried away from the table with fear, but they remained in the room, curious to see what the Father would say and do.

"As a matter of fact," Welcek responded, "it is a scandal that brings me here."

"Then leave here immediately. This is not a place for you."

Welcek laughed with a loud guffaw that sounded superhuman and impish, pushing Celestina over the edge, making her think he had something to do with the devil.

"Don't be an imbecile, Celestina."

"Imbecile, or wise woman, before we go any further, I want to have a word with you in private. Come with me."

"No, I'm not interested."

“Then, girls,” she said, turning to the pupils, “go over to the side room and continue saying the rosary, until I tell you to stop.”

They obeyed rapidly.

“I want to tell you that if Your Reverence is related to the devil, as I have just deduced by certain doubtless indications, I am also a friend of him, and he has given me his word that he would never bother me in exchange for my soul, which was well-earned because he has served me so much. So understand, Your Reverence, that we are partners, and since we both belong to the same family, it would not be proper to harm one another. If you insist on creating a scandal, tomorrow you will see me facing charges, perhaps from the Inquisition; and the devil can free me from any predicament, except from the clutches of the inquisitors. I am an old woman, and the prospect of the rack doesn’t comfort me. Let’s fix things like friends.”

“I don’t have friends.”

The priest jumped up from the table and stood in front of Celestina. She stared at him challengingly, but he grabbed her by the arms and made her sit down.

“Look, old woman, I don’t give a damn about your convenience. I came here for my own reasons, and your scruples are not going to stop me. I have lived forty years of a virtuous life, and tonight when I am going to die, I want to sample wine and women, and kill a Christian with a feeling of satisfaction.”

“If Your Reverence is a sorcerer, it astonishes me that you want to sin so immorally, like some student. We usually condemn ourselves with sins of more importance, and not by fornication and drunkenness that are within anyone’s reach, or a killing with aggravation, like a murderer. Permit me, Your Reverence, to scorn you.”

“You don’t understand me, old woman. I told you I have forty years of virtuous life, and now I want to know if I am giving up something that was worth the effort.”

“If that’s the way it is, do as you like, but don’t involve me in it.”

“It’s because I despise the habit that I’m wearing and dishonoring it is the main reason for my plan.

.....

In the archives of the Holy Inquisition, the description of Welcek’s death was written by Celestina, and signed with her name:

“Then he began to give signs of diabolical power and do strange things. He obliged me to bring the girls, interrupting their prayers; and he made those who were having fun with two students, and also the students, stand before him in their underclothes, showing their private parts. With his magic, he made several bottles of wine appear; he drank from them and let others drink, until everyone was drunk, except for me, because I tossed the wine over my shoulder. While he was inebriated, after several indecent acts, he seemed to calm down and he asked the students what they had learned and, while they were talking, he declared several times that wine was a good thing, but that he still couldn’t say if it was better than a woman’s breasts because he was not familiar with the second part of the comparison; then he recited the Holy Scriptures, in Latin, as far as I could tell from the what I knew after hearing the students speak, and make fun of me with it. After that they discussed whether or not the Song of Songs had been written by Salomon, and he said that it wasn’t, then he added that the Scriptures were rubbish, and he asked one of the students if he really believed that Balaam’s burro had actually spoken to him. And when the student said yes he got furious again, calling him a fool, and then went back to the subject of wine and women’s breasts, forcing girls to take off their clothes and show theirs. And when the girls had barred their breasts, he had fondled them, not like a man who knows how to do it, but like an inexperienced amateur. Then he turned to me and said that this flesh was nothing, and that wine was worth more. To see if it helped him change his mind and quiet his fury, I suggested that he should choose the prettiest girl and go to bed with her, to see if her flesh was something to be scorned. Then he spoke at length about flesh and quoted several Holy Fathers, to the disgust of everyone, and finally he looked over the girls, choosing one of them. But when I indicated that he should take her into the bedroom, he refused, and said that it had to be right here in front of everyone. After that it turned out that, no matter how hard he tried, and no matter how much the girls tried to help him, his body didn’t respond, and the project failed. Then he began to shout and curse, and to rebuke himself in the following way: ‘Father Welcek, what is your body worth if it can’t do any more than some street dog? In what way have you wasted your strength, you piece of idiocy, so that you made me die, without having been able to enjoy a woman.?’ One of the

students tried to convince him that it was only because he was too old for those things, and the best thing for him would be to go back to the convent, since his body wasn't suited for what he tried to do. Following this, they got into a heated debate about the human body, mentioning some things that had been said before, as well as some new ones. Then, as if the poor girls were there only to be ridiculed each time he needed to prove one of his arguments, the priest grabbed one of them and started beating her, or poking her like a doctor who was examining her, until I got tired of that mockery and told him that these girls were on sale for pleasure, but outside of that, they were just as respectable as anyone. Then he abandoned the student and rebuked me and then insulted the girls with ferocious insults like a pagan. After that he drank and savored the wine and clicked his tongue, at times throwing some of the wine on one of the girls, insisting that wine was better than the woman's breasts, and that Salomon had been this and that. Finally, he said that all he had to do now to complete the list of sins was to kill someone, then he produced a deck of cards out of thin air and said we all should draw a card, and he would kill the one who drew the highest. But before he did that, he explained the kind of death he would give, tearing all the nerves of the body from the crux of the spine which would cause the most horrible death. We all began to shout with fear and ask him to die once and for all, and leave us alone. After all the shouts, he seemed to step back a bit, and after considering I don't know how many things about human destiny and free will, he told us to choose between drawing a card or committing blasphemy and, at the same time, he continued describing the death that waited for the one who drew the card, and he explained it so vividly that we all trembled with fear. Then, seeing that things were heading toward the most horrible ending, I decided to try to use a ruse, and I told him that we would prefer to blaspheme, thinking that everyone would do it with mental reservations, without wanting to offend the Lord, just to free ourselves from that devil. He accepted, and started to direct us like a chorus master, so we could blaspheme singing, however it was; but along with the song and the blasphemy, another miracle happened, because we did it in Latin, like the clerics although, as one of the students said afterward, the things we said were entirely dishonest. We sang in Latin, following a voice inside us that told us what to sing, and how to do it; which let me know that the Lord had listened to my prayers and had accepted my mental reservations, and fixing it so that we would not blaspheme ourselves, but only the evil spirit that was using our body and our words to do it. And so it was, for a long time with a greater and greater brouhaha of shouts, until the singing transformed into a sort of dance, and we all ran around the table, that was also dancing with us, along with the other objects in the room: Father Welcek in front, and his victims behind, until it got light and Father Welcek, saying the last words in fluent Spanish, cursing heaven and everything heavenly, until he fell down flat, with blood and wine gushing out of his mouth. Then I went to see the Holy Inquisition."

5. Yes. It was now a new day. A little earlier than expected, but the body of Welcek was hurting all over, his stomach was tearing apart, and his entrails seemed to be full of pieces of red glass that punctured and broke them apart. The orgy had reached the climax and everyone was screaming like madmen and madwomen. Frightened faces looked out of nearby windows, and some early riser who dared to stick his nose into the brothel and came out with it fouled by a stench. Garbanzo abandoned the body of Welcek, once and for all. Embodied in a lamp, he contemplated the death rattle of the orgy, dying with laughter. Then he went out into the street. The air was so fresh and clear that he would have liked to breathe it.

"And now to look for Leporello, who probably is a crusty old man loaded with aches and pains, like this one who God confuses, or some youngster, who is ugly and stupid, whose deficiencies I will have to put up with for God knows how long. It's no good to protest. It's no good to resist. Men have an advantage over us of having free will. If I could only do what I damn well want!"

He wandered above roofs until he reached his destiny. His first look encouraged him. Leporello was in the deep sleep of a healthy young man, and his spirit floated over his body enjoying the dreamy view of a moral lesson. Garbanzo entered the body and began to review it. It worked perfectly, and the review of the nerves, the muscles, the entrails, the endocrine glands, the brain, and the skeleton could not have been more satisfactory. So he cut the thread of the floating spirit and settled down with his moral problem, taking possession of Leporello. After he felt himself incorporated, he felt a strange sensation that disturbed him, because he remembered his ancient, and almost forgotten, happiness. (So many centuries had passed!) In surges the quiet, living body produced the sound of blood calmly moving with majestic security. For a moment he withdrew into himself, the spectator of a life that was beginning to be his own: the air filled his lungs and

oxidized his blood; millions of cells were formed; the arteries and veins, flexible and almost elegant, rhythmically sent out, and sucked in, the blood, with no difficulty or alteration. And everything that took place in this body happened with perfection. He entered the brain and filled it with a type of logic that Welcek had never been able use, and Leporello quickly felt the results. He then recalled some of the lewd images from the previous orgy, and the memory of what he had done reappeared, leaving Garbanzo filled with stunning astonishment.

“That’s a man for you! And here we are without being able to think of anything else except search for their undoing. There’s no doubt that we have a chip on our shoulders. Wouldn’t it be better if we tried to limit ourselves to what is possible? The problem is, that the measure of what is possible is scarce. The core of a man resides in his body, it acts in different ways, and what they consider life should give the man some other way of seeing things, that we would never be able to understand. Just the same, there must be reasons why Satan has always kept from his devils the reality of a sound body. As far as I know, this is the first time one of us has been permitted to use a healthy, intelligent young man for his work. And I don’t think it will happen again, because if all the devils were able to experience life and feel it like I do, there would be a rebellion in Hell. But Satan knows very well that when I speak of my experience, no one will pay attention to me. However, I think it won’t take long. Right away I am already able to understand many things about theology that were incomprehensible before. And if this goes on, I will finally be able to understand the man, and maybe some day I’ll understand the reasons that the Enemy has for being so interested in those who, before, I thought were only intelligent animals. Until now, the most perfect of those who I have known was Father Tellez, but the poor fellow has to walk supporting himself on crutches. And being able to make a few jumps should be as important as getting worked up over some basic theories, because it is more pleasant!

The desire to understand things sprouted out of his blood, and he jumped out of the bed and rose to the ceiling, making a few taps with his feet, as well as somersaults, and some contortions. His body bounced elastically, and in his muscles he felt the effect of his flexibility, and his strength.

“Leporello!”

The voice came from outside, and almost right away the door opened, and Don Juan Tenorio came in.

“Leporello, have you gone crazy?”

Securely, and totally immersed in Leporello, Garbanzo ceased his contortions and settled down in a corner.

“I was just doing my morning exercises, sir.”

6. Don Juan was a young man about his same age, quite handsome, but taller with a strong constitution, and he was graceful in his movements, with a sort of calm agility whose aesthetic effects surprised Garbanzo. He regretted his confinement that did not allow him to explore the inside of his lord, but he left his curiosity for later, because it was obvious that the exemplary man in front of him was worth the effort.

Don Juan was wearing black pants, and a nice-looking shirt and, instead of shoes, was wearing slippers, with two swords in his hand.

“So, you get tired, and can’t do any more than a couple bouts. We’re leaving. Get dressed right away!”

He put the swords on Leporello’s bed and left the room. His servant got dressed.

“I’m ready, sir”

“Come in.”

Leporello entered. Don Juan’s room was like a large cell, with two windows full of sunlight. Inside it, besides a bed, there were shelves of books, a table, and a wardrobe. The books were of philosophy and poetry. The clothes in the wardrobe were elegant, but also black. On the bed there was an old crucifix, and by its side a rosary. Leporello thought that Don Juan must be a good Christian.

“Today we’re late. We have to shorten our exercises if we don’t want to miss our first lessons. Be on your guard!”

“It’s a bit of a shock to see a man with a sword in his hand! Because of what he knew from Leporello, Garbanzo responded and was able to deal with the shock. But he had to be careful, because the spirit and the skill of Don Juan were greater than his.

“Touch!” Don Juan shouted, and continued harassing him.

Until someone knocked on the door. A Jesuit Priest entered. Don Juan stepped back and made a courteous greeting with his sword, that Leporello imitated, because he was also amused.

“God gives us good days, Don Juan Tenorio.”

“They seem pretty good, Father Mejia. What brings you here?”

A glance at Leporello warned him that he was in the way, so he left the room; but the purpose of Garbanzo was to know everything, so he left the body of the servant on the bed and snuck back into the room.

They had seated themselves—Don Juan on the bed—and the Jesuit started to turn around and began to give the news: a Father of the Company who had just arrived from Seville had brought some bad news about Don Pedro Tenorio, the father of Don Juan, who had been sick in bed in a bad mood for several days. Since he was old, it could lead to his death, and because of that, the Jesuit came to make some offers.

“Because we know that you have been thinking of entering the priesthood.”

“I haven’t made up my mind yet,” Don Juan said.

“It’s a praiseworthy proposal, but it should not be done without considering it seriously. The secular priesthood involves serious dangers, not because of the amount of service in the world and, thanks to God, the latest reforms have greatly improved the life of a priest, but because a gentleman like you can not logically become an ordinary friar, unless it’s to start a career and, at least, become a bishop. And that, dear friend, is the serious risk. Ambition can put our spiritual life in danger, and there are many who have forgotten God while chasing after the miter. And it’s not just our moral life. Because, from an intelligent gentleman like you, with such a good reputation as a student, we can expect great intellectual deeds if he lives with the tranquility that books and lectures require. And in that case, what better place than our Company? We are, as you know, a militia of wise men, and right now the ultimate theological message is that of Father Molina. Come with us, and you will find what you desire, in the order and the culture, as much as in the education. We Jesuits are almost all gentlemen, or at least, hidalgos. And there are no rude Friars who impede delicate spirits from entering religion. On the other hand, we offer heroic occasions to courageous men. Thanks to them, I mean the few Jesuits, heresy is not completely dominant in England, and the blood of Father Campion bears fruit every day.”

He started to rise up, and Garbanzo immediately returned to the body of Leporello, preparing for the priest’s exit. Who was courteously led to the door by Don Juan, while he assured him that if he did decide to enter the priesthood, he would definitely keep in mind this offer.

The Jesuit left, and Don Juan ordered:

“We have to eat breakfast right away. I have bad news about my father, and we must get on the road this very day.”

They got dressed, and in no time at all they left.

It was a nice, clear day, the beginning of spring, and their cloaks slowed them down. They quickly passed through the University plaza, and as they looked for a café, they called out to Don Juan from the Irish school.

“Mr. Tenorio! Mr. Tenorio!”

It was a Dominican priest, and Don Juan stopped while he approached. Leporello stayed a few steps behind, but not so far that he could not hear what they said.

“I have been looking for you, my dear Don Juan. Are you aware that last night one of our Fathers came from Seville with very bad news?”

“Yes, I already know that my father is ill.”

“Gravely ill! When my religious colleague departed from Seville, they didn’t expect him to live for more than a day or two.”

A somber look passed through the eyes of Don Juan.

“We intended to leave immediately.”

“Do that right away, Your Lord, although I am afraid it may already be too late.”

“In that case...”

“You won’t go?”

“On the contrary, I’ll go without eating breakfast.”

“My dear Don Juan, if my Lord Don Pedro has died, a few minutes delay won’t make him recover life. I wanted to tell you something.”

Don Juan nodded his head, and the Dominican spoke for several minutes. He knew of the proposal of Don Juan regarding the priesthood, and he invited him to join the Dominican Order.



There was none other so appropriate for a young man with such a brilliant intellectual future. And since the final word of theology were the doctrines of Father Bañez, precisely opposite to those of Father Molina, a Jesuit, and because...

They said goodbye, Don Juan assuring that he would keep in mind his offer, if he made a decision regarding his vocation.

"Let's go back to the house, Leporello. We need to get ready to go."

"Without breakfast, sir?"

"We'll get something to eat on the way."

But when they got home, a visitor was waiting for them; a Mercedarian priest, who had just arrived from Seville, and had assisted in the burial of Don Pedro Tenorio.

Everyone in Seville attended the funeral rite and wept for that saint that God brought to his side. The poor cried out because of their poverty, and the rich because they had lost a paragon of virtue. Judging by his works, he must be in heaven.

Saddened, Don Juan sat down and the priest gave a long eulogy for the deceased, whom he had known for a long time because of his kindness to the Mercedarian priests.

"He had great love for us, and I confess that many times I have hoped to see his only son dressed in our white habit. And truly, for us it would be a great pleasure to count you as one of ours. They have told me, my dear Don Juan, about your interest in holy theology and, if that is so, where would you find better Fathers than ours? Sometime you will have listened to lectures of the wise Father Zumel. His equally distant position between the exaggerations of the Dominican Bañez, and those of the Jesuit Molina, represent the true doctrine concerning the prickly theme of Grace. Definitely, the final word for theology is that of Father Zumel.

"I'll keep that in mind, Father, I'll keep it in mind."

Leporello had always scorned the specialization in Trinitarian Theology and his faith in Father Tellez. He didn't know much about Grace, and he considered it old-fashioned, and out of style.

### Chapter III

1. "So what do you think?" Leporello asked me, with his nose greased-up, and his eyes sparkling with satisfaction and wine.

"Just normal. And it has called my attention to your classical style of language."

"Oh! You don't mean to tell me it is artificial. Remember, I learned it in Salamanca in the seventeenth century, and it was hard enough for me not to speak to you like they spoke then. It's only natural that I should have some reminiscences, especially when my memory takes me back to those times. Besides," he added, "I didn't ask for your literary judgement."

"In spite of that, and for the moment, now that I can consider your story nothing more than fantasy, I ought to tell you that the presence of the Devil..."

"...a devil," he corrected me immediately.

"Okay. The presence of a devil in the history of Don Juan destroys his originality, and makes him seem more like he's from Goethe's Faust. An old friend of mine, a smart university professor, said that when modern writers reinvent Don Juan, they either come out with a new Faust, or a new Hamlet. You have chosen a new Faust.

Leporello turned his head and drank a swallow of wine; he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and explained:

"In the seventeenth century there weren't a lot of napkins.

"You haven't responded to my objection."

"What for, if you are so non-perspective? You want to compare my intervention in the history of Don Juan with that of Mephistopheles, who happens to be a member of my brotherhood and, incidentally, never existed in that of Faust? I have never acted as a tempter, but a witness. And aside from a certain moment—and what a moment, my friend—I have limited myself to being a friend, and a helpful servant. At least give me credit for a certain originality as a devil. And if you're not capable of figuring it out for yourself, I will tell you, I am a devil who is delighted with appearing as a man, and if it were possible, I would always do it, even at the risk of death."

"Your master is also a man and, according to you..."

"That's another story."

I smiled.

"In that aspect of your character, I recognize that there is nothing owing to Faust, but only to the Wandering Jew. Your lord must have read a lot, but as an inventor, he doesn't have great originality."

"What do you know!"

"It makes common sense."

Leporello took out a pipe and filled it frugally, and, until he lighted it, he didn't bother to respond; but from time to time his mocking eyes looked at me.

"Would you like to know the entire story?"

I looked at my watch.

"I'm afraid that before long miss Nazaroff is going to grow impatient."

"Oh, don't worry! I'm not going to tell you now, I'm not even going to tell you. But you can see for yourself, it can unfold before the eyes of your soul; as you remember it, if you want, you can listen to the real words of Don Juan. You can do that, but you have to do it by yourself."

"At what price?"

"Free us of Sonya."

He blew out a puff of smoke. He had unfastened his waistcoat, and he had loosened his waistband. He seemed pleased with with the food, and with himself.

"Don't think that it would be easy. Never that! In spite of my great confidence in you, and in your great talents, I doubt you would be able to accomplish it. Don't you realize? You need to remove my lord from Sonya's heart, and then take his place. That is not impossible, since Don Juan would remain idle, but you would have to try very hard, you would have to use your imagination, your intelligence, and your capacity of seduction... against Don Juan! Don't you realize? Against Don Juan! You would have to compete with Don Juan in her heart, in her fantasy, and also in the physiology of miss Nazaroff."

I affected modesty and humility.

"I realize that the lack of proportion is greater than in the case of Marianne."

"There's no doubt about that! In her heart, Marianne is a primal creature. For me, a piece of cake. But not all of the sentimental transfers that my lord and I have dealt with are so easy to resolve. There was this Jewish girl..."

He left the pipe on the table, and wiped away a tear.

"Pardon my sadness, but it's been centuries since I have know a girl like that. Only after the "affair" of Ximena of Aragon, who you may have known about. Was she the most beautiful during the last hundred years? Without doubt. But saying she was the most beautiful is the least important thing you could say about her. My master met her during the Resistance."

I interrupted him:

"Please don't tell me about an episode of the Resistance. Mr. Sartre has done enough of that already."

"There was never a woman with more profound intelligence, with more heart, and with greater heroism. The Germans took prisoner and never dared to execute her. Her hands had power, you understand?, that of a miracle worker. Her words conveyed virtue, enlarged the soul of those who listened to her, and made them capable of sacrifice. Poor girl! She belonged to the Communist Party. And now you see, my lord undid that in less than a week. But a woman as great as that was not going to devote her love to just any resistance, nor leave her at the mercy of he Party. My lord, who is a gentleman, realized that in this case there was only one man who was worthy of her. You can see her, if you want, in a Benedictine Priory. She has the reputation of a saint."

A cold shiver shook my back.

"There is something about this that I don't like, Leporello. There is this odor of blasphemy that you smell sometimes."

"So what do you expect? That she smells like incense, like blessing candles? Don't forget that Don Juan is a living blasphemy. He always has been. And for you, especially for you, that should never surprise you. As for me..."

"You're right. However..."

Without any effort to hide it, Leporello yawned.

"Pardon me. It's the time for my siesta. Would you accept a deal? The complete story of Don Juan, for Sonya Nazaroff. And a double prize for the winner: an interesting story, and a pretty girl."

"And if I don't?"

"Then neither the story or the girl. Get your ticket for Madrid, think about what has happened and, as you pass the international bridge, forget about Sonya and Don Juan forever; because a loss like that is never pleasant to remember."

It disgusted me to accept and, almost as much, to refuse the offer. At the moment, not only because of Sonya, but also to look bad. And in either of those possibilities, I wouldn't look good.

"Would it be okay if I waited to decide until after the interview this afternoon?"

"You can say no, then tomorrow say yes, and later back out, and still change your mind again. I am familiar with the vacillations of the human heart, and I tend to consider them with kindness. Do what you prefer. And later I will see how things are."

"But, that story..."

"It's so long that it can't be told in one sitting. From now on, consider me a payer on instalments. The notification has already been given."

2. Leporello warned Sonya that my arrival would be delayed a half hour. The taxi left me several blocks from her house, and I hesitated for a while, because my intentions were not clear, nor were my desires.

I tried once again, without success, to figure out Leporello's plan, and guess what was behind his nonsensical actions. But since that question would arise in my conversation with Sonya, my desire to figure out something was replaced by a postponement.

The immediate question that made me stop on a corner, in front of a store window, at the gate of a flower garden, and a couple of other places, was Sonya herself. I liked her, and rejecting her would be stupid. In spite of that, I couldn't see the reason for my desire, nor where it was going to take me: if it was only a passing fling, or sincere love. In those moments, the fling tempted me, and the love scared me. But the whole thing frightened me, because behind it love could be waiting.

I arrived at Sonya's door, and before deciding whether to enter, I lit a cigarette. After struggling for a moment, I decided to telephone her and apologize for not keeping my date. But by the time I my cigarette was finished my spirit had changed, I felt more confident, and I tried to convince myself that gaining a victory over the memory of Don Juan, would be like gaining it over Don Juan himself.

While I started going up the stairs a moment later my idea changed, and I began to feel ashamed, because it wasn't just anyone I was trying to defeat, but a poor surrogate, perhaps a madman, whom I would drive out. But my shame was based especially on the idea that Don Juan was the real Don Juan, not a surrogate, on an assumption that I had made with regard to his identity. As if in fact, against all logic, I was convinced he was the real thing, and that the so-called Leporello was in fact a devil.

Sonya opened the door right away. She may have been waiting in the vestibule, because she opened once I had barely pressed the door bell. Her hair was tousled, she was wearing a dressing gown over her pajamas, and she had a half-smoked cigarette in her hand.

"You're terrible," she told me.

She didn't shake my hand. She closed the door and pushed me into the waiting room. In the hallway she hurriedly asked me several questions. I didn't answer any of them.

The living room, so nicely arranged the night before, now seemed like a lion's den. The bed in a corner with the sheets in disorder; on the table was a tray with several plates and cups, and in them the leftovers from breakfast and lunch. An ashtray full of cigarette butts, scattered books, some shoes on the carpet, some stockings on the back of a chair, a grey skirt and a sweater on the sofa. There were a few other little things that Sonya hurried to pick up.

"Now I'll make you some coffee."

While she did that, she continued asking—in fact, repeating, the same questions that she asked when I arrived, with the same insistence. I waited until she stopped, and then I answered. I told her, in essence, that, except for the name, I knew less about Don Juan than she did.

"Mais c'est stupide, cet affaire-là!"

"Of course."

She didn't say anymore. She served the coffee silently, and she drank hers without sitting down. I thought that the situation, besides being dramatic, was comical, and that Sonya would end up figuring things out, and send me packing. Or maybe say: "In view of that, let's go somewhere and dance, if you want." However, these thoughts only served to prove to me once more my total ignorance about women, and the limited similarity of my thoughts with reality.

"And that's all you're going to say?"

She said that with such a scornful tone, and with such a scornful look, that I felt myself blush.

“First of all, I need to know what you want of me, why you called me, and what way I can help you.”

“Nothing. Forgive me. I have made a mistake. If you don’t know who Don Juan is, or why he is called that, I’ll have to ask him about it.”

“You think you could do that? I think it’s likely that you won’t see him again.”

“Then, why do I have to resign myself, to be mocked?”

“I wouldn’t call it that.”

“I call things by their name. You are angry and disturbed. When you have calmed down, you will see things differently. Why don’t you get dressed and take a walk? It’s a common remedy that sometimes helps.”

“Walk with you?”

“If you don’t have something better to do, I can help you by serving as a distraction. The important thing is that you have to calm your heart and your mind.”

“I’m afraid to calm down. I’m afraid of what will happen to me when my anger is calmed.”

“You are afraid that you might realize that you’re in love with Don Juan?”

“Exactly.”

“Then it would be best if you accept that right away.”

She sat down in front of me, in a corner between the sofa and an armchair; she rested her arms on her knees and dropped her head.

“I am frantically in love, and hopeless,” she said.

I was moved by the sadness of her words, and her naïve simplicity shook my heart. But I didn’t do anything, since I didn’t know what to do, or what to say to her. I waited for a moment for her to move and look at me, but she didn’t do that. Then I got up and sat down on the sofa next to her.

“I’m sorry miss, I’m not the man who can help you with this. I don’t know what to say, or what I could do to help you get out of this predicament. I am just an intellectual and have very little experience with women. You need consolation, but I don’t know how to console you. And you need advice, but I don’t know how to advise you. It was easier for me to listen to you yesterday and understand what had happened to you than it is for me to help you now. What happened yesterday was much simpler for me; Don Juan had made you a victim of a literary experience, and literature is my territory; but the tears of a woman who is in love are too real for me to understand. Forgive me.”

I raised my hand to caress her face, but then didn’t dare do it. My hand remained in the air and, behind it was a man who hated himself, and was determined to take the train that same night, and not come back to Paris.

“Forgive me,” I repeated, and I stood up.

Then she finally looked at me.

“What are you going to do?”

“It’s time for me to leave.”

“Wait, I beg you. Don’t you see that, in spite of everything, you are the only person who I can count on?”

My smile had to be stupid, but she still looked at me sweetly and stretched out her hand for me to help her. Her eyelids had reddened—the only thing about her face that wasn’t beautiful, the only thing that I wasn’t used to. I thought, then, that some false eyelashes would fix that. And if I had said to her then, “Tell me, Sonya, why don’t you put on some false eyelashes?” what would have happened? Or perhaps say to her less brusquely, but with more skill, “Your eyes are getting ugly from crying, etc.” Some long blonde eyelashes.

“I’m going to get dressed.”

She picked up her scattered clothes and left the room. I went over to the window and thought for a moment. I was not pleased, not because of my clumsiness, but because things weren’t going the way I would have preferred. For the beginning of a gallant adventure, a bit of levity was lacking; for the beginning of a love affair, some drama was missing. Even without the hope of a great love, a little drama would have been helpful, and made things easier for me. The dramatic words that didn’t please me the night before now came to my lips, now, when they were superfluous, because there was no one to say them to.

Feeling ridiculous, I sat down again, and found what was necessary to move away from my usual method of behavior. For me, this business of relenting didn’t work. I am an intellectual, of the type of those who are sophists. Faced with a real situation, I make an effort to understand it and

reduce it to clear, logical formulations, without worrying whether or not they are legitimate, or true. Until meeting Sonya, I had never varied from that procedure with women, and if it was true that I had never been very successful with women, the three or four that I did have success with was while using an impeccable dialect. Everyone uses what they have at hand, and I, in fact, had never had more than glibness, even if it was a little churlish.

I heard Sonya move in the room next to me, then she opened the door and asked me to wait for her, because she was going to take a shower. I couldn't help imagining her naked under the warm water calming her upset nerves, and this imagination drove me crazy for a moment. I pulled myself together quickly. I wanted to recover my usual mode of conduct, and be faithful to myself. I wanted, above all, to control my feelings and my desires, and avoid an outbreak. An unexpected kiss is more effective, after a long-winded intellectual tirade, than ending it with passionate declaration.

When Sonya returned, I felt myself obliged to put my decisions in practice, because the dress she had put on made her more attractive than ever.

"Shall we go?" she asked me.

"Where?"

"If you would be so kind as to go with me, I would like to visit the bachelor pad of Don Juan."

"With me?" I asked with surprise.

"You would help me stay calm. After what happened yesterday, I am afraid that I wouldn't be able to control my emotions and would embarrass myself."

We set out. The little red and black two-seater was hers. She drove. As we traveled, I asked her how we would be able to enter; she told me she had a key.

"Remember that I have gone there by myself, on my own freewill."

Her hands trembled as she stuck the key in the lock. I had to open it. I let her pass me and I stayed in the doorway, but she gave me a look that was an invitation to follow. The room was dark and silent. Sonya stepped forward respectfully, as though she were in a church. She moved away from me and went to open a window. Some dim sunlight spread over the top of a piano. Nothing had been touched, nothing had changed. The pool of blood on the carpet was now only a dark stain. However, Sonya didn't look at it. She spread her look through the room, somewhat surprised, and also a bit disgusted.

"My God!" she said.

She hurried into the adjoining room and I heard her open another window and walk back and forth. She said "My God!" again several times.

Meanwhile, I also looked around. The day before I had been within those walls for more than two hours, and I had been attracted and enchanted by what I saw. The souls of several women had been revealed to me in a mysterious way, and as I remembered that, those rooms seemed like a church where a god had lived. Now, before my eyes was an ordinary room, of very good taste and purity. Nothing had been touched, but something was missing, or perhaps it had never been there before. I felt angry in my heart, and I reacted by pounding on the keys of the piano. They sounded raucous and out of tune.

Sonya gave a shout and appeared, upset and agitated.

"Is the same thing happening to you, like it is to me?" she asked me with a trembling voice.

"Yes, I think so."

"But how can that be?"

Panting, she walked over to me, with her gloved hands stretched out,

"How is that possible?" she repeated. "Everything is the same, but still..."

She lifted her hands to her face and rubbed her eyes.

"Oh!"

I made her sit down and did what I could to calm her down. A cigarette helped.

"I am inclined to think that I, as well as you, have been victims of a curse, but a curse that has disappeared."

"And it is now, that we have been cursed?"

"I said curse, because of my natural tendency to exaggerate things, however, as you must know, I don't really believe in things like that. What happened can be explained without referring to the paranormal. You know that. You must know more explanations than I do."

"Yes, yes..."

"Let's accept whatever we think is appropriate. For me, that means Leporello. I have never had the honor of hearing a single word, or taking a single look at his Don Juan."

“Don Juan!” she whispered, with a sigh.

“Don’t get upset again. Think, for a moment, about the need to have a cold heart, not just a cold mind.”

I got up, and asked her. “Do you want to take a look at your shrine from close up?”

“My shrine?”

I pointed to the closed door of the bedroom. She leaned back on her chair.

“Oh, no, please!”

“Come on, have courage.”

“I pushed her toward the bedroom door, and I stepped ahead to open it. I turned on the light and went inside.

“This bed has never been used, but you already saw this yesterday. Now then...”

Moved by a momentary intuition, I tugged the bed and uncovered a red mattress with yellow edges.

“You see, a bed that no one ever intended to use. A trick bed. The emotional part of a bed that gives it intimacy and human warmth, are the sheets. And you see: this one doesn’t have any.”

Also, the pillow didn’t have a pillowcase. It was definitely a Spanish pillow, and not a French pillow that was making me so uncomfortable at night.

“In other words, an ordinary cold room where love has never palpitated in a human heart.”

“You are forgetting mine.”

“You are sure of having been here sometime?”

“Yes, many times.”

“Here? Is this what you have looked at, and what you have worshiped like a tabernacle?”

She didn’t reply. She left the bedroom and, once she was outside, she told me:

“Let’s go.”

I went over to the piano and I played a scale.”

“Do you think it is possible that the music from yesterday was able to come from this contraption?”

“Please!” she begged.

“Forgive my insistence. You and I feel the same, but it could be that the presence of each of us here, hinders some experiences of the other. The piano is an objective piece of information: it’s out of tune, and it sounds terrible.”

“Let’s go.”

She didn’t say anything while we were going down the stairs, nor during the few moments we were in the car. When we had gotten far enough away, she asked without looking at me:

“Do you know where Don Juan lives?”

“More or less.”

I told her.

“I want to go there, and I would really like to have you come with me.”

“I don’t want to see Don Juan and, especially, not when I am with you.”

“That’s not what I’m asking. I only want you to show me the house.”

In the section of the Isla de San Luis that faces the right bank, there are a number of fairly old hotels built in the seventeenth century, as dwellings for magistrates, directors, managers and other opulent citizens who accompanied the King in his “Bed of Justice.” I thought I remembered one of them that Leporello showed me. I took Sonya to the patio, but I couldn’t show her the staircase for the simple reason that there was no staircase. I apologized. We entered the hotel next to it, then another, and another, until it was five or six hotels. Convinced that I had forgotten which one it was, I started asking. But no one knew Don Juan as a resident on that street, and not Leporello either.

“He is a distinctive person about forty years old, wearing...”

In case what I said was not clear—since my French was about as bad as it could be—I had Sonya ask the questions. We covered the entire street, asking everyone we saw.

“A gentleman about forty years old, with grey hair and dark glasses! A servant...!”

With the last person we asked, Sonya described Don Juan with such glowing words that he laughed in her face. He told her that the person she was asking about didn’t seem real, more like a famous movie actor. Sonya was embarrassed, but I was the one who paid for her shame, because she reproached me with multiple recriminations for my lack of memory (or perhaps what she was now thinking was an attempt to trick her.) She finally decided to try calling on the telephone and entered a café, while I waited in the car. If I acted calm, or even amused, I was certainly not calm

or amused, because Leporello had definitely taken me to one of those hotels that were so historiated and beautiful., I felt annoyed and frustrated once again.

Sonya took a while before she came out of the café. She approached the car looking downcast.

"I have called this telephone number a hundred times, but according to what they always tell me, it's a number that does not exist in Paris."

She sat down, putting her arms on the steering wheel, and then put her head on her arms and began to cry.

The curve of her head was beautiful.

3. Marianne's café was closed with a placard that announced the indefinite absence of the owner, giving us another disappointment, and leaving us in the Latin quarter, tired, hopeless, and, as for myself, very hungry. Sonya probably would have preferred to immediately start complaining, perhaps accompanied with weeping and whimpering; but I felt just as disconsolate as she did, and even more convinced that Don Juan's escape—maybe only his disappearance—had a great deal of caution, and, if may say so, cowardliness... I spoke of his escape, knowing that I was exaggerating, but in the end I accepted the equally reasonable theory of Sonya that he would end up in a psychiatric hospital, and all the rest was nothing more than a series of coincidences and mistakes, caused in part by me. I had the impression that she didn't believe her own words, but in mine, in the same way that I didn't believe in my words, but in hers. Her emotional state would prefer the escape as a hypothesis; if she spoke of a psychiatric hospital, it was only to contradict me and, in passing, calm herself, at least in appearance.

I talked about going to a restaurant. Sonya accepted, and even agreed to take me to one that I didn't know of where they served very good food. At that time of day it was full of students, and right away I felt uncomfortable. Those mournful people seemed to be tragic characters on erotic vacations, judging by their manner of being in love while they ate. They gave the impression of saying: "When we're done eating we'll commit suicide, unless we want to make love first. Not for very long; only for enough time so that our libido won't interfere with our thoughts of nothingness. Perhaps the spirit of Sonya was the same as those restaurant patrons; her clothing, of course, was not; and as for me, neither my clothes or my spirit were the same. And for that reason, as I said, I felt uncomfortable, as if all those philosophers had come to the conclusion that some bourgeoisie had boldly sneaked into their files; as if they all wanted to insult me when they found out about it. I am ready to swear that some of them did that, and the word "bastard" came from their lips many times, however, discreetly. Sonya was too lost in herself to have heard it, and I preferred not to say anything about it.

"So you think Don Juan has run away?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"It's his custom."

"In this case, it wasn't necessary. No at father, not a brother, not a husband, would try to avenge me."

"You seem to forget that you fired a shot at him."

"Yes, that's true..."

She seemed to react right away.

"Of course, I fired a shot at him. But, why? Was that my intention? I didn't have a pistol. I would have just hid my naked body behind the piano, to get dressed and leave, if he hadn't told me: 'There is a pistol.' Who had put it there? Him. But why? So that I would shoot him. That's clear. What was he trying to do?"

"To give a tragic conclusion to the adventure. Don Juan likes tragic conclusions."

"Oh! And you, an incorrigible frivolous small fry. Do you believe that is a valid esthetic explanation? Why don't you just try to think with me and find some meaning in all this?"

"I'll repeat what I said before: Don Juan, or the man says that is his name and has a really amusing servant who says he's a devil, is a guy whose sexual impotence has driven him crazy, or neurotic, or whatever you want to call it. Since he hasn't lost his skill as a seducer, he keeps on winning women's love; I know that since he has imagination, he woos them in unusual ways, but in the end I see nothing else."

"And the shot?"

"It's natural that a man like that want's to die."

"And the name, Don Juan?"

I smiled.

"The psychologists call that compensation, or something like that."

"I see it differently."

She didn't explain, at the moment, how she saw it, and I continued eating. She looked at me with a look that I didn't want to examine closely. Suddenly she asked me:

"Do you believe in fate? You must believe, because you are a southerner."

"Nevertheless, I don't believe."

"I didn't believe either, but after certain facts..." She paused for a moment, and then continued in a hurry; "If not, how can I relate a series of facts? You can see for yourself: against the custom of all the women in my country, and with my education, I am still a virgin; contrary to my initial idea of writing about philosophy, I write a thesis about Don Juan; against all my expectations, reading my thesis leads me meet a man..."

"On the other hand," I interrupted, "the atheism which you profess, and that seems to me a fact that should be considered, is not at all unusual. All the girls and boys who are around me are atheists."

"Do you think that some of those girls could make Don Juan love them?"

"Some are quite pretty."

"They are girls who sleep every night with their friend. They lack sexual prejudices."

"You too."

"I however... What makes you think my conduct is not controlled by a prejudice that I am unaware of?"

"You said so."

"I could be mistaken. I have had myself psychoanalyzed a couple times, but not so deeply that I see everything clearly. Anyway, what does it matter? Now I find that certain facts of my life that before had no relation, have them now. Some seem to be conditions so that the most important one of them could occur; others, without doubt, are their results. There is a cohesion that you would call esthetic, certainly, but that I call..."

She stopped again, and seemed to hesitate, as though she was ashamed.

"...I would call it religious. And you who are a Catholic, ought to agree with me."

"I believe in freedom, not Fate.)

"I have been free to remain a virgin or not, to write a thesis about another topic and get rid of Don Juan with a single word when I wanted to feel happy."

"Fine, and what then? Accepting Fate as a hypothesis with a capital letter, who is Don Juan?"

"Oh, Don Juan, without doubt! The real Don Juan."

"Born in Seville in 1598, according to Leporello. Don Juan Tenorio de Moscoso, a man who seems to have avoided dying. Do you want me to get up and shout to others that among us there is an immortal man? Can you imagine how they would laugh at me? Can you remember those philosophical slogans like: "Live in order to die." That little guy with the blonde beard who seems to be dying would tell us "Man is meant to die"; or "If this one doesn't die, he isn't a man." We have to accept that this fact is irrevocable. I would be obliged to shake the hand of that bearded fellow and congratulate him for his forceful dialectic. Afterward, I would have to come back to you and say: "Miss, you are mistaken; a man can not be immortal."

"Why not?"

I made an expression of frustration.

"If you are asking me that seriously, I wouldn't be able to answer."

"I ask you then to go and ask that young fellow with the blonde beard what he thinks about God. He will say that he doesn't exist. Then I will turn to you and, with complete seriousness, I will convince you that God is a contradictory concept."

"I have my reasons for believing."

"The same as I do, for believing in Don Juan. Neither your ideas, or mine, have any absolute proof; but in spite of that, we accept them. And if the young fellow with the blonde beard destroyed them, we would keep on believing without them. For you God is real; like Don Juan is for me. I admit that your faith is more worthy than mine, since you have never seen God, and I have been naked in the presence of Don Juan."

Almost shouting, I said to her:

"In the presence of a phony! In the presence of a fake!"

"Why do you put it that way?" she asked me calmly. "Can't you see that you are calling attention?"



She pushed the glass of wine over to me.

“Here, drink a little, and calm down. You are acting as if you were jealous.”

I felt humiliated. Sonya smiled and looked at me with her bright blue eyes, like mothers would look at their exasperating and unreasonable children: with a mixture of superiority and tenderness, that humiliated me even more. I drank a swallow of wine and calmed my nerves.

“You are mistaken. Why should I feel jealous? Whereas, it makes me furious when a rational person insists on believing this nonsense.”

“Do you realize that it was you, yourself, who told me he was Don Juan, and you told me in such a way that suggested you were expecting a certain effect? “

“Exactly. I wanted you to know that you had gotten yourself in an affair that you should get out of right away. Any woman would have known immediately that they had gotten involved with a charlatan, or a madman.”

Unexpectedly Sonya took my hand.

“You don’t know how happy that revelation makes me,” she said with a voice that was almost ecstatic. What would it have been like for me, if believed I was a victim of an ordinary seducer? How could I have explained what happened to me, how could I have stood it to know that I was slighted. It would have been a chaotic disaster that would have probably cost me my life. But you clarified everything; you helped me clarify it even more. With the way you spoke and discussed things with me, it seems like my soul is functioning with the independence of our words and is entering a world where everything is clear, radiant, and intelligible. I assure you that all this seems necessary, that everything had to be this way.”

“Also the disappearance of Don Juan?”

“Especially that. In order for what is going to happen, it was necessary for Don Juan to be absent.”

I dared to ask her, with feigned timidity, what was going to happen. She let go of my hand and crossed her arms over her chest, closed her eyes and, as if she had slipped inside and was listening to herself, she answered with a whisper:

“I don’t know. But when you mentioned the name Don Juan it was as if a child was born inside me. Now I feel it move inside me; it will grow, it will fill me completely, it will become one with me, and in this way we will stay united until Eternity.

“Until Nothingness, you mean.”

Either she didn’t hear me, or my irony didn’t deserve an reply. Her withdrawal, and her silence, permitted me to examine her and make comparisons. She seemed like an Annunciation painted by a primitive Dutchman; immediately I saw myself with wings, levitating over the floor of that noisy restaurant. And again I had the feeling that in the bowels of that matter there was something blasphemous.

4. There was nothing more to do. I left Sonya in the doorway of her house, saying goodbye forever. I felt sad, that’s the truth, seeing her turn to the elevator more quietly than slowly, with her hands on her belly, as if she were holding a child, and I felt sad for the victory of a phantom over me. I was sorry that this girl that I liked so much, was taking this farce seriously, so that it became part of her, turning her into a fraud. Something inside me, against my will, called her an imbecile, but I immediately rejected that insult and redirected it toward myself. And while she was walking down the street, I thought there must be some rational explanation that would justify Sonya, but I couldn’t figure out what it was.

I went back to the hotel, tired and filled with shame, but determined to leave that very night. The hotel porter agreed to get me a ticket with a “couchette,” because I didn’t have money for anything else. I packed my suitcases, I went to have something to eat, and, although it was more than an hour when my train would leave, I walked to the station. It was even earlier than I had thought, and I had to walk around by myself, until the train finally arrived. I immediately grabbed my luggage, went out on the platform, walking some more, with the irrational hope that Sonya would come to stop me, even if it was to tell me she had made a fool of me. It isn’t that I really expected her to do that, only that it was an idea that emerged in my mind making me blush and feel like I wasn’t worth anything. Five minutes before it was time for the train to leave, I climbed in the car and entered my compartment that was already full of suitcases, with two or three other travelers lying in their bunks, plus a couple others that were about to do the same. I moved over to the window, although with back to it; it was then that I saw Leporello at the end of the corridor,

elbowing his way through. I tried to hide, but it was already too late, he had already seen me. He was coming outside himself.

"You are a fool and an idiot!" he told me. "Where is your luggage?"

I didn't tell him, but he guessed that anyway. My suitcases were carried out on the platform and taken by a porter to whom Leporello gave orders in French that I didn't understand. Everything happened so fast, so diabolically fast, that I couldn't interfere. They announced that the train was leaving, and Leporello pushed me toward the exit.

"Let's go, hurry up!"

I stepped down from that train that had started to move, or rather, they forced me to step down, and I didn't stop them, because, in my heart it was what I wanted, or expected, and it wasn't as bad as it seemed. It was a miracle that I didn't break my leg.

"Carry these suitcases to a red Bugatti that is outside the station. And you...!" Leporello said, looking at me with anger, "Be thankful that I'm letting you walk!"

I hadn't said a thing. He took me by the arm and pushed me through the people who were waving handkerchiefs or saying goodbye to travelers who could no longer be seen. He had calmed down, and pulled himself together. He was silent until we got to the Bugatti, and he remained silent like a child who was sulking.

"Get in."

He put the suitcases in the car himself, and payed the porter. And he drove me with his usual rapidity, and with the customary filigrees, to the "Bachelor pad" of Don Juan.

"I am bringing you here because I suppose you don't have any money, and because the room in the hotel is already taken; also it easy to walk from here to find another room."

I sat down on the sofa in the main room. Before bringing up the suitcases Leporello gave me some whisky with ice cubes, as though it was expected, and then he left me alone. After he closed the door I trembled, because the room was not a mysterious bachelor pad, like it had been that afternoon. Maybe it was the effect of the night and the silence, or because things had happened so rapidly that I hadn't had time to return to reality. In any case, the whisky was no mystery, and I was happy to drink some. By the time Leporello returned with my things, I had finished the second cup, and the pleasing warmth had filled my stomach, making me feel light and happy.

"Don't drink any more," Leporello told me.

"Why?"

"Because you're not used to that, and it might do you harm."

"And then what?"

"I need you to be sober and on your toes, man. I am not accustomed to discuss things with drunks."

He opened the door of the bedroom and, inside it, the closet. I walked over to it.

"On the other hand, I need to drink a little because we are going to smack each other, and, without alcohol I probably wouldn't be able to do that."

Leporello was bending over a suitcase. He looked at me out of the corner of his eye, and laughed.

"Sometimes I doubt that you are very intelligent."

"Is it that you don't believe I'm going to smack you? Doesn't it occur to you that, just to feel good about myself, I need to break your nose or, at least, try to?"

"Only for that reason?"

"Exactly. For moral reasons."

"Then, smack me, and stop worrying about your self esteem."

He stood in front of me, without taking off his hat, and offered me a cheek, with the same tranquility as if he was offering me a cigarette. I gave him a hard punch that didn't make him blink, or take the mocking smile off his face.

"Are you calmer now? Or do you want to try it again?"

"I would be happier if I could punch your master the same way."

"My master! Didn't you know that, just now, he has had bad luck? His wound has festered."

"Where is he?"

"In the clinic of Doctor Paschali. But don't look for it in the telephone book, because it is secret."

I sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Now that you made me stay, I hope that when your master is feeling better he will agree to meet with me in some solitary place."

"Is that a condition?"

“No, it’s a demand.”

“Okay, As you like. But, if you will let me, I will tell you that you should behave without even a hint of eccentricity. For one reason or another, every time my lord seduces a woman, there is always some man who wants to kill him.”

“Are you talking about seducing? They call what your lord does seducing? Don’t be conceited. I don’t know whether to consider him a purveyor of mystical experiences, or as an agent provocateur of solitary orgasms by induction. Perhaps both things. In any case, a ridiculous person.”

“A satirist, right?” He cut off my incipient gesture with one of his own.

“Don’t get angry again, for God’s sake! I give you my word that my master has never satirized you, nor I either. And also, he never tried to satirize that girl either, although she thought he did.”

“She...”

“She believes she was satirized, and all this story she has told you this afternoon is nothing more than that, a story that she would prefer to believe, rather than feel that she was satirized.”

“You have spoken to him?”

“Only in a certain way.”

“There’s only one way to speak to people.”

“All right. I’ll tell you then that I have listened to his thoughts. Only because of that did I come to look for you, and it’s only because of that you’re here now.”

“You’re not going to try and get me to see Sonya again.”

“Let’s don’t talk about that now, okay?”

“I have a right to know why you have brought me to this place.”

“To help me avoid that Sonya goes crazy.

He had put my clothing in the closet. Now he was holding a couple sheets and a blanket. He gave me a signal to get off the bed. From the corner where I was situated, I could see him move around the bed, placing the sheets, still with his hat on; and, in truth, he was an amusing figure.

“There’s much to we have to talk about.”

“But not now. Do you know it’s already past eleven? We’ll talk tomorrow. Don’t forget that Paris is a city where people retire early. You should do that too and go to sleep, because tomorrow at eight the “femme de ménage” will come, and you will have to let her in. If you need something, you can find it in the kitchen, but I beg you, don’t drink more whisky. The bathroom is also ready. Try and feel like this is your home.”

“Thank you.”

“In case you don’t have enough money...”

“You’re not trying to...?”

He cut me off.

“I’m not trying to do anything, man of God, except to put an end to your mistrust! Tomorrow you will have money, but you will have earned it. Until then, what you have in your pocket will be enough.”

He waved goodbye and left quickly, diabolically quick. I ran out of the door after him, and then I hurried back inside and searched in all the closets and under the bed; I pressed on the walls to see if there was some secret door that didn’t show, I turned on all the lights—and I was still frightened.

5. It was then when, for the first time in the last two hours, I felt calmed and relatively in control of my actions, but perhaps not so much of my thoughts. Letting myself fall on the couch, and stretching out as much as I could, were free movements, as was, without getting up, my examination of the room in which I found myself, and then the one next to it. It’s pointless to say that nothing had changed, and that it was the same romantic room as before, and that the lights which lit it were not the best thing to create hidden mysteries; so what I saw then depended on me, and only my intimacy. It’s difficult to describe what it was, and how it was; what it mostly looked like, though only physically, was like the flickering of neon lights when they are first lit; something also flickered inside me two or three times, and then stopped. Everyone has sometimes had this kind of experience, and Plato was probably speaking of that when he spoke of how our souls migrate. But what flickered, and then extinguished, in me was the awareness, not of having been there before, but of having lived there at another time, that was perhaps remote; it was the fleeting awareness of a recognition. More lasting, however, was the realization that somethings had changed place, and that the lamps were not the same, and that the illumination

was excessive. I also heard the echo of words that Leporello had not said, lingering bits of a conversation in which I took part as the owner of the house. I had three guests, one of them a woman.

I want to insist that the nature of that experience belonged to a state of things that were reminiscent, and their content was the memory, not like one of several days ago, but the awareness of mystical contacts. Not only were the women who had loved there forgotten, but they had also ceased to be present in the same essential way they had been earlier. Even more: the fleeting memories referred to a situation in a much earlier time, when women passed through the house of Don Juan. I knew this in an instinctive, intuitive way, without anything else to support it. I rose up and examined the room again. This time I examined it when it was entirely lighted, after which I turned off some of the lights and examined it again. In full light, in semi-darkness, and even in complete darkness—that is, the touch and the smell—the room and what was in it offered me an aspect that was unknown before this: neither the mystery of the first visit, nor the great commonness of that afternoon, but the impression—rather than the conviction—that it was inhabited, by someone who spent their daily time there, someone with different habits from mine, and those of my time, and with a different mentality; someone, in short, whose habits and whose soul matched the late romanticism of the furniture, and for whom the lines and the colors of the pictures and drawings represented either an audacity or a novelty. That person—with whom I had identified for a moment, but now seemed different—was visited by friends who did not drink whisky, but champagne; they didn't fall onto a chair, instead, they seated themselves ceremoniously; they didn't speak our intellectualized language, but a French that was filled with intelligence and lyrical enthusiasm—one of them, who was a woman, had a Creole accent.

If a soul is able to split in two, mine had done so, and the receptive part had soaked up like a dry sponge and plunged into the experience, while the other part alertly examined, classified, and judged things without fear, and—why not?—without being affected by the mild terror that the other felt. This duplicity wasn't new; normally, every time part of me became enthusiastic, I have managed to make the other part stay apart from the enthusiasm. Thanks to that habit, maybe also a privilege, I have always been able to recover my tranquility, or stay cool, when it was appropriate. Therefore, I quit examining the room and devoted myself to my nightly ablutions. The bathroom was close by, and when I looked at myself in the mirror, no romantic image superimposed itself on mine that was so ordinary, and typical.

I fell asleep right away. I had a dream, and the dream was related to the things that had happened that day. I dreamt that in the corner of my mind, something like a bird's egg was put there from the outside, and inside it something was scratching like chicks do when they break out of an eggshell; they scratched insistently, making a noise that seemed like quite a racket (which was because the rest of my mind was so silent), and I waited for it to quiet down, but it went on until I got impatient. I suddenly realized that while I waited, the egg had become like a hollow tube, like those illusionists use for their conjuring. Leporello, in tails, with a magic wand in his hand, made me check to see if there was anyone inside the tube; after that, he covered the ends with two pieces of paper that he fastened with a ring. There was a distant rattle, and Don Juan broke through one of the sheets of paper and jumped over the ring shouting: "Hop!" and then he came out through the hole, whistling. When I peered into the inside of the tub, it was like looking through a window through which I could see a panorama of memories that were not mine. "You see," Leporello said then, "how I fulfill my promise? But you tried to weasel out." He said that to me, but the words were part of his act, forming the conclusion. Leporello saluted, and the audience applauded enthusiastically. While Leporello was finishing, the servants came and changed the scenery. Then I woke up and said:

"Juana carelessly set the glass there on the edge of the table, and Lissette, who is reckless, will break it."

I said that, and I heard myself say it. I stretched out my hand to turn on the light, but my hand didn't reach for the switch, but for matches; my fingers felt around on the cold marble until they found them; I lit one and with it the candle of the candelabra that was on the night table. After that, with the light on, I went into the hall to pick up the glass that Juana had left on the edge of the table, but when I got there, there was no glass. I realized then that at that moment, and since I woke up, I had not been living in myself. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that someone else have been living inside me since I woke up, and that after remembering the carelessness of Juana, and the recklessness of Lissette, they had left me. However, there was something that had been left inside me, related to the reminiscences and memories that Leporello

had offered me, because I opened the door of a cabinet and, inside, it I found the glass that I feared would be broken, slightly separated from the other glasses, still partly filled with champagne. I recognized it immediately.

I wasn't sleepy. I sat on the piano bench and dropped my arms on the keyboard: the keys that were struck produced a strange harmonic sound (earlier that afternoon the piano was out of tune!) that filled the air around me and pressed against me, almost making me fall over myself; after that, my soul was enwrapped by a musical movement that was more and more speedy, almost dizzying; it went on until those strange harmonies finally came to an end; but by then, I had already changed.

I had lost control of the rudder of my will, and the invulnerable center of my soul had been reached. Gently all efforts of cogitation ceased, and any reflexive ability vanished; after that, reminiscences came in droves to invade my soul, and filled it. Confusedly at first; then with more order. At the same time my awareness of myself became weak. It was connected to me by a delicate memory, and although it didn't belong to another person, I definitely felt like I was occupied by someone else with an unknown name whose life I recalled with clarity and insistence. In short, the totality of my memories were substituted by the memories of another person. It had happened that afternoon. I had just come from Munich where a few days ago—it was the tenth of July, in 1865—and Richard Wagner had released the premiere of "Tristan and Isolde." Three friends had just visited me—the good Charles and his lover, Jeanne, who always always left the glass on the edge of the table; and a third person, a strangely dresses man whose name I was not able to remember—. I had explained the opera of Wagner to them as well as I could. Charles asked me to give him a sample of the music, if I could remember it, and then, on the piano I replayed, as best I could, a few of the musical passages: those sung by Tristan, and those sung by Isolde. Then Charles said:

"In Wagner's music each character is, to put it that way, accompanied by the melody that represents his moral character, and the role that he will play in the story."

"Then, would you be able to verify, based on the musical passages I just showed you, the manner in which Tristan and Isolde love each other?"

"Of course, my friend!"

The good Charles began to talk of love, and while he spoke, I examined him. He had gotten older while I was gone, his hands and his eyebrows trembled, and something ruinous seemed to foretell his next collapse; but his clear eyes hadn't lost their disenchanting, melancholy sharpness, and his words showed that he hadn't lost his usual farsightedness. Jeanne was also a bit older and her movements were clumsy, because her paralysis hadn't been completely cured. At times Charles paused in what he said, and looked at her tenderly, or caressed her with his hand,

What Charles said about love, attributed to Tristan and Isolde, could well be the way he loved Jeanne; and for me, it had always saddened me that a man of his intelligence would live bound to a woman with such an indelicate spirit, even though her body was very attractive. Some friends seemed to pardon him, as though that complete submission gave Charles the spirit he needed to maintain his intelligence and his sensibility, making them more sharp and those of any other man of his time. I, however, have never seen it that way, but rather as someone who God had placed by Charles side, something placed in his life for some particular reason of God, that I could not imagine. What Charles could have achieved, what he could have written, if it weren't for his sexual submission to Jeanne! He described her, transmuting himself into Tristan, like the demonical happiness of Adam and Eve, after they were advised by the serpent. And that was something that I knew about.

"You don't believe in love, right?" Charles said to me, interrupting himself; and his bright eyes, seemed to want to pass through mine, so lacking in brightness and filled with old age.

"In my own way."

"Only as sensual pleasure?"

"Above all, as a protest against God" I answered him at the risk of exposing myself; so I added at once: "That is, that's the way I saw it as a child."

"I was asking about the way you feel now."

"It is a custom that is properly considered, one that served my initial purpose."

"Are you referring to the method of enhancing pleasure?"

"Pleasure doesn't interest me. I am referring to the way of conquering women."

"Oh, please, explain that!" Jeanne interrupted with her sweet tropical voice, as if she immediately wanted to become a victim of my technique. "That has to be quite interesting."

"I don't think I can quite understand it," Charles said. "I have only been capable of one technique in my life, with a single woman: total submission. Because of that, all the other women have failed me, or I have failed them."

"It's because you love, and I don't," I told him.

"But how can you live like that?"

"Because I have discovered a sentiment more fundamental than love, an object more important than a woman."

"Pourtant, vous êtes un homme à femmes, mon vieux!"

"I can assure you that in my life women play a part that is purely instrumental."

"Instruments of pleasure?"

"No, not like that. Didn't I tell you a moment ago that pleasure doesn't interest me?"

"Then what does?"

"Permit me to keep my secret for now."

"I always suspected that that you were a mysterious person, and now I am sure that you are. What is your real name?"

"Oh, dear Charles, what foolishness you are thinking of! Be quiet and go ahead and tell us what your technique is. I'm dying to hear it."

Charles looked at her with tenderness. He agreed right away. We smiled. My smile meant that we were in agreement, His was meant to thank me.

"Jeanne is right. Your conquering technique is most important."

"...although my technique as a trickster is still more important."

Here the window of memories closed, here the reminiscences vanished, here my soul was emptied of the things that occupied it and returned to myself, like it was pushed away by that word that I hated so much. I rose up like someone who had come back from the other world, with the feeling of someone who has seen marvels. Everything was the same; and I began to feel cold.

"But have I ever been able to play 'Tristan and Isolde?'" I asked myself. "On the piano, play music of Wagner?" I added with astonishment.

And before I went to bed I tried to figure things out, including the melodies that Charles had listen to. But no good. I had never remembered the music of "Tristan."

6. Lisette woke me up with a hullabaloo of bangs and thumps, and when I opened the door, she apologized for waking me up, telling me to go back to bed and sleep some more if I wanted, while she fixed breakfast and warmed the bath water. She was a very tall girl, quiet lively, and, if not beautiful, she was still nice to look at. She spoke an highly accented French, mostly slang, and she said it rapidly. But after the third time I asked her to repeat what she said, she realized the difficulty I had in understanding her, and began to speak more calmly, almost pronouncing syllable by syllable, each time asking if I understood her: all with the nicest smile in the world, without ceasing to look at me, eating me with her eyes, as if I was a strange oddball. I got back in bed, and she came to visit me several times, with different pretexts, in spite of having told me I should go back to sleep. And when she brought me my breakfast, she stayed in the room, silent like she was raptured, without ceasing to watch me. I don't know if the insistence of her look bothered me, or if I was surprised by the happy expression on her face, because until then, no woman had ever looked at me like that, or had looked at me with such happiness. I decided she must be experiencing some sort of memory that had nothing to do with me. After I finished my breakfast, I handed her the empty plate and she took it, but didn't move.

"Is something wrong?"

"Oh, non, monsieur! Mais, vous êtes si charmant...!"

She went back to the kitchen immediately and I remained there, feeling confused. I wondered if I wasn't wide awake yet, so I took a cold shower that helped me sober up. As I was shaving with my mind free of cobwebs, I was able to think and even was able to laugh at myself. Evidently I had woken up feeling quite vain and some repressed hunger had made me dream. I was dressed to go out, when Lisette came to say goodbye.

"Tomorrow I'll come whenever you want, sir. If you leave the key in the lodge, I won't wake you up. I'm very happy to serve you..."

The insignia of a radical syndicate that she wore on her lapel didn't blend well with her happiness to serve a guy with an indisputable middle-class background like mine. She said, "See you tomorrow," but didn't move away, and it occurred to me that I ought to give her my hand and wish

her good luck, so I did that. She accepted it with naturalness and took a while to let go of it. Perhaps it would have been more proper to give her a kiss, but I never thought about that.

When I was alone I started to think about the events of last night, not as something real, but something in a dream. However, for things from a dream, they stayed in my memory with a strange insistence and, most disturbing, was that part of me felt they were real, against my will, and against my logic. I saw them as part of a series of real events, like mechanical indications of my actual situation. And not all of it was crazy, because with the memory of the things that took place in my dream, were memories of a life that was not mine.

They were, especially, memories of women; brief elusive faces, words like whispers, eyes full of distress, and memories of caresses, memories that made my hands tremble as if the body I had touched had quickly moved away and, although it was no longer there, I could still feel its warmth. But none of them came from inside me like real memories, instead they broke open my soul and came in from outside, as if that window opened by Leporello was actually an opening in my soul that was now open to all sorts of tempests. The rapidity with which they entered and vanished, the impossibility of being able to retain any of them and keep them my mind, prevented me from being able to examine them fully. They moved and trembled like a throng in which a face or a profile could perhaps be identified and fixed in my memory, if they didn't quickly escape in an anonymous group.

"This has to be a sickness," I was able to think.

Leporello arrived, and his appearance was like a strong gust of wind that placed a dark cloud over my intrusive memories.

"Good morning," he said, without taking off his hat. "How did you spend the night? Did you feel like you were at home? I hope that Lissette came to help you."

"I slept like I usually do, and I am feeling fine. And Lissette is a servant whose skills are beyond reproach."

"She can be careless if you don't keep an eye on her. Meddlesome. She has a lover... Didn't she tell you?"

"No, I don't think...."

"She'll tell you. She'll tell you the whole history of her lovers. Lissette is a gossip from the south."

I didn't care about Lissette; I was annoyed by Leporello's words and the pretentious smile that accompanied them. I asked him about his master, and the smile disappeared from his face.

"I'm very worried about him. You know...?"

Only then did he remove his hat and asked me to pardon him for not talking it off sooner.

"An extremely strange complication has occurred. Last night my master's soul left his body more than once."

"You know enough about the soul not to think that it is something which can escape like a bubble of air, or anything like that."

"We know very little about the soul, my friend. In fact we know almost nothing. But that's not the case, since Don Juan's has been missing for a very long time."

He sat down, and wiped some nonexistent sweat off his brow.

"It was something terrible. He seemed to have died, and they thought he was dead. I knew he couldn't be and I sustained that belief against the opinion of the doctor. About three o'clock in the morning he began to move."

"Catalepsy?"

"That's an easy explanation of an unexplainable situation."

"All right. In any case, it doesn't concern me."

"And what then? Do you say that things that don't concern you don't exist?"

"No, I only say that they don't matter to me."

"Well it matters very much to me whether Don Juan can get out of this morass, and not because of what you might think, but because if he is not cured, our trip to Spain will be impossible. We're supposed to take the train in eight or ten days. If it hadn't been for the unfortunate experience of Sonya Nazaroff, we would already be there."

I lit a cigarette. I understood that the mention of Spain was a bait that he offered me, and I decided to reject it. But then the name of Sonya, who I had forgotten about in the last few hours, made me change my mind, and want to see her again.

"Yes. Didn't I already tell you that we go to Spain every year? It's in order to see the Tenorio family."

What would Sonya be doing? Was the seed of Don Juan still growing in her soul? Was she still dreaming about the mystical maternity that she had imagined?

"My lord doesn't want to lose his reputation as a Tenorio. Like a good Spaniard, forgiveness satisfies him; I think that he also expects to be forgiven himself."

How I would like to be by her side at this moment! I remembered her at the moment when she bowed her head, when she crossed her arms and dropped her hands in her lap, pure and filled with love, like an Annunciation.

"As you may know, I am not enjoying myself. My knowledge of the real Don Juan makes me think the version of Zorrilla is a fake. But I will use the trip to Spain to take advantage of several things I enjoy. There are some really incomparable things in Spain: the wine, the food, and the prostitutes. They acted like they love you, and once or twice I had the impression that love was real! One of them fell in love with my lord. She was an extraordinary woman. We met her in an expensive restaurant. A great woman! Beautiful, and a good madam; she earned twenty to thirty thousand pesetas every month; she saved more than half of it, and used the advice of friends about where to make good use of it. Since she believed we were ruined she offered Don Juan her entire fortune. Thanks to him, that woman is now happily married."

And why couldn't Sonya also get married? And why not think of her when she was sitting there with her arms crossed over her stomach, at the moment she was thinking of a real maternity?

"What are you planning to do today?" I quickly asked Leporello.

"Nothing. I don't even know why I am here right now."

"Right now you could help Sonya."

"Sonya? Ah yes, that girl!"

Leporello broke out laughing.

"That's what she told me this morning, only a half an hour ago, when I mentioned your name: 'Ah, sí; ce monsieur-la!' But Sonya was sincere, and you are feigning an indifference that you don't feel. Right now you are thinking..."

He angrily pounded on the table.

"Go take a walk! I will not tolerate you talking about riddles in my presence! And to warn you that I am not pleased by you trying to know what I am thinking, and I will tell you that in Madrid a short time ago I saw a clairvoyant, a poor woman more unhappy than a cat, who without the slightest diabolical presumption, told me from beginning to end, exactly what I was thinking."

"Yes, I know her," Leporello told me calmly. "She lives 87 Victor Pradera street, and her name is Soledad. I am not surprised that you visited her; among her clients there are a great number of intellectuals. She is a very gifted woman."

"You have the advantage over her, of being more clever."

"A lot more. Thank you."

"But if you try once more to imply that you are a devil, our relationship is finished."

"You really don't believe that?"

"It's obvious that I don't."

"Would it cost you so much to believe that?"

"I would cease to be who I am."

Leporello paced around the room without looking at me, as if he was feeling disillusioned. I went into the next room, and he disappeared from view, but I heard him walking around, making me feel his presence with noise. Suddenly his face reappeared. He had put his hat back on and was looking comically remorseful.

"Not even a tacit agreement by which you act like you believe that, and I act as if I believe you believe it."

"No!"

"Well, I'll be damned!"

He fell into an armchair and searched in his pockets for something he didn't find, perhaps pretending he was looking in order to kill time. Rather irritated, I lit a cigarette and began to work through a scale on the piano.

"Leave that thing alone!"

"Didn't you say that I should feel like I was at home?"

"In your home there is no piano, nor was there ever one! And your playing bothers me, and makes it hard for me to think."

He rose up and, running over to me, he quickly slammed the piano shut.



“Forgive me. I wanted to tell you something about the relation between being and believing, and that noise disturbed me.” He immediately changed his attitude and acted like he was humbled. “I wanted to say...”

He shoved me toward the sofa and made me sit down with a soft push. He had now recovered his control over me, but fairly, that is, he wasn't smiling triumphantly, but submissively, almost pleadingly.

“About being and believing then. It's important that you understand me... I mean, that we understand each other. Both my master and I, that is.

“What do you have to say that excuses you?”

“It's not a matter of excuses, but something about the essence of simulation. If we are a pair of simulators or, as you think, a couple phonies, wouldn't you like to know what was behind it?”

“No.”

“Not even one sentence, one short sentence, a definition?”

Moved by the humiliation of his look, I couldn't refuse him. He seemed ready to throw himself at my feet, to ask me something with his hands begging to humbly, and lick my feet. It made me afraid that he would do just that, afraid that his humiliation would humiliate me too.

“Oh, all right.”

He patted my shoulders happily.

“That's the way. You see now how easy it is to make others happy? It would top it off if you could believe me as Garbanzo Negro injected into the body of Leporello; and then, at least I have the consolation of being able to explain myself.”

He moved away from me a bit, and leaned on the piano. He looked up, and his hands began to move.

“One is not anything. The loner isn't anything. One is not more than what those around them think they are. You would say that my and I are two, and that we certainly might be able to believe in each other, and could do without a third person whose faith is always problematic; but it's not sure that we are two. We are two ones, two loners. Because the company of two can only be filled with mistakes, or with lies, and my master and I know each other perfectly. I cannot convince you that I am a devil, nor can he convince me that he is Don Juan. But if someone believes I am a devil, I will really be a devil, and he will be Don Juan if someone believes that. You would say...”

I interrupted him.

“Why do you suppose I say or think something, if I do not say or think anything?”

He excused himself with a smile.

“I invent the polarized manner. That's the custom. So that... you will say that I may believe I am a devil, and that Don Juan believes he is Don Juan, but basing your belief on yourself is, in other words, arrogance. The drama of Satan consists in his wanting to convince himself that he is Satan, without being able. Because...” I interrupted again.

“Are you acquainted with the drama of Satan? Direct information?”

Leporello drug a chair and sat down in front of me. He didn't stop looking at me. He removed his hat and left it on the carpet.

“Theology, sir. Theology added to the knowledge of man... and of the devil. If not, listen to me. God knows He is God because, besides being One he is Three. But, when He is one, like Satan, or any Tom, Dick or Harry, one who wants to believe what he wishes to be, he must split in two and believe in himself, as if he was someone else. But it is precisely in this personal act of faith where his destruction occurs, because he divides himself into a reciprocal subject and object of his faith, in existing in order to believe in himself, and in existing so he is there to believe in himself. Now then, the first part of oneself, that needs to be believed in order to exist only believes in what the other believes (that is, the other part); if the other has personal reality, that is, if he also believes in himself; but, at the same time, this second part needs the first to believe in it, to exist. So between the two parts in which one divides oneself, there must be an endless system of reciprocal faith, endless like the images of a mirror, reflected in another mirror. I believe in me (that is, in you), because you (that is, I) believe in me (that is, in you...)”

I couldn't take any more.

“For the mother of God, Leporello. You're going to drive me crazy!”

It was as if I had punched him in the stomach. He doubled over and leaned forward, and I thought he was going to fall.

“I beg you!” he said with a sorrowful voice, “Don't ever mention that Woman again! Promise me, please!”

"If that's the way it affects you, it shouldn't be a problem."

He seemed to calm down. He even smiled. But his eyes were still anxious.

"All right, I see that I failed in my explanation. But it isn't my fault, believe me. If you were up to date with the terminology of modern philosophy, you would have understood me perfectly. I'm sorry. But although your mind cannot understand rationally, you should understand the conclusion. In order for my lord and I to be a devil and Don Juan, respectively, we try to make someone believe that. And so someone will do that, he acts like Don Juan, and I like a devil."

"You do that very well, and so does your master."

He jumped in his seat.

"Then, why don't you believe us? We need to know why."

Before I could answer him, he came and almost poked me in the eye with his threatening finger.

"I'll tell you why. You don't believe that I am a devil, because you don't believe in the devil. And like that, you don't believe he is really Don Juan, and condemned to be him for eternity, Don Juan judged permanently, because you don't believe in Eternity or in Hell. If you believed in Hell and Eternity, why deny that my master is condemned?"

"You never told me Don Juan was condemned," I said. "You only told me that..."

"That he was Don Juan and I the devil. That's correct. It wasn't a complete lie, but a good lie ought to be told in stages, like all well composed narratives. Now though, if I had told it fully from the beginning, thus breaking all the basic rules of art, you wouldn't have believed it. My friend, why don't you think about the authenticity and the substance of your faith? You said you believe in the devil, but if you meet him in the street you don't admit that's who he is; and you say you believe in hell and in damnation, but if you meet someone who is damned, you call him a phony. And still, is it metaphysically impossible that I am the devil? Is it impossible that my master is Don Juan Tenorio? Think about it: it's not that he is immortal, but a deceased who has put his feet in Eternity. You know very well that a man can change his nature while he is still breathing; he can rectify, straighten out, repent, or be stubborn; but death permanently fixes his manner of being; it fixes as it was at the moment of death. So if Don Juan dies being Don Juan, he will be him for eternity, and being him will be his damnation. It makes sense then, that he will go through the world donjuaning. You think now that the dead are not present among us, but you don't recognize who they are, and there is nothing that convinces a believer that the man who sits by his side in a bus is not someone who has been damned and is now fulfilling his damnation.

I interrupted again.

"I don't doubt that your farce, and that of your master, has been concocted with plenty of theological guaranties. However..."

"However, you have to accept that you haven't believed me because you don't believe in the devil, or in Eternity. And you also wouldn't have believed, if I made you witness, or had you effected, by a few prodigies.

"All right, what do you intend to do now? Where are you going to take me?"

"I don't intend to do anything, or take you anywhere, only to try and make you realize the weakness of deepest convictions. During other times the imposture of my master and I would have better received. We would have been burned at the stake by the Inquisition."

I told him I was getting tired of this discussion.

"Yes, me too; but grant that my failure should authorize only a light spanking. For my part, I will confess that this isn't first time something like this has happened. Imagine the centuries that my lord and I have lived this deception, and the number of people to whom we have finally had to admit the truth! It is discouraging. I don't know what is going to come of us."

"Of you and your master?"

"Of the human race."

"Of course I don't know what will happen to you, but as for me, I am beginning to believe that I will definitely take the train to Irún."

"How will you pay for it?"

"I will ask for a loan at the Embassy."

"Don't do that; don't leave. Are you going to renounce Sonya because of a poorly understood feeling of pride? Sonya likes you, she is a very nice girl, and if you are capable of healing her she could be a wonderful wife. But, my friend, with exceptional women like her it is always necessary to do just that, in spite of difficulties. In the Middle Ages you had to free them from the dragon, and in ancient times, Tobias had to fight with the devil in order to win his woman. If you want to have Sonya, you are going to have to make some effort.

“And if I don’t do it?”

“You will regret it. You will always remember and regret your cowardice when it’s already too late. You will try to change things when it is no longer possible, and you will spend the rest of your days sad and regretful. You are old enough to be married. You could refuse to do that, it’s true, but the feelings of an unmarried man who has not found the right woman, are very different from those of one who has found her, and does not know how to make her his.”

“Nothing tells me that Sonya is precisely the right woman.”

“Your heart is telling you. And if it bothers you to think about it, your common sense will also tell you, that is if you still have any.”

He poured some more whisky, and then walked over to me.

“Come on now, make a decision. But first we must resolve the question of money. I would advance you some but, since you are very scrupulous, I would rather show you how to win it. Do you remember the gambling den from yesterday?”

“Are you trying to get me to go and gamble the few funds I still have?”

“I am trying to make you a deal. How much do you have? I’ll give you the same amount, and then when you make your bet, we will be doing it together; we could use a little extra money too.”

“I have never gambled.”

“Today you will. Luck always favors newbies. Come on, count your money.”

He took out his wallet and began to count; I counted how much I had; again I began to feel I was being controlled by his willpower and forced to do what he wanted. With a few franks in my pocket, and a few vague instructions, he led me to the door of the gambling house, telling the porter to take me to the room where last night they were playing a game of baccarat. I was taken to a poorly lighted room where a half-dozen men and women were seated around a table—people who hadn’t gone to bed, mostly dressed for night, all looking somewhat ghostly, silent and motionless, except for their hands that were tossing chips or moving cards, along with the voice of the croupier.

I sat down, they dealt cards, I played, and I won. I played some more and won again. I didn’t understand very well what was happening. One man was removing cards from a box: without looking at them, I asked for some, and the winning cards piled higher and higher before me. It wasn’t a large amount, some thirty thousand franks, because my initial bid had been quite small.

“You can stop playing now,” a voice behind me said in my ear, “it’s time to withdraw.”

Without turning to look, I asked if that was proper.

“Of course. No one will say anything.”

I got up, she took me by the arm, and led me to a corner in the bar. It was a woman, about thirty, pretty, distinguished, well dressed, a little decadent, almost degenerated by anxiety, or vice. She sat down by my side and began to speak heatedly. I wasn’t able to understand her very well—she was speaking French—but, judging by her tone, she was pretending to be a woman who had suddenly fallen in love. I thought about my thirty thousand franks, my provincial suspicion awakened and put me on guard. But she didn’t ask for anything; she continued speaking and when I tried to stand up she didn’t stop me, and rose up herself and grabbed her coat. When she opened her purse to remove the card, I noticed it contained a large wad of bills, and she didn’t try to hide them. In fact the open purse was on the table for several minutes.

“Did you also win?” I asked her.

“No. I’m quite wealthy.”

Out in the street a chauffeur came over to her with a hat in his hand.

“Would you like to have give you a lift to wherever you’re going?” she asked me. “Or would you rather take a walk through the Forest? In that case, you would have to wait while I change.”

We got into a large, black automobile and she continued talking while we were driving through the streets of Paris, and when we stopped in front of a nice looking house, she asked me to wait for a few minutes. She came back right away, wearing her morning dress, and told the chauffeur to drive us to the Forest. But she no longer talked to me. She started to look at me, at first out of the corner of her eye; then she looked me in the face with surprise. Finally she said:

“Are you the same man who was here a half hour ago? Are you really the same?”

I told her I thought so.

“That can’t be. A person can’t be transformed like that, that can’t be... in such a short time...”

“I don’t understand.”

“Oh, that doesn’t matter! I don’t understand what happened either.”

“But, what happened?”

"An hour and a half ago, when you sat down at the baccarat table I was just getting up to leave, after an evening without excitement. I felt sleepy and disgusted. I saw you and I was fascinated—that's the word. There was something extraordinary about you that I cannot define, but that affected me immediately and nailed me to your side, and made me behave myself foolishly. It was like an enchantment that lasted until now, until I came back to the car and saw you again. At that moment I thought you were someone else."

"Can you tell me what the difference is?"

"Oh, yes! You are very ordinary, and the other was an extraordinary person."

I laughed and asked her to tell him to stop the car.

"What you see now is correct. However, I assure you that I am not responsible in any way for what happened."

"I suppose I have been a victim of some sort of hallucination. Or perhaps drugs."

"Yes, that's what must have happened."

She seemed upset. She didn't give me her hand, and she left me on the sidewalk of an unknown street and drove away rapidly. I was not irritated, but instead, amused. Just to be sure, I checked my wallet, to be certain my thirty thousand franks were still there. I started walking aimlessly and, when I went around the first corner, I found myself in front of the red car of Leporello, as if he had been waiting for me.

"Get in, get in," Leporello said and, when I was by his side he stretched out his hand."

"Fifteen thousand franks."

I gave them to him, and he put them away.

"They left you in the lurch, eh?"

"No, not me, rather, it was..."

"It was you, definitely you. The one who won at baccarat, but the one who charmed that woman was my master."

"Your master?" I broke out in laughter.

"Don't laugh! The soul of my master, immigrated from his body and entered yours. That was why you won, that was why you fascinated that woman, and that was why, without any apparent change in you, she was so upset. But something did change, in fact, just a few minutes ago."

"Oh, of course! The soul of Don Juan returned to his body."

"Exactly. I'm sorry. Believe me, I'm sorry, because without his help it would be difficult for you to win the love of Sonya Nazroff."

I laughed once more. Without acrimony, and without resentment, because the whole thing amused me.

"So, according to you, only Don Juan would it be able to win the love of Sonya Nazroff."

"Only with help of Don Juan would you be able to remove Don Juan from Sonya's memory."

"Okay, then for that operation I am not essential. Any nobody in the street could do it, provided he had that migrating soul in his body."

"And afterward?"

"Afterward, what?"

"Exactly. Afterward what? Do you think we could hand Sonya over to any Tom, Dick, or Harry in the street? What kind of conduct do you attribute to my master?"

He started the motor, and, until the car started moving, he was silent.

"I told you the other day that my master chooses his successors with the greatest care. They are not always worthy of him, because that is impossible but, in any case, worthy of the woman who is involved."

I was going to thank him for the honor he was doing me, but something else occurred to me.

"A short time ago we agreed that you are not Leporello, nor is your master Don Juan."

"Nevertheless, we have to call ourselves something, and with these names we are better understood. Except for you, who are bothered by it."

He looked at me without turning his head, and I had the impression that only one of his eyes was looking at me, while the other remained attentive to where we were driving. It was a bothersome impression, caused by a man who had been able to alter the parallelism of the two parts of himself, who moved them according to his will, each one by his side. But it was a fleeting impression, since something in the street distracted me. Now I remember. It was the two-seater convertible of Sonya.

Leporello stopped the car.

"Okay, we're here."

“Do you seriously think I am going to visit Sonya?”

“Do whatever you like. I will leave that to you, and we probably won’t see each other again. Make use of the Don Juan’s flat any time you want, without any condition other than the redemption of Sonya. If you refuse to do that, leave the flat and return to Spain. But if you decide to stay, I will take care of your needs. I will gamble with my share of what you won, and I will set aside half of my winnings for you, and not a cent more; it will be enough for you to live comfortably and take care of Sonya. And, please, don’t have scruples about using money you haven’t earned; you will live a luxurious life, but isn’t that the aspiration of every mother’s son?”

With a shove, he pushed me out in the street, and before I could react, he had disappeared.

7. I only remembered a few of his last words in which he said he would not be seeing me again; and, in fact, they affected my feelings, and when I realized what he had said they made me began to chase after the car, shouting at him that he shouldn’t go away, that it wasn’t a big deal, and telling him that, although we had been fighting, someday we could go out to eat and have a plate of spaghetti. But I ran and shouted in vain. Or maybe I didn’t run after him and shout, because I didn’t think about saying those things until it was too late.

Somewhat later I found myself once again in front of Sonya’s front door feeling that I had lost all that help, when I needed it most. Outside I saw Sonya’s two-seated convertible, which, at the moment, seemed like a symbol of all that I would never be able to offer her. Because all this was the work of a decadent man who was probably rich and, like the characters in romantic novels, could spend his entire time on love affairs, even if they were as complex and sophisticated as the one with Sonya; but at the same time, only a woman like her who, in a certain way was also a luxurious woman, could spend two months devoted to the seduction of a seducer, thanks, perhaps, to the monthly fee that a steel magnate sends her from Sweden, that permits her to devote herself to lofty adventures, and worry about nothing else. Sonya lives in an elegant loft in district XVI, she drives an expensive car, and nothing that is known about her life shows the slightest economic worry. And I was nothing more than a modest intellectual from a country where intellectuals earn very little, and I belong to a poor, proud race, whose chosen moral support is independence and poverty that makes me capable of saying: “This car that is not mine, offends me.”

I think that, since I have been involved in this affair, that was the first time that I thought with my head, with my feet centered in the reality of the situation, and with the exact perspective of what could happen. Logically, I should have walked down the street with a lighted cigarette in my lips, singing a song of goodbye. And nevertheless, I hadn’t done that. And not because of the additional perspective, the perspective of happiness I could find in the company of Sonya, made it difficult, but because, without knowing why, I now felt stronger and sure of myself, plus capable of resolving all the problems, even of being able to earn enough money to offer Sonya a modest new car. I think that at that moment my chest straightened up until he became petulant, and my head rose up with impertinent boldness, with the attitude of a swashbuckler caught in a moment of compulsory rest. Oh, how I would have liked to have someone step on my toe, so I could simply knock his block off, and walk off as if it was nothing! But there was no one to respond to my challenge, as I arrived at Sonya’s front door.

She opened it for me. She was wearing some black pants and a green silk blouse; her hair was hanging loosely over her shoulders, and she looked quite pretty. She smiled when she saw me, not the first time I saw her smile, but the first time I saw her smile at me. She smiled with enchanting familiarity, with complete spontaneity.

“You?”

She moved aside so I could come in, without ceasing to smile, as she gave me her hand.

“I thought you had left!”

“Is that what you wanted?”

“Oh, no! That’s just what I thought.”

I handed her my hat and my coat, and she put them on the couch in the vestibule. And like she did on the day of my first visit, she stared walking down the hall in front of me. The room of her study was neat and tidy, and there were two or three branches of fresh flowers.

“I’m very happy to see you. It’s strange! I had almost stopped thinking about you and, still...”

She looked at me. For the first time she looked at me like one looks at a person, like a person who is real, or has at least begun to seem real.

“...still, it’s not unexplainable. You are the only one who knows my secret. You are the only one with whom I can talk about the important things in my life.”

"Do you think that's why I came back?"

"Why did you come, then?"

I didn't answer right away. I sat down and lighted a cigarette, while Sonya's eyes watched me, not angrily, but curiously, as she waited for my response.

"I've come to save you from Don Juan."

"Oh, I don't need to be saved! I am happy like this."

She pointed to her room with a gesture of her hand, in order to explain what she meant.

"You see. All this is now in order, and I am in order too. It will be easy to stay this way too. I realized that something was lacking in my life, but now I have it."

She crossed her hands over her chest and lowered her eyes.

"I have it here in my heart, and no one can take it away from me."

"That's what I have come to do."

"But why?"

"Not only to free you from a ghost, but more than anything to do it for me. Things like this are either done because of love, or they are not done at all."

She looked at me with surprise.

"You mean... you love me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how much I regret that! Because I can't love you, I can't."

She said that with such kindness, with such a great desire to not hurt me! She let herself fall to her knees on the carpet. (Although, not imploring, but rather like someone who adopts a posture out of habit), and she stretched out her hands convincingly.

"You have to understand me. I am in love."

"With whom?"

"Don Juan, of course."

"Do you think you will see him again sometime?"

"Oh, no, and that doesn't matter! What makes me happy is the love I feel. How can I explain that? It's something new; it's discovering that living for someone else is how you really live."

"You are living for a ghost."

"And, even if it is, if it makes me happy..."

"You will find out one of these days that you have been deceiving yourself, that you have created a love that you don't feel, so that your loss of pride won't hurt you."

She laughed.

"No, I'm not proud. Neither am I so complicated. I simply love..., like anyone"

"Who?"

"I already told you!"

"You should know that this morning Leporello confessed to me that he and his master are two phonies. All they have told you, all that they have done, is a lie."

"The reality of what I have lived cannot be discussed."

"That's true. The reality of your admirable feelings, because they are admirable, just like you are admirable. However, the cause of those feelings..."

"The cause!"

She jumped up with extraordinary agility. And once on her feet, she looked at me energetically.

"Nobody knows the cause better than I, and nobody can tell me things about them! That they are called one thing, or something else..."

She stopped for a moment.

"After all, it was you who told me his name. As far as I am concerned, that would not have been necessary."

"The name is the least important thing. It's not the name I want to free you from, it what is behind it."

"A fascinating man. A man who I will never see again, but who has left me happy for the rest of my life. Is it from this, from this happiness you want to free me? But why?"

"Because I want to be the one who makes you happy."

My God! I was astonished by what I heard myself saying, by the tranquility with which I said it, of the certainty with which I looked at Sonya, and the audacity with which I discussed her objections. Something very strange must be happening to me. Normally I would have acted in a different way. I am rather timid, and especially, very considerate of others. I have always respected other's freedom, and I would never have dared to ask a woman to give up her happiness in order to increase mine.

None of what I was doing really belonged to me, and when I realized that, it made me ashamed inside, because my face on the outside also did not belong to me. I remembered the affirmation of Leporello. And yes, indeed, what if the soul of Don Juan had left his body in order to enter mine and fill me with this audacity and certainty? Well. It's evident that I never believed that an exchange of souls was really possible, but I did believe that some sort of suggestion might make me act in that moment like someone else. Thinking that, I felt a vehement desire to be only myself, to speak with my own words; I felt that way because my love of Sonya was real, and the collection of borrowed words humiliated me. However, I didn't see any way of changing that. Underneath my apparent certainty, was a feeling of desperation, similar to someone who is chained to a stone and shakes his chains only to see the steel links produce useless sparks. That was until, in the most obscure part of my mind that the invading soul had probably not reached, I had an idea.

"Listen to me, girl."

Saying that in such an unusual imperative and brusque manner surprised Sonya, and almost frightened her a little.

"What's happening to you?"

"I beg you, listen to me. There is something I must explain to you which may seem impertinent, but let that bother you, and answer me with sincerity. You'll understand the reasons for doing this in just a moment."

"Ask what you like."

"Two days ago, or yesterday, would you have responded to me with that docility?"

"I don't know."

"Please remember. Remember the impression I gave you, the idea you had of me until a few minutes ago. Didn't you consider me a poor devil that chance, or maybe fate, or something else, had placed in your life?"

"Certainly."

"Yesterday, and the day before, when we were together did you think that what we said and what we did, was nothing more than a farce?"

"No."

"And, a moment ago, when you opened the door for me in such a charming way and smiled at me the same way you smiled at Don Juan, why did you do that?"

"I don't know."

"Do you notice any difference between the man who was with you yesterday in search of Don Juan, and the man who is with you now?"

Sonya leaned back and took a few steps away from me, then looked me with growing surprise, about to shout before she held it back.

"You're not the same, right?"

"Yes. I am the same, in a certain way."

I rose up and I moved toward her, almost cornering her in the window. She looked at me with surprise, perhaps with fear. She started to show discomfort, or anxiety, or perhaps she was still unsure.

"Don't be afraid. My movements and their nature, as well as the tone of my voice, definitely did not belong to me, but the words are mine, as is my intention."

"What do you intend?"

"Above all, that you don't let yourself be deceived by me."

My answer was so startling the Sonya laughed.

"In that is the case, why do you want to deceive me?"

"I am not trying to do that. Everything I've told you so far is completely true: that I love you and that I am trying to free you from Don Juan. But the way in which it was said is... as if it was said by another person. Now listen to me and let me finish what I am trying to tell you. No more than a half hour ago I was told that the soul of Don Juan enters my body and gives it his abilities. I already know this seems absurd, but it is undeniable that, because of some kind of mysterious prompting, in those moments I have an audacity and even a charm that do not belong to me: the charm that made you smile at me, and the audacity that lets me talk to you like this, and reveal the truth, without the slightest hesitation. Even if I want to, I can't free myself from this influence, but at least I am able to tell you that it exists, and that I am not really like this, neither audacious nor charming, and nothing like Don Juan: I am rather timid and only partly sure of myself. In normal circumstances I would not have dared to confess that I love you. I am sure I would be able to truly win your heart; but what would happen when these abilities that don't belong to me abandon me,

and I am once more my real self? I am incapable of deceiving a woman, and yet, I would have deceived you..."

The power of my words had more effect than I would have expected because, as I was speaking, Sonya was captured by them and let herself be bound by something that accompanied them and, in spite of their audacity, was attracted to me. By the time I stopped speaking she had placed her hands on my arms. She held onto me with increasing force while her eyes lighted up, and her face glowed with a splendor I had never seen her have. As if now she loves me. And, it was so sudden and unexpected, it surprised me. But the appearance of this spontaneous and unexpected love coincided, with synchronic perfection, with the moment of my greatest enthusiasm, and the moment when I must appear more attractive. It was precisely that abnormality that made me lose confidence and made me fear that all this was anticipated and calculated. It occurred to me at once that Sonya was part of this farce, as one more phony, and that she was acting in accordance with Don Juan or, at least, with Leporello. Everything was clear then: not only that sudden unlikely love with which she was looking at me, but also what happened earlier: the cunning aspect of her words, and the literary nature of her actions. Sonya was an actress in a comedy in which I was the sincere, but ridiculous character. Evidently the woman of the gambling den was part of it too.

So I put myself on guard. I decided to go on playing my part, but conscious of what I was doing; and I would shout unexpectedly, which would create a different ending from what they expected.

"Extraordinary," Sonya said.

"Please, let go of me. It's not me who you are touching."

She let go and seemed perplexed.

"I don't understand you."

"That's clear."

"Aren't these my hands? And aren't these your arms? Weren't my hands on your arms while I was next to you? Didn't you just say that you loved me?"

"Yes."

"If you had continued with that incredible confession, wouldn't it have left me fascinated like I was a moment ago, until perhaps I fell into your arms?"

"Yes. And why?"

"Isn't that what your love makes you want?"

"Not like that."

"How then?"

"In such a way that you would never ask yourself if the one who wakes up by your side is the same one who went to sleep on your shoulder."

"It would always be me who is deceived, and not you."

"The thing is, I don't want to deceive you."

"What is it that you want, then?"

"That the morning of this first awakening, and the mornings that follow one by one, and each day a little more, you will discover that I am better than Don Juan, and especially, that I am different."

"Am I to understand that you are speaking to me about a continuing love, and of a prolonged relationship?"

"Exactly: of a marriage."

"Then aren't you talking to me about love?"

"What do you know about that!"

I moved away from her. She tried to follow me, but I stopped her with a gesture.

"Please stay there. Don't come with me. I am going to go away, and I will not come back to your house. At least, I will not come back until I can win your heart with my own weapons."

"But don't you understand that maybe then you won't win my heart? I am beginning to suspect that, the way things are now, you could offer me the same as Don Juan offered; but, the other..."

"The thing is, miss, I never intended to offer you what Don Juan offered."

I left her with her hand raised, uncertain, with a new question on her lips. I started to run out. Going down the steps, I felt myself falter, I felt cowardly and weak, uncertain and perplexed, like it always was. I was afraid I'd made a mistake. For a long time I walked through the streets of Paris, without knowing where I was, or where I was going. It was already quite late, when I was tired and hungry, and finally in control of myself. During that time I reviewed my life, I remembered things and judged them, and began to think I wasn't the failure that I thought I was; and it occurred to me that my few real virtues could dare to compete with great virtues of Don Juan.



I ate a cheap supper in some restaurant and then took a taxi to what was then my residence. When I got up calmly, I felt myself changing again, not into the bold, tough guy of a few hours ago, but one who once again was inundated with someone else's memories that filled my memory, like they must fill those of person who was dying. They inundated me and urged me, and pushed me to describe them. It never had occurred to me that I could do that, and, nevertheless, I did it: in the silence of that romantic room that smelled of unused perfumes, seated at a table at which perhaps a great poet who I always loved and was still there in my memory, had written. I Don't know how much time passed, like a psychic whose hand is guided from the other world, nor do I know when I stopped writing and went to bed. One morning when Lissette woke me up I ran to the writing table and found, lying on top of it, dozens of sheets of paper with with my handwriting. Their first lines said: "J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans." I borrowed the verse from my friend Baudelaire whom I met rather late: he had already written a beautiful poem about my entry into hell, and he planned a drama, that he wasn't able to write, about my death. For my friend Baudelaire, I was a boring and sad person, although likeable..." And, after this preamble and a few more lines, it talked about the Tenorios of Seville.

#### Chapter IV

Don Gonzalo

...and give me your word  
as I have given you mine.

**Don Juan**

I will gladly do that;  
because I am a Tenorio.

Don Gonzalo

I am.

Ulloa.

Tirso de Molina—EL CONVIDADO DE PIEDRA.

1. "Ja'i plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans." I borrowed the verse from my friend Baudelaire who I met rather late: he had already written a beautiful poem about my entry into hell and planned a drama that he never wrote about my death. For my friend Baudelaire, I was a boring and sad person, although likeable. But Charles was too, and his spirit was so discerning that I didn't dared reveal my identity, in spite of the fact that he was one of the few people who would have understood: I only did that so that he would continue believing I had died as he imagined, and my entry into hell had been like his verses say:

Mais le calme héros, courbé sur sa rapier,  
regardait le sillage et ne daigait rien

I would have entered like that, if it were possible. But my entry into hell was forbidden in the same inexorable way as my entry into heaven. I once gave Charles a hint that Don Juan had not died, and he told me that Don Juan carried death in his soul, that he wasn't the Wandering Jew, and that, after he had existed, he was surely in hell. The truth is, that the Don Juan imagined by Baudelaire was Baudelaire himself; and the death he attributed to me was his own. And also the certainty—or at least the fear—of his damnation made him think I was also damned. However, there is nothing more different than Baudelaire and I. The differences start at the beginning. I come from the most noble family of Seville, in whose conquest we assisted the Tenorios, and for which the King gave us a piece of land that suited our lineage which was that of the caballeros whose home had been in Galicia since time immemorial. On the other hand, Baudelaire was a

petit bourgeois who was not a member of the aristocracy; and since it wasn't in his blood, he had ennobled his spirit with the continuous exercise of elegance, wisdom, and disdain. In his way, he was a conquistador, and I am an inheritor.

There is also another difference; Charles lost his father when he was a child, and he was tied to his mother and rather fragile. My mother, doña Mencia Ossorio, died when I was born, and I lived during the years of my infancy under the authority of my father, who loved me in his way, but who never pardoned me for the death of my mother. Perhaps it is because of that that Charles spent his whole life wrapped in skirts and submissive to a woman's body, and why no woman has ever mattered to me. His experience of love was so different from mine that when we spoke of women we never understood each other, as if each of us were talking about something else. And still, Charles had experienced a deep and painful feeling of the human body.

One day I asked him how he imagined the beginning of Don Juan's life, and he told me that it probably wasn't important. I urged him to think about it, and several days later he told me: "It's that Don Juan loved his mother too much," so that speaks for itself and gives the explanation of his personal character. I told him: "Perhaps it was this," and I had him imagine a tortured and highly sensitive infancy, like his own.

I regretted the idiocy of that clear mind, I regretted the death of that exceptional man, and I also envied him. The day they buried him, someone by my side said that his idiocy and his death was God's punishment for his pride. I know it was not punishment, but divine mercy. With men like Charles, God clouds their intelligence when they are at the point where they understand life in its most secret essence, and it wasn't punishment for their audacity, but to prevent their fear of facing life in its true form. With Friedrich Nietzsche a few years later, the same thing happened.

It surprised me a great deal, though, that Charles had not given my origin the proper importance. The drama he thought of writing, was only about my death. In general, poets have usually been more attracted by that episode, only because of my boast that I had invited the Knight Commander to supper: a boast about whom I invited, and those that followed. In reality it wasn't a boast, although it may have been audacity. The most important thing wasn't the invitation, but a question. The invitation was extended, and it didn't seem proper for me to exclude Don Gonzalo only because he was dead. I have courtesy deep in my soul, like my second nature, and I can be bad sometimes, but never badly educated. And don't don't consider my good education esthetic, and even less as the remains of a formative deficiency: since later it will one day be put to the test, but in the disaster that followed there was no reason for courtesy to sink.

As I said, my father could not forgive me for the death of my mother when I was born; he loved her with the calm, deep love of honorable men, and had found in her that secret forbidden joy, the greatest pleasure of his life, and I had destroyed it. He was not happy to see me, and often when he encountered me somewhere in our house in Seville, he pretended not to see me and walked away. It would seem logical that there had been a feeling of guilt grown in my soul, but that never happened because no one ever planted it. I admired my father. I don't know if I loved him, but I respected him greatly, perhaps not just as Don Pedro, but as a Tenorio, a member of an admirable lineage that I also belonged to. So, from that respect and that admiration, something touched me too, and like him I was a Tenorio, so I had to take his place.

This was mattered most to my father: to make me his heir. He spoke to me of his blood and his cast, like it belonged to a large body, like that of an eminent and distinguished, pluralistic family, to which both of us belonged, and in whose acts we found the best of ourselves; it was a demanding family represented by a name that was governed by a law of restrictions. "Because of who you are, and for being who you are, you cannot do this, or that, or something else" For being who your are. For being a Tenorio. And complying with the narrow limits that the name required of me was my true virtue, and only through them would I be able to construct my happiness, if that mattered. Although that latter had never been given to me by my father because, after my mother passed away he never tried to be happy, and perhaps because, in the depths of his soul, he feared that she had died because of the sin of having been happy with him. Men like my father can aspire to be good, but never happy. For them, happiness is a lack of distinction, that only those with ordinary souls can aspire to, and if they sometimes achieve it, they must hide like leprosy of sinfulness.

My father told me, for example, that if we walk in the street, "Fix your eyes on those people with dark eyes and greenish skin who are agitated, talkative, and impassioned. Then fix them on yourself: you have white skin and blue eyes. They are moors or gypsies, and you are a Spaniard. You come from the North, and you are a conquistador. They can live by the will of God; but your life has a law, not one given by Kings, who are equal to us and don't touch our heart, but one that is

imposed on us by our dead, the law that our dead shout from death, that you can't hear yet, but I am here to inform you of." It was a law of pride. And I grew up being different from the gypsies and moors, equal to some men who often came to our house: men with white skin and also blue eyes. They patted my head, and called me Don Juan even though I was a child, and they considered me one of them.

Since we didn't approve of the King's wars, when I was ten I was sent to Salamanca. I suspect my father, eaten inside by the nostalgia of solitude, was not able to tolerate my presence; but those feelings did not torture his will, and, if he had thought it suitable, he would have kept me by his side until his death. However, he thought of Salamanca as the wisdom of a complimentary gift, by which this last Tenorio would become a man; and so I was a student at the most noble and privileged College, and just being part of it gave the right to have people in the street step aside and let me pass. I was assisted by a teacher who was also a priest without orders, to whom my father had given instructions. His name was Don Jorge, he spoke Greek better than Spanish, and he was an expert on avant-garde literature. When he died years later, and I was able to read the secret papers that he had left in a box on his desk, I discovered that he had been a scoundrel who led a double life and did not believe in God. Don Jorge not only taught me dead languages, and introduced me to the mysteries of Gongorian poetry that I studied in Salamanca, but was also the one who taught me religion.

Actually, Don Jorge was an honorable man, although in his own way. They paid him to teach, and he taught what he believed, and what he didn't believe. He believed in the reality of the aorists and told me of that. He didn't believe in the reality of the Credo, and he taught me that also. From Don Jorge I learned about God, Christ, and the Church. I knew them like invisible Realities to which I was connected in a way as mysterious as the dead of my blood, even if the type of connection was different. But in the same way that my father told me that he was related to the body of our dead, Don Jorge told me he was related to the men of Christ. But since the teachings of my father and Don Jorge came from different sources, no one tried to connect them, nor did I. They coexisted inside of me without contradiction or disagreement, not fused, but superimposed. My father had taught me the obligation of noble charity, and Don Jorge the Christian obligation of honor. I never suspected that someday those two bodies would collide, and it would be necessary for me to choose between the one that was given to me for honor, and the one that touched me for love.

After Don Jorge died, I hired the services of Leporello who also was a cheeky devil, by his own admission. Leporello studied with me, ate with me, and accompanied me; but at night, instead of deceiving me he told me frankly that he was going to go out on the town, which amused me, but did not tempt me. I don't know if it was my Christianity that saved me from unworthy nocturnal sins, or if it was the idea I had of myself that a man like me could not go out on a spree like a nobody. I never set foot in a pub in Salamanca, or secretly visited a prostitute, or visited bars, or went around on the sly. I reached the age of 23 as a virgin and, stranger still, without the presence or the body of a woman making me long for sex. Sometimes Leporello told me that some girl had looked at me, or some other girl was interested in me, but I just laughed at his comments. I was a studious lad, and in my studies and in some sports, I calmly passed through the days of my youth. What attracted me most, other than Theology and the work of some poets, was swordsmanship: no one in Salamanca could use a sword like I could. But in Seville they knew about my theology, not my swordsmanship. If they heard about it during the time of the Commander they might have laughed at it, or perhaps they might have wanted to assassinate me.

2. My relations with Don Gonzalo de Ulloa began shortly after the death of my father. They have never given Don Gonzalo the real importance he deserved, and the death that I gave him was never mentioned punctually. It even came to be interpreted as a disguised expression of the Oedipus complex. I cannot complain about my luck with poets, it's the wise men that I need to thank. Those who interpreted my father's death as a symbol—he was already in his grave—of the one I gave Don Gonzalo split hairs with a gratuitous hypothesis. No matter how much I searched through my records, I never found any evidence of sexual misconduct, nor did the psychoanalyst, who looked at my past without knowing my name. I killed the Commander, because he disgusted me. Today I would not have killed him, but my knowledge of men, as well as my tolerance, is greater than I had when I was twenty three and I have ceased to have illusions about the dignity of others that I had some time ago.

The intervention of old Ulloa was, as I said, merely instrumental, and not at the time of my supposed death—"colosse famntastique, grotesque et violent,"—but at the beginning of my

career, during the days after my father's funeral. They had postponed the funeral rites until I could attend them; it was a morning in March, in the middle of Lent, an especially hot morning. They had raised a tremendous catafalque whose severity and size did not look exactly right in the whiteness and the dimensions of the church that he had favored with his alms. All the posh people were there, as well as some scoundrels and thugs that my father normally assisted. The funeral lasted two hours; there was never any deceased whose soul had been commended to God with more elaborate music. When it was done, the miserably poor, the modest, the charitable associations, and the devout of this order, all received alms of gold; and every time my hand took money out of my bag, the friends of my father shivered as they heard the tinkling, as the coins disappeared from sight. I gave them out of obedience, not with the hope that they would serve as suffrage for the deceased. He had been such a good man they supposed he was already enjoying the glory of God. -"In all my life I have never seen such useless charity," a well-dressed fellow by my side whispered. I showed him my agreement with smile, and he told me he was the Commander, and he would come and see me.

Three pompous men were having a dispute regarding me by the exit. They wanted to console me and, though I don't know why, it had to take place in the respective homes whose patios were filled with fresh air. Also, each one of them was talking about their daughter whose age and beauty would be most capable of consolation. The Commander was lurking near them with a dubious chuckle, without butting in. I thought maybe it would free me of the harassment. I looked at him so he would approach me, and he did, but then only stopped and smiled. Until the efforts of the disputants finally ended and each one walked off by his side. Then Don Gonzalo waved goodbye, and he also left. I could finally go back home in silence with Leporello. I wasn't sad, but I had to control myself out of respect for the deceased. I told the servants that I would not receive any visitors. Since I had nothing else to do, I began to imagine the welcome the Tenorios would offer him in the heaven especially created for them, where glory consisted of the fullness of honor, and where there was also a place for those condemned by Divine Justice, whose law also was not ours. So my father, whose soul had been so severe in life, rose up and the other Tenorios welcomed him on foot, silent and solemn. The oldest took him by the hand and directed him toward an extremely uncomfortable easy chair where my father would be seated for eternity—next to my mother—with nothing more to do than rise from time to time, when another Tenorio who died came to have the honor of sitting next to him.

After midday, the heat became unbearable. I ordered them to open the windows of a room that looked out over a shady alley, and I sat down behind a lattice with a book in my hand, but didn't feel like reading it. Then Leporello came to tell me that the Commander of Ulloa wanted to visit me, and that he insisted that his relation with my father gave him the privilege of friendship. So I had no choice but to receive him.

Don Gonzalo de Ulloa, seen from close up and listened to carefully, seemed to be an actor, almost a great actor, but one that believed that living consisted of moving from the persona to the personality, and staying there to activate it. He was wearing some ancient black clothes on which the most important thing was a large "Cruz de Calatrava" which could be seen from almost anywhere, to let people know that he was the Commander. From my point of view, however, even more outstanding than the cross was his huge red face with thick lips, an enormous nose, and terrible eyes. I thought it was a face he had worked hard to create so that it would be appropriate for his lineage. It was the face of a loud braggart, solemn and representative, that would show his state of office, and his purity of blood. He had a very large body, and an even larger head; everything about him was big. The arms he stretched out to embrace me scared me, and the embrace left me breathless.

"My son, my dear Don Juan!"

His voice became a sob when he began to lament about the death of Don Pedro, and not because he had any doubts about his salvation, but because it made me an orphan, etc.

"Because, my son, your father was my only friend. And to what extremes! There were difficult times in which my family was only able to maintain the splendor of its lineage, thanks to his discreet generosity."

And so on. He kept on talking, walking around the room until, suddenly, he changed. He stopped in awe in front of a painting.

"Is that a Titian?"

"I don't know."

"It's a Titian, you only have to see it. As they might say, worth a fortune. And that one there is a Greco. And this one is a still life by that talented boy who is called Velazquez, and who has gone to Madrid. Your father knew how to collect paintings."

He began to examine everything, and said it was all excellent and worth a fortune: the furniture, the rugs, the carpet, and even the marble stones of the pavement.

"Your patrimony is worth two hundred thousand ducats, and you will have so many more pennies in interest. So now is the time to get married, immediately!"

"Right now I would rather refresh myself a bit. I am terribly hot."

"Then why have you stayed here on a day like this? On your ranch by the Guadalquivir river there would be a nice breeze. And the late afternoon there would be excellent."

He knew more about my ranches than I did: where the orange trees were, where the olive trees and the vines were, what time of year they would blossom, and who bought the crops.

"That place next to the Guadalquivir was a recreational ranch where your father liked to spend the afternoon on a hot day like this. It's a great place. Why don't we go there?"

I wasn't able to avoid it. Right away he instructed the drivers, and prepared the trip. Leporello looked at us, teasingly, without knowing what to say. I only smiled. What else could I do?

"Let's go, let's go right away, before the afternoon ends, because it's best to get under those lemon trees while the sun is still shining. It takes only a half hour to get there."

Yes, a half hour, past the bridge of Triana. The Commander and I were in the car with the sun shades down. He fanned himself with his sombrero. I had bared my chest, but I could still feel sweat running down my neck. We heard Leporello and the coachman, in the driver's seat, curse the heat, the sun, and the trip.

When we got to the ranch there was still an hour of sunlight left. The house had been build on the top of a hill whose slope slid down to the shore. It was a rather small house with two stories whose walls were covered with windows and green vines. The interior was dark and cool. I sat down in an armchair in the corner of the hallway. I got myself in shirtsleeves and asked the Comendador to do the same thing.

"Are you sleepy, boy?" he asked me. "Take a nap if you want. I'll look around to see what I can find."

I did sleep, in fact. When I woke up the sun had gone down, and you could hardly see. The Commander was sitting in front of me under a candelabra, with his face looking quite pleased.

"What riches, boy! You don't know what you have here! What there is in this house is worth those thirty thousand ducats. All of silver, and all of the highest quality! You're the richest boy in Seville."

I had my eyes half open and was smiling as I listened to him. For the Commander the things of this world had value because of their price. He calculated the furniture, the tapestries, the crockery, and even the kitchen utensils, all of which he felt were exceptional. I began to get tired of the verbosity of that man who had made the mistake of evaluating everything, because considered himself an appraiser. When I couldn't take it any longer, I implored him to continue inspecting and, if he had a piece of paper, make me an inventory of the things he found, and with this I went out in the garden.

It was getting dark now, and the old Guadalquivir river down below attracted me. The water was flowing and I kept looking at it. It was clear and produced small ripples. You could see the pebbles on the bottom, and the little scraps carried by the current. I decided to take off my sleeve and stick my arm in the water. How delightful to feel the eddies on my skin and to hear the little noise of the ripples in the middle of the flowing water. I asked myself what all of that meant and why it pleased me so much, but I couldn't find an answer. According to theology, happiness in an indication of man in the presence of God; but here there was only my arm, and the water, and the steady noise of the ripples. Well, there was also the moon that was beginning to shine, and there was the air, and the flowers. I still found no answer, and it didn't really bother me, because the sensation in my arm continued and spread to my entire body, perhaps to my whole person. There came a moment when I felt myself a continuation of the river, as part of the air, and merged with the aroma of the flowers... As if roots were emerging from my self and they were trying to blend with what was around me and turn me into one immense being. Then my happiness reached it's peak, and my body was filled with a strange shiver.

After I returned to my house and told Leporello and the Commander about it, the Commander asked me:

"What was it like?"

"Something like a rapid tingling."

"And, did it last very long?"

"Until I realized that I was not the water, or the air, or the aroma. That I was only me, Don Juan Tenorio. Then I felt profoundly discouraged."

A burst of solid intelligence flickered in the eyes of the old fellow, and his face shook with the delayed beginning of a happy victory. Surely he was looking at me while he calculated the value of a silver plate.

"My dear Juanito! Will you let me hug you?"

Once again I felt myself overwhelmed by his long arms.

"What is the cause of this new enthusiasm?"

"What you have told me convinces me that you are still an adolescent, and that I have many things to teach you, so you will be a fully grown man."

He pulled me toward a bench and made me sit down beside him.

"What happened to you by the river happened to me years ago, and it also happens to everyone else. And in your case we must give thanks to God it happened in time. After receiving sacred orders, it would have been a disaster."

The truth is, I was confused, and it probably showed in my face, or perhaps in some kind of involuntary stupidity.

"Look, so you can understand the effect, I am going to explain what happened to you. I mean, what has happened to you for the first time and keeps you in suspense, without knowing how to explain to yourself what it means. Don't you feel like getting on a horse and galloping, galloping all night long in any direction and then, when it's morning, go and sleep for a long time in some flowery meadow?"

"Yes. That's right."

"And don't you also feel extremely generous, capable of giving your fortune to someone who asks for it, and even your life, if necessary?"

"Well, yes. I also feel like that."

"And hasn't it happened to you that for the first time you feel alone, or rather, incomplete, as though they have taken away a part of you, or as though you have discovered that you are lacking?"

I answered yes, because he had made a bull's eye with all of those shots.

"All that is what I feel. But why?"

"Because nature is reclaiming its rights, my son. Nature is an old tyrant, under whose power we fall, sooner or later."

I remember what I had learned about theology, so I made use of it to respond to him, to crush him and make it possible.

"The Grace of God has rescued us from nature, and helps us live supernaturally."

That made him laugh, a strident, gigantic, bombastic laughter; and when he did that he opened his mouth from ear to ear, and his entire face seemed to be only a smiling mask.

"Yes, yes, the Grace of God! Maybe you can go without eating? Win indulgences to see if you can use them as a substitute for fried potatoes and eggs."

After that he became serious, and he grabbed me by the shoulders.

"Nature waits, crouched and calm, because because it knows that no one can fool it. It has our life and our death, in its hands, and when it wants it plays one of its jokes, like the one it played on you. I don't say that you can't try to free yourself from it, until you end up in the desert like those old hermits. But that doesn't help. Even in the desert it has played deep jokes on saints."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"I could explain it, or perhaps better, I point out how you could do that yourself."

"Go ahead and do it."

"Perhaps it's not convenient."

"Then, why did you offer to do it?"

"I felt bad about your ignorance, and I thought that a cursory explanation would be sufficient. But the truth is that with certain things one cannot speak clearly when of the parties is ignorant."

He made a strategic pause and looked at me out of the corner of his eye.

"Maybe sometime later..."

"Why not now?"

"The death of your father has just happened."

“What does the death of my father have to do with this matter? He is in heaven, I am still here for the time being.”

He turned to me.

“You have to be careful what you do.” he said with benevolence. “If you don’t, what will they say about you in Seville?”

“I couldn’t care less about what people in Seville think of me, Commander. My life is transparent and it is only mine.”

“In that case...”

There were probably other words that he meant to say after hearing what I said. But he got up and said:

“...permit me to give the orders to the driver.”

He told them to get the car ready. When we were inside, he stuck his head out the window and shouted:

“To the Eritaña Inn!”

3. We didn’t say a word. I felt nervous and, at the same time, disturbed. I looked through the window at the trees, the vineyard, and the white farmhouses surrounded by the dim light of dusk. The Commander was breathing heavily. At the end of the drive, when we saw some lights, he said to me:

“There is a moral responsibility that I reject. In these cases one has to walk very carefully, although very attentively, and it shouldn’t surprise anyone that a sitting gentleman is trying to refresh himself.”

The carriage stopped. Some servants sitting under the grape-vines of the Inn approached, and, when they saw who we were, they gave us many bows. The Commander asked them to notify the Innkeeper, who came right away. They talked to each other, and I knew I was the theme of their conversation, because I saw the face of the Innkeeper examine me from the distance and agree. He came over to me and wanted to kiss my hand, and was happy about my arrival for being the son of who I was.

Before he died Don Pedro never went to his ranch without stopping at the Inn, either on the way there, or on his return. He often was able to distract himself here from his melancholy feelings which must have been numerous, judging by the little he said.,

Good. That flattery finally led me to a door and a stairway hidden from sight, then to a room with a balcony above the garden and the river. Seville could be seen in the distance, on the other side of the river, under an open sky lit up by the moon. I went out on the balcony and continued to look around. Meanwhile the Commander was preparing some refreshments. When he was done he came up to me with a cup in his hand.

“A swallow of sherry.”

“I’m not thirsty.”

“You mean, wine is only to quench your thirst”

“Well, I don’t usually drink wine.”

“Drink this with a single swallow, and then attend the nuptials of your body with one of the few things that are worthwhile in this world. You will immediately understand that, although you hadn’t realized it, you were thirsty, with a very ancient thirst.”

Under his menacing look I took a swallow and savored it.

“It’s quite good.”

“Drink all of it.”

It was like a sudden burst of fire, like a happiness that was ignited in my entrails. I handed the Commander the empty cup, and he took it and walked off with it. It wasn’t a good idea for me to drink any more until after eaten something, and so he went out to order some rashers.

Pots of carnations were hanging on the balcony. I grabbed one and smelled it. It seemed like the odor was part of that aroma that filled me next to the river an hour ago. But by the river it was silent, and here I heard voices of men and woman who were chatting in the garden. Farther away I heard someone playing a guitar, and someone singing a song. The air was full of odors, the night was warm, and a thick mist rose up from the watery ground. The wine was spreading its effect through my veins, and warming my head. Everything was beautiful and stimulating because, again, I was beginning to feel that my life was moving toward things, wanting to enter and merge with them. In a nearby tree a bird was singing, and the the song grazed my skin until it was painful. A sigh rose from my throat...

Time stopped passing, as if everything fit together inside a motionless crystal in which the moon, the bird, and I were immersed. Until someone knocked on the door and broke the spell. I said: "Come in!" with disgust, because they had snatched away my happiness. I saw a young girl come in after opening the door with her shoulder, because she had a tray in her hands. She left it on the table and looked around until she saw me and then approached.

"Don Juan."

Then my ears were hit by a voice filled with traditional Flamenco singing. It struck my ears, as if instead of saying "Don Juan!" she had told me: "I want to die!"

"What's going on?"

"I am what you have waiting for."

"A yes, the rashers of ham. Put them anywhere you want."

She didn't move. Her back was to the light, and I could only see the silhouette of her body.

"Do you want something?"

"Not I. You. That man told me..."

"What man?"

"The old man with a cross."

"Ah! The Commander sent you."

"He came to the place where I was, he squeezed my breasts and my legs, and then he sent me here so I could serve you."

I couldn't figure out how that girl could serve me. I left the balcony and walked into the room where the light was turned on. She followed me.

"Do you play a guitar?" I said.

"Why do you ask that, sir?"

"I just heard one played in the garden, and it seemed like they were playing it for me."

"Order a guitarist to come, and here I am," she said with disgust.

"You can't do that?"

"I'm not here for that. I'm a prostitute."

She must have seen the expression of surprise on my face, because she added right away:

"Don't you know what that is?"

"Yes, I have an idea..."

I moved forward toward her. She looked at me with professional calmness, and she looked me over as if she was evaluating me. She must have looked at the Commander the same way, like a piece of furniture or a painting before calculating its price in gold.

"Please sit down, Miss."

"Please, sir, you don't have to be so polite. They just talk to me and call me by my name. And to get me to sit down, they give me a push, and then do something else."

"What is your name?"

"Marianna."

"That's a pretty name. And you are too."

In fact she was, like those prostitutes in photographs. With dramatic beauty, with a bored sneer on her lips, and a look of trembling desperation in her eyes.

I pushed her gently so she would sit down.

"Have you come willingly?"

"I have come because that's the way I earn a living. A dog way. You have to put up with some things, and some jerks! The one from Calatrava struck me with a sword to see if I had stiff thighs."

"Does that mean you are not doing this job willingly?"

Marianna shrugged her shoulders.

"I've been stuck in this business for a long time, and it had to end up like this. No one gave me a chance to do anything else."

"And what would you like to do, if you weren't a prostitute?"

"Maybe sell flowers in Triana."

"If they gave you money, would you do that?"

"Look, sir; women in this business either die in it, or they put us with the Penitents. That's the way it is, you know?"

"You mean to say that your job lacks appeal, and the only way you could avoid it is to become a nun?"

"That's about right, sir."

"Nevertheless, it gives you pleasure at times, isn't that?"



“The pleasure is theirs. We endure it like a piece of dead flesh.”

My lack of experience, and my curiosity, made all this rather monotonous. However, something happened without my realizing it. I liked that poor girl. Her likeability originated, probably, in the hidden part of her soul, while she responded to me, and while she listened to me. And now I am asking her stupid things, and she answers me. Until suddenly she jumped out of her seat and found another one on my knees.

Since, by my own choice, I often witnessed many similar operations, I am now in a position to have a better understanding of what had happened to Marianne. But, then I didn't really know. My ears were not listening. A stream of blood rose up like vertigo, and I let myself be swept astray. However, it didn't come from outside, but from the lips of Marianne that awakened it in me. It was like a passionate desire to unite with her and, even more, to sink myself in her. The desire I felt earlier on the balcony came back again. I wanted to lose myself in her and, through her, drop into the world of things, of everything which after that afternoon was present and inciting enticing, the air, the moon, the aroma of flowers, the music, and the night. Embracing her with my arms, I wanted to encompass everything. They were like trees whose plentiful branches were sinking into the depths of my life. What enormous jubilation I felt in my heart before that naked body! As if all Creation had taken place again inside it, as if the body of Marianne were an instrument of God.

With her eyes and lips half-open, Marianne had come back and seemed to be listening to herself. Before, she was lively, she had caressed me, and each caress had stimulated my body—my arms, my hands, my cheeks—as if she had been sleeping, and Marianna's hands has just awakened from a deep dream; and I had witnessed my own awakening with astonishment. Each new vibration was recognizable, and my physical self was the same. I had a body that served me to live. Timidly, I had caressed her too, and the contact of my fingers with her forehead, her eyelids, and her neck, had revealed, little by little, the truth of another body that was soft, warm, and active. Everything that my fingers discovered was new and different, attractive and disturbing. Touching a woman wasn't the same as seeing her; it was something else, whether beautiful or nice, or simply terrifying, and was a mystery to me. After seeing and feeling her before without realizing, now, in a moment of lucidity, when I began to understand what I was looking for in the body of Marianne, a blast of fear shook me, because none of that was expected or described so that its complete reality, with all its terror, could fit into words.

I don't think there is anything in the world in which a man can have more hope, or can cause more deception. Because I have never before felt myself more locked in the limits of my body than in those final moments. I had a woman in my arms who was moaning with happiness, but with hers, not mine. The burst of pleasure had become locked inside both of us. Without that huge feeling, desired but not achieved, my arms would end up on her impenetrable body. We were both locked and distant. Fortunately it was quick. I felt cheated and sad, and I suddenly felt like kicking her out of the bed. I didn't do it, because it wasn't her fault, and because I am a gentleman.

Then it happened that, little by little, Marianna came back from her private paradise, she hugged me and began to talk to me enthusiastically. Before she had only told me vulgar things. Now she managed to give me back my spirit, placing me again in a state of vertigo, and making me hope for what I had wanted before; the desire for eternity entered my heart, and my spirit was filled with the desire to surpass my limits and lose myself in Marianne. I wanted to feel her pleasure, and make it one with mine; I wanted her blood and mine to be the same. And none of that was just a passing fancy, but the foundation of my desires, blossoming from them like a spontaneous rose.

Once again I was deceived, but this time without anger. I don't know why my discontent was mild, perhaps because it wasn't complete, perhaps because within the discontentment there was something new that encouraged me. I went out on the balcony. Part of the full moon was still visible on the horizon, and on the other side dawn was lighting up the waters of the river. Seville was still sleeping in the shadows. A strong odor rose from the ground. I absorbed it avidly, with the desire to mix it with my blood and always feel it there. Perhaps it was the soul of the earth but, in any case, it was an impenetrable soul.

I sat down astride the steel railing and looked around at things that were reappearing with the light; the things nearby and farther away revealed their location: those in the sky and those on the earth, those that were visible and those that were sensed. I had been indifferent to them for many years and now they were here and attracted me. How beautiful was the dawn! Like the golden body of Marianne, now calm and quiet, her lips half-open and smiling. In some part of my soul something asked me for the meaning of the body of a woman, and in that same place, burning like a hot coal, was the trail of a mystery laid down that night.

4. I don't know how long I was like that, with one leg hanging out of the balcony. For watches and clocks, not long; for the experience of my soul, almost an eternity. As everyone knows, these events are especially intense, an abnormal intensity that exceeds human capacity. To explain them we use similes of extension. There is an eternity in the distance, in the width, and up above; but there has to be another that only mystics know of, like the infinite prolongation of a spot in the feeling of depth, so that it continues to be a spot that is neither far away, or wide, but immense. A spot like the one I was in while my left leg was hanging down; attracted by the dawn and exhilarated by it, I left that spot and would have rediscovered the unknown path to ecstasy if, in that exact moment, someone had not called to me.

"Don Juan."

It wasn't Marianne. The poor girl was still very quiet, enjoying her motionless internal happiness. It was not Leporello either, since he was sleeping it off in some corner of the inn. Even less could it be the Commander who didn't know where I was. But I recognized the voice that, when I was a child, just by saying my name could transform my hesitation and my anxiety to security, even if it was my fear of the bogymen, or a mortal sin. It was the voice of my father, reminding me, just by hearing it, that a member of the Tenorio clan could have no fear.

"Don Juan.,"

It came from far away, and with it a figure that had always been familiar, also the name. Slender, a little stooped, but still in good shape. He rested his feet in the early morning air, just like before on the tiles of my house, with gallantry, almost with majesty. As he approached, the splendor of dawn seemed to recede making things fade away and, in a remote place of gloomy space a throng of figures waited.

"Don Juan."

He was now next to me, and he wasn't smiling. He offered me his hand, and I gave him mine.

"Come with me."

"Am I dead?"

"No."

"Then...?"

"Come with me."

He gave orders like before. Not against my will, but against my self. Because my self obeyed him and let itself be moved by his order, without my will having anything to do with the movement. Not even my entire self, because when I felt myself ordered, I looked backward and was able to see my body on the railing of the balcony with the left foot hanging in empty space. Mine was a self without a body although its equal, a pure transparent form like that of my father. It was my own phantom that was following the phantom of my father on a path through the air, guided by his hand toward a place where a crowd of shadows waited for me.

I recognized them immediately and was excited. There were all the Tenorios in an assembly; and the place where they waited for me must be their own private paradise, perhaps part of hell. They all were there, starting from the beginning with a Spanish farm worker who assassinated the abbot of San Benito and stole his horse, then served the king in the war, gaining honor and land and took the name of the place where he was born. He still had the appearance of a rough outlaw and the weapons of war with which he had died; leaning on a lance, his tense blue eyes watched me, while his mouth twisted with a half-smile that could have been curiosity, or scorn. He seemed to be the leader, and by his side were his descendants, six complete centuries of descendants gathered by careful selection in a semicircle in the order of generations. There were some soldiers, some friars, and three or four doctors of law. Standing out in the first was Admiral Don Jufre who, they say, died on the bridge of his galley. A pair of them in the second group carried red rockets. There were also many women, some beautiful some ugly, married and un married, widows and nuns. And several children, who died young, but were just as obvious as the others. I chuckled now when I recognized them, but I also laughed at my idea of finding myself one of them. If God had made me and then surrounded me with His angels, it didn't make me feel favored; because in my heart, my ancestors were above angels. The fault is not mine. That is what they made me think ever since I was a child. And I considered their anger more fearsome than that of God. God only sent sinners to hell, but the anger of the dead Tenorios produced dishonor.

It was strange. They all looked similar to that libertine whose blood and name we shared. But the same features spread from one to another, becoming softer and more beautiful. The faces thinned, the hands lost their size and their thickness, and the bodies emitted by that big ape shrunk until they became fragile and slim. Our common great-great-grandfather had a large head, a short

chin, and the protruding eye-ridges like the roofs of his eyes; but the descendants nearest me had broad, intelligent foreheads, arched eyebrows, and powerful jaws. The noses, of course, showed some difference because our great-great-grandfather had such a small one that there was little nasal flesh that he could bequeath us. With so many common features my Tenorio ancestors used their noses like an extreme bulwark of individuality to distinguish themselves from each other; and so many family nicknames based on the nose were used, for example for Don Diego, the Snub, or Don Froilán, the Hooked.

I saw my features in all of them and I seemed like a summary of all those distinctions. The evolution ended with me, and with me the refinement was completed. When children were born after me, the degeneration would begin. But I was the peak and, when I understood that, I began to feel more sure of myself, although not so much that there wouldn't be a few weaknesses.

My father had ended up in the center of the ring.

"I present you my son, Don Juan."

I bowed my head, lower than I would have done before the king, slightly lower than if I found myself in front of God, and they raised their right hand. Something in my heart trembled and I was still a bit disturbed, because those men were infallible judges whose jurisdiction over my actions was always recognized, I who was, in some ways, above those who had come to this world in order to produce me. If they called me, it was so that I could be their representative. I did have to respect their authority but without lowering myself; as if I told them: "I am so important that all of you are needed to judge me." They would have scorned a submissive, bland, young man, a weak, trembling young man.

I turned to my father. "What is this: a judgment of faults, or a presentation to society?"

My father didn't answer. He let go of my hand and went back to his place in the group by the side of a woman looking at me with tenderness, who must be my mother. When I saw her, I gave her a bow and smiled at her. She was pretty, and there was something fascinating about her. Right away I could see that her nose was the origin of mine, the only thing that she gave me, because my mother didn't belong to the Tenorio clan and she didn't have the same pride, the arrogance, or the energy. Now that I am able to understand that she was one of those special women who, by dint of the aristocracy, came to scorn all mundanity and still have a human spirit, I realize that she could not have given birth to me easily.

One of those in-laws left the semicircle and stood close to me. He didn't look like someone to be taken lightly. Along with the mutual traits of the others, he was undoubtedly a man of great astuteness, and a certain sense of humor. Everything in his face was solemn, but his smile undid the solemnity, as if he was making fun of it; that opened the door to my understanding, but it was not an easy door to open. That man must laugh at those who were clumsy and, probably, at those who were solemn; and from that moment I was afraid he would laugh at me.

"Good, young man, good!" he said to me. "So are you enjoying yourself? Only at first, of course. And, like any Tom, Dick, or Harry, after your first spree you find yourself a little perplexed. Well, don't worry. We have brought you here to give you a better understanding of yourself."

I was very annoyed by his air of superiority; his foxy smile disconcerted me.

"Is this the customary thing? Each time a Tenorio commits his first sin, is he called to the counsel of the dead?"

"No, not at all. This is the first time that we are meeting for something like this."

"Am I to understand that they are doing me this honor?"

"No, no. Nothing like that. Considered as a person, you are one more Tenorio. For us, it is important that you are our descendant and that you are faithful to your blood. What in you might be different, how should I put it?, as an individual, doesn't bother us."

"Then?"

"We have brought you here, in fact, because of your sin, but not because it was against God, since that is not something that concerns us, but because of certain circumstances that convert it into a sin against us."

I had no idea where all that was coming from. I didn't know what to say to him. Only in order to not remain silent, which would make me look bad, I pointed at my father.

"There is Don Pedro Tenorio, thanks to whom, I can count myself a legal member of such an illustrious company. My father taught me that my life must be in accord with two laws: the law of God, and our law. And, in the special code awarded by Providence to all Tenorios, there is no rule that says I shouldn't sleep with a prostitute. Or at least, none that I know. I was never told that by my father, who I lived with until I was ten, nor by the pedagogue in whose hands I was put then

until I was twenty. If all these men could convince me that they have never committed that sin, I would believe it, although that would be difficult. But, meanwhile..."

"A formidable burst of laughter came from my great-great-grandfather and, laughing from one ear to the other, he started to pound on my chest.

"Great, boy, that's great! That's exactly right! Now you have me who, for twenty years, only slept with women soldiers. What would the military be without them?"

The man stopped smiling; he turned to me and bowed.

"Thanks so much, sir, for that necessary explanation."

He turned to me with a rapid movement, and he extended his hand with a long finger that was pointing directly at me.

"It doesn't matter to us that you have slept with a prostitute. We have all done that, and no one has been accused of a sin. But, there is this; we all did that with our own will. However you..."

He came closer and his big finger was almost in my nose.

"You let yourself be deceived, you let yourself become involved with the Commander of Ulloa. You were a toy in the hands of that fraud, like a little child he was playing with. While you were involved in your adventure with Marianne, he was laughing at you, and he considered you a piece of cake."

It felt like I had been insulted. I felt my blood boil and my face turn red. He must have noticed it.

"But, why?" I asked urgently.

"Because, for the Commander of Ulloa, you were nothing more than wealthy rich kid that he was planning to fleece."

It occurred to me that a theatrical act might reestablish my equilibrium that was upset by that accusation. So I raised my hand and grabbed his, gently pushing it away from my face.

"I already knew that. In order to figure out the intentions of Don Gonzalo you don't have to dig all of the dead out of their graves. I find him a little prone to exaggeration."

"Perhaps you don't understand the magnitude of the offence. Perhaps you don't know that the Ulloa are below us, a poor retinue, of bowmen when we already were gentlemen. In any case, we will have to wash off the offense with blood, but dealing with it in an equal way (in the debatable case that someone is equal to us), in order to settle it. But with the Ulloa the only settlement is death. You have to kill Don Gonzalo."

"Kill him?"

"Yes. Not murder him, you understand, but put a sword in his hands, and kill him with yours. Except if he's a better swordsman than you, of course he could kill you. I warn you that in that case you wouldn't be seen as a hero by us, but you wouldn't be seen badly either. But your reputation would be safe from disgrace."

"Yes, I see."

"Of course," he went on, "our requirement does not affect your freedom. Yes, dear descendant! We respect the freedom of everyone. But you must understand that, if you refuse to kill the Commander, if you reject our demand, we will no longer consider you one of us."

He stretched out his arm and pointed at the semicircle of ancestors.

"If you were able to know all your ancestors up close, you would know that there are some who are lacking. Luckily there are not many of them. They are those who, with scruples, cowardice, or laziness, refuse to fulfill our requirements. Some are in hell, others in heaven; but there are none of them among those who are now here, because we reject them. And a Terrorio can lose his soul, but never the respect of his dead. Our respect for you, from all of us is, what is decided here now."

"But," I asked him, "aren't this type of vengeance a little old-fashioned? I thought that now the thing is more simple, and that cases like this are resolved with punches, or a slap in the face.

He let his hand drop down.

"That's not a bad start. Punch the Commander. His death will come later."

He turned to the others.

"I suppose that there will be no problem if the vengeance starts with some punches."

As a group, they responded with agreement, that it would be fine. Then he bowed to me.

"The way the fight starts doesn't matter, as long as it ends with death. You can say no, and give your reasons. We're not in a hurry, and I am sure that these ladies and gentlemen will be glad to hear what you have to say. We know that you are smart and you speak with elegance."

"Thank you."

He went back to the group and was lost among them. I remained alone in the empty space and, for a moment, I felt helpless. The closest faces showed interest, but none sympathy, and certainly

not love. Right then I had the intuition that the Tenorios had never loved, and that the absence of love had increased their strength. Not even my father was looking at me with tenderness. They seemed like a regiment in which the all were captains and had gathered in order to judge the misstep of the youngest captain with regard to their requirements.

I had loved them, and I had felt lovingly attached to their greatness, and their imperfections, but at that moment I understood that love was out of the question, and that it had been the cause of my hesitations and weakness. I made an effort to remove from my heart any sentiment that was not related to duty, in order to work with them as if I had never loved them. When I did that I felt great relief. Without love, things were much easier.

I greeted them again.

"I want to tell you that I will kill the Commander. Yes, I will certainly kill him. I don't know yet if it will be with blows or with something else, but I will kill him. However, there is also something else I would like to state.

I paused for a moment and looked for the place where the clergymen were.

"I especially want to talk to you, because I am going to talk about God, and you are His representatives here."

At that point, the man I spoke to earlier interrupted me.

"That's not necessary. Our law is not the law of God, but of our blood. It's a worldly law."

"Nevertheless, we are Christians. I still am, anyway. And since I never believed that the law of God and mine could be in conflict... Because, if I kill the Commander, I commit the sin of murder."

One of the bishops nodded with agreement, but the other man answered me.

"A sin is mollified by repentance."

"Does that mean that I must kill the Commander for the purpose of regretting it afterward?"

"Exactly."

"And isn't that dishonesty?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Christian life is full of dishonesty like that. There are many things that God forbids that we are obliged to do, without choice. But we know that with repentance it will be resolved. God will pardon it."

"Should I also think that if I repent for not killing the Commander, I will be pardoned by you?"

"We do not pardon. Pardon..." he hesitated, and then smiled, "pardon is a divine act that, for us, is prohibited. We are inexorable, because we are human."

"I am like that with myself too."

"For us, you are just fine."

"For that reason, I can't commit a homicide with the purpose of repenting it afterward. It would be hypocrisy, or cheating. But who could be such an imbecile that he would play the part of God with an ace up his sleeve? God knows the truth of my heart. If I plan to do that, I hear Him telling me: "If you kill the Commander, you will shut yourself off from me."

"And didn't you hear those words when you were sleeping with a prostitute tonight? Because it is also written: "You will not fornicate."

"God must have been silent then, or, at least I didn't hear Him. I was blinded by my blood."

"You can also be blinded when you fight with the Commander and kill him."

"I will not be blind again."

I said that with a sort of dramatism that came out of me spontaneously and ought to cause quite an effect on the group of listeners; but the listeners didn't seem moved, and they probably didn't notice the distinction."

"I will not be blinded again," I repeated. "It is one of the things that my rules will veto from now on."

"We are not that demanding. We wouldn't prohibit your feelings, or for you to lose your head. It's not wrong to do that, and at times it's convenient. You see, if tonight you hadn't been deeply moved, we would be less benevolent to you. Emotion is your defense. You were so enthused by pleasure that you didn't realize you had been a victim of a fraud."

"Only of one?"

"As far as we know. And of course we know all those things."

"Yes, the things that concern you. But not what only concerns me.

"This evidently concerns you too."

"Agreed. But everything that happened tonight is linked. You can tell the difference between the things that matter to you, and those to which you are indifferent. For me, it is not possible to

separate them. If I throw out one thing, the others follow after it. Listen to me. The Commander of Ulloa tried to defraud me. The old fellow does what he wants; according to you, he wants to fleece me. But he has also humiliated me without knowing that, because until a few hours ago I was chaste, but now I no longer am with a prostitute. The Commander thought that my pleasure would distract me or weaken me, or simply make me stupid, but my personal humiliation could not matter to him; the humiliation I felt by myself could only matter to the single Witness of what I felt, and He is the master of events; they come from Him and return to Him. So I have to ask myself: why did the Lord want me to be humiliated? I was virtuous, my body was pure, thanks to the grace of God; but it never occurred to me to be humble, or achieve purity by my own efforts. The truth is that I never even thought about the purity of my body, or in my body. I've had it for twenty three years, I have used it and it has never given me pain, or pleasure, and not anxiety or harm either. I've been living without feeling like it was there and was trying to travel in the direction of holiness, but now it turns out the body exists, and serves for something. One must count on it by the will of God who was always aware of it, while I had forgotten it. The Lord needed to have me discover it, and he used Don Gonzalo for that purpose. It was like telling me: "Hey, boy, that body is yours, and I gave it to you for a reason."

I stopped talking and looked around. A loud burst of laughter broke out after what I had said. The man I had spoken with earlier came back and embraced me.

"Bravo, lad! You are a great sophist! Why don't you become a lawyer; you'd have a successful career, I can assure you."

I pulled away from him violently.

"You call what I have suffered sophism?"

"Sophism for the lengthy analysis. Sophism for joining two things that can't be joined. Sophism for turning the hierarchy of truth into a hypothesis. But that's fine. It shows you're clever, and above all, you speak with effective poignancy. Now, you must analyze your own reasoning and then destroy it. That way you'll calm down."

"I can't do that."

"Why?"

"Because I'm honorable, as you insist I must be. My conclusion is that I must kill the Commander because he defrauded me and break with the Lord who, from the heavens, ordered the fraud. Or else fall on the ground and beg the Lord to forgive me and accept his orders, and then forgive the Commander. And not stop there, but convert the rest of my life into a penitence, an atonement, or else a sin."

The man laughed again, but less heartily, and looked at me without any sign of scorn in his eyes, but rather, with a sign of respect.

"I'm starting to realize that you are one of those radical types for whom there is only one card on the table, and only one bet in life."

"I am what you have made me, and now I cannot change. And especially now, after what has happened."

"Well, we'll see; aren't you capable of finding a way of thinking that lets you separate one thing from another, to go ahead and kill Don Gonzalo and then reconcile yourself with God?"

"Yes, but I wouldn't believe in it."

"It's enough that God believes it."

"Are you asking me to hide the ace up my sleeve? Can't you see that it is stupid to do something like that with God?"

The man twisted his hands.

"You're desperate."

"Only consistent. Tonight I see exceptionally well, and I am starting to work out an agreement with myself. I can see more clearly and farther away than any of you who have never asked why God did the things He did, because you have endeavored to remake them the way you want. But tonight I have had to ask myself. Tonight..."

I interrupted what I was saying.

"What I am going to say is rather harsh, but could the ladies withdraw themselves?"

"It's all right with me," the man said.

But the women had begun to whisper to each other, and one of them who was an abbess stepped forward timidly, and spoke in their name. She was a lady of great presence, and also quite beautiful. Her headdress fit her well, but the blonde hair she used to have was missing.

She approached me and stepped in front of the man who was there.

"We would rather not leave. We are interested in what your say, Don Juan. Besides we are on your side."

She looked at me with her large blue eyes, a lengthy look, and then her airy fingers caressed the tip of my chin. After that she ran away.

Her caress moved me, just like the look from her eyes had. I felt upset for a moment, but I took control of myself.

"That's all right. With the permission of the ladies."

But again I interrupted what I was saying.

"But couldn't at least my mother leave us? I don't like to speak of these things in front of her."

Nobody answered me, but I saw how the ghost of my mother vanished after throwing me a kiss.

"If you had been able to follow my inner thoughts tonight; if you had been able to see something more than how Don Gonzalo was acting, you would have noticed how I passed with enthusiasm that was almost religious from the desire to find God in the body of Marianne, to the deception, to the incommunicable solitude of pleasure. Now I ask myself in front of you, why didn't God do this in a different way? Why did he make flesh beautiful and attractive, and then say that it is a sin? This is what I ask God. And I dare to tell him that it is wrong.

The semicircle of my ghosts seemed to be shocked by blasphemy. The man I had spoken with had lost his sense of humor.

"Let's leave this," he responded sharply. "The world is the way it is, and God will have had good reasons for making it that way. We haven't come here to discuss the things that rule the universe."

"But you want to correct the law of God with your own law, because God prohibits a man to kill his brother, and you have ordered me to kill Don Gonzalo. You don't have the courage to admit it, and even less to rebuke God and ask Him why his rules are contrary to yours."

j "We limit ourselves to what is strictly temporal. As for things from beyond, let God deal with them."

"There is nothing that is temporal if God exists. When I breath, I breath in front of God. And if I unite with a woman, the union is recorded in eternity. Only in the name of God can I rebel against what is bad in the world. But if God doesn't support my rebellion, then I am rebelling against God. If that's the way it is, why not do it honestly out in the open, with the cards on the table? I can't go up to God one day and respond with lies and excuses to His accusation: "Lord, I didn't know I was acting against your will! Lord, I was blinded by anger, or passion was obscuring my spirit! Lord, I don't understand the world, and I made a mistake!" I am honest, courageous like you have taught me. I will answer God's accusation: "I did it because I felt like it, and because I'm not in agreement with You."

I turned my back on my great-great-grandfather and, judging by his expression, he had not been able to understand the gist of my words. I walked down to the dark ground below me; and once I was there I turned back to the group.

"You already know it. If kill the Commander, I reject the hand that God has given me, and I will live in sin."

The man I had spoken to ran up behind me.

"All right. But don't blame us. We will not oblige you to do great things that drive you mad. The world is as it is, and we don't want to change it; we are satisfied to be part of the best there is in it. For that reason we ask our people to remain at our level so they don't clash with the rest of this group. We ask, we don't oblige. I have already told you; you are free, absolutely free, to accept our mandate, the same as you are to find a way by yourself to help you be forgiven for the killing. If you take our side it will carry you forward... it's up you. The responsibility is entirely your own."

"Have I ever tried to deny that?"

"I know you haven't. My objections are not because of that. And they are not objections I make in the name of our group, but mine alone, those of an experienced man, to an immature lad. Besides being extreme, I also find you ostentatious. I would like to give you some advice."

"For what?"

"So you learn to live tranquilly."

"That doesn't interest me. The best of you are unacquainted with tranquility. I have always identified with them, my soul has been filled with admiration for them, and I have always hoped to be able to be like them. Since I don't approve of today's wars, I am going to invent my own and then dedicate myself to them. If you have some warlike advice that you can give me..."

"In wars you need to have reasons."

"I also have my reasons."

"Then there is nothing more to say?"

I shook my head. He seemed to have lost his confidence. At the same time, he seemed less tall.

"In that case..." he gave me his hand. "I'll say goodbye."

He left me. I was alone again, once more in front of the semicircle, I saluted my ghosts and I started to leave. But then the women quickly jumped out of the circle to surround me. The pretty, the ugly, the married and the unmarried, the widows and the nuns.

"The poor lad!"

"He isn't going to be very happy!"

"How you can tell that he doesn't have a mother!"

Some of them caressed me; others hugged me; some even kissed me. And then, little by little, they started to disappear, as if they had dissolved into the bright morning air.

I found my body where they had left it; asleep, the head leading on the wall, the legs unmoving. I returned to it. When I felt it warmed by the morning sun, I trembled with joy, and fear. I recalled what had just happened and it seemed like the memory of a dream.

I went out on the porch and woke up Leporello.

"We're leaving."

"It's about time, sir. I'm stiff all over. A bench is not a good bed."

He stretched.

"Can I bring a drink?"

"Yes, but hurry. Get the car ready right away."

I went back inside. Marianna was sleeping with a smile. I sat down on the bed and caressed her. She opened her eyes part way, and when she saw me she opened them wide. She hugged me.

"Are you leaving already?"

"Yes, we're leaving."

"Are you coming back?"

"What for?"

"I would like you to return. I would like it if you never left."

"It's not necessary to stay or return. You will come with me."

"To your house?"

"Yes."

"But, I am a prostitute!"

"You're coming with me."

I kissed her eyes, that were opened with surprise and happiness.

"Go on. Get dressed. I'll wait for you outside."

Leporello was waiting with a cup of brandy. I sat down next to him and asked for another.

"It's strange what has happened," I told him. "Have you ever heard that a man can find the real truth of his life in a dream?"

"Dreams have always had an excellent reputation, sir, although they're also rather mysterious. I still don't know if they are produced by God, or the devil."

"What do you think?"

"I have never thought about it, nor is there any reason to, because I hardly ever dream."

"Mine was strange, but very clear. So much that I feel like I have discovered my real self. In it I have thought about things that I wouldn't have dared to think when I am awake, and I have said terrible things.

"As you must know, one is not responsible for what they dream. We know that!"

"What I dreamt touched me so deeply, and I feel it was so truly me, that rejecting it would be like denying myself. That is why I told you found the truth of my life in it."

"Isn't that a little solemn, sir?"

"Perhaps yes, but true."

"You didn't tell me that so I could give you advice."

"No. But I needed to tell it."

"There are people who are the same class as you. The Commander, for example."

"The people of my class wouldn't understand me, and the Commander would pretend to be scandalized. Besides, I have the presentiment that I am going to separate from them, and I will always be alone, without more company than yours."

"Why is that, sir?"

"There are sinners that people stay away from like they were lepers. They pretend to be scared, but the truth is they feel guilty."



“Sir if they find themselves in sin, they need a confession.”

“I am not in sin; I am sin.”

Leporello looked at me but I didn't understand his expression. Many years after that I discovered the reason he had looked at me that way.

“I am not insisting that you continue to serve me. If you are also frightened...”

“Master! How could I ever leave you?”

Marianne appeared. The cold weather was making her shiver. I gave her my cloak and wrapped her in it, then we got in the car.

When we got to Seville, I said to Leporello:

“Take her to the house without letting anyone see her, and then let her lay down and get some sleep. Then, this afternoon go and look for a merchant and have him show us the best women's dresses that are now in style.”

“You're going home by yourself, sir?”

“I'm planning to visit the church.”

5. The morning was warm and sunny, and people passed by without hurrying, trying to stay in the shadows. I was almost to the church. In the orange tree patio a group of beggars and thugs were listening to the lies of a wounded soldier. When they saw me the group broke up and came to ask me for money. I tossed a handful of coins in the air. From the door of the church I saw the fighting with each other, trying to grab them, and I regretted that I had not divided them equally.

I entered the cathedral. They were saying mass in a chapel, and I walked over to it. In front of the altar, in steel candelabras, many candles were lighted, some still whole, and others almost burned out. I watched them for a moment, because I liked the way they sparkled. Suddenly, I realized that some women had turned to look at me, and they rose up and started to approach me. I leaned on a column and pretended to turn my attention to the mass. When they reached me they stopped in front of me like nitwits, or enraptured fools. I had to ask them respectfully if they had monkeys in their face. Then they crossed themselves, and walked away. There were two: one was middle-aged and still beautiful, the other young and pretty. They disappeared in the rear of the church. I wondered why they had crossed themselves. What had they seen in me, or what had they felt?

I didn't know for sure why I had entered the cathedral. I suspected it had something to do with my earlier venture, but I didn't know what it was. I looked for a corner and sat down. A priest in a habit passed by, preceded by loud rings made by an altar boy. Following him was a group of women in mourning clothes. I took refuge in the shadows. The altar boy went by with his bell, and I stayed there wrapped in silence, surrounded by murmurs. Then I was able to think.

Or I should say, to remember. Coming back to my mind were the images from the dream which had not left me, and had been hovering on the edge of my consciousness. I went over them and listened to the words I said, and I also remembered the conversation I had with Leporello. All that could be thought of as an involuntary episode that I must now consider, calmly, and cold-heartedly. The result of that night of gambling—my first—didn't seem normal, and certainly not customary. I suppose that, in the same situation, other men would also examine their consciousness, as I was doing. Or maybe their enthusiasm would last and they would sin again as they enjoyed themselves in the memory. I also remembered Marianne—how not?—but only as a small part of the event.

I wanted to remain calm, and I did that successfully. I didn't re-experience any sexual urge, nor did any feeling of repentance fill my heart. God knew my purpose, and He was collaborating with me. My will and my intention could work impartially. I gave God my thanks.

After that moment, though, I began to feel an inner struggle. It occurred to me that when I left God, I came in contact with the devil, and that upset me. I have never had the least sympathy for Satan. He strikes me as foul and ignoble. I especially hate his falseness. Evidently, the devil is not a gentleman, in spite of his elevated lineage. At that moment I felt his presence, trying to tempt me. He was incapable of leaving me alone, with my freedom and my destiny. His performance was clever, and I have never doubted his astuteness. He opened my eyes to the beauty of Dark Powers, to the fascination of Unconscious Happiness, and a whirlwind of shadows struck me and carried me away from myself, as the night was too. The center of the night was luminous as it sometimes is, and now the light crossed through the night and lit up the unknown face of things. I felt dazzled and my will faltered, but only for a moment. When the blackness began to be filled with happy moans, with invitations to an unstoppable orgasm, I made sure not to let my feet leave the ground, or my senses leave reality. I fought bravely. Voices like violoncellos broke out above my head, but

a pair of women passed by my side, whispering. I held on and tried not to lose my strength. The women were saying bad things about an archdeacon and the chattering of their bad-tempered voices was stronger than the tenderness of violoncellos, although those old hags were more ugly than the devil.

I was able to feel myself free of the Grace of God, and the temptations of Satan. However I knew in my heart that it would not last, because neither God or the devil remain permanently silent, and that one or the other would harass me, as is their custom. I took advantage of the occasion to complain to the Lord that there was no other path, a third path of independence. "He who is not with me is against me," the Lord has said; but why necessarily, then, with the devil? Couldn't it be—for example—with men?

My complaints ended there, because I wanted to be fair, and that privilege of liberty which I had just experienced has been offered to very few men. Nevertheless, I could not take advantage of it. My heart was still not mature enough to choose. I admitted then that Don Gonzalo could be dead, and that my soul would respond to the first request of the Lord. Examined coldheartedly and not burdened by any sentimental cost, my reasons for disagreeing with God could be questionable, and I myself could doubt them and destroy them. On reaching this point, however, my heart lost its tranquility, and I remembered once again Don Gonzalo's insult, and the humiliation that he inflicted on me. But what if Don Gonzalo were to ask me to forgive him? The spokesman for my ancestors had forgotten to tell me what I should do in that case, and I was leaning toward mercy. Supposing that the old fool had repented and, on seeing me, he gave an explanation for what he did; would that be enough to remove my anger and make me offer him my hand? "Let bygones be bygones, Commander. Any man can have a bad moment, and since you are down and out..." It's even possible that he might offer me a loan.

I immediately felt obliged to give the old man a chance to apologize. The ships were being deserted: bursts of incense came from some remote place, and lighted candles sparkled in the dark spots. I left right away in order to go to the place where Don Gonzalo lived. But I didn't know where that was, and I had to ask someone. I was sweating when I got there, so before knocking on the door, I rested in the shade for a short time.

A young female servant opened the shutter. She looked at me using her hand as a visor, and her eyes dazzled. She didn't ask me anything and kept on looking at me until I told her:

"I want to see the Commander."

Without responding to me, she closed the shutter. I entered the front door. The servant kept on staring me in the eyes, and in her stare I caught the same enchantment I had seen a few hours ago in the look of some women in the cathedral.

"Do me the favor of telling Don Gonzalo..."

"Yes, yes, right away."

"...that Don Juan Tenorio would like to see him."

"Don Juan Tenorio!" she repeated; but the tremolo of her voice sounded more appropriate for the "Open Sesame!" of happiness, than for the musical sound of my name.

She stepped away from me without turning around.

"Wait there in the patio."

I entered the patio where some curtains were lifted up high to shade you from the sun. It was a large patio with flowers and a fountain in the center. I liked the sound of the water, and explored the flowerpots, and stroked an exceptionally beautiful rose. When I did that, I noticed that the servant was still in the doorway and was looking at me silently. I made a brisk movement with my hands, I gave a shout as if I were trying to frighten chickens, and the servant ran away. I have the impression, however, that I didn't do the right thing by giving the old fox my message, because I was able to hear soft voices, furtive steps, quick movements, windows partly opened carefully, and I knew I was being watched.

The Commander came. I heard his heavy strides descending the steps, and his scarecrow figure appeared at the end of the gallery. My God, what a slovenly look! He must have just gotten out of bed. Locks of hair covered half his face, he was wearing slippers and dressed in a crimson velvet smock that barely covered his legs. He had had time, however, to grab hold of a sword.

He opened his arms and waved them like the blades of a fan; but since I didn't move he let them fall, and he approached me very cautiously. His stature also seemed to shrink; his shoulders were lower, his chest was flattened. By the time he reached me he seemed to have deflated so that his flesh seemed like the sails of a ship in calm water, and he was also afraid. If at that moment I had called him something like "Poor fellow," he would have thrown himself at my feet, and would have

made a great spectacle of repentance. But that never occurred to me, thank God. I smiled at him, I bowed my head in the usual way and said hello. Then he took a deep breath and embraced me.

“What a fright you have given me, young man! I was afraid that something had happened to you!—he cleared his throat—. When they said you were looking for me, something hit me here.” He pointed at his heart. “And my heart missed a beat...”

“It’s nothing like that.”

The Commander pushed me in a chair.

“I couldn’t sleep all night thinking about you. When I found out you had gotten involved with that girl, said to myself: This could be something serious; so I asked your driver to drive me. Then I sent the car back. I never should have done that! As soon as I was alone, I started to think that I never should have left you, that you are still too young to handle that by yourself. But there was no longer anything I could do because the Inn is very far away from Seville...”

He patted me on the shoulder.

“Good, lad, good! I can see that you are safe and sound.” He lowered his voice. “How did things go? You know what I mean. Because I suppose that you and the girl...”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“So what, what? What did you think about it?”

I looked away and lowered my head. I swear that I was only pretending to think about what I was going to say. But the old guy thought I was feeling shame, or timidity.

“You don’t have to act like that. You haven’t committed any crime. On the contrary, you have behaved like a man.”

“You think?”

“When some time passes you will know that yourself. You will find that you have changed, that you are more sure of yourself. You have only just got started. You don’t know the half of it!”

“But you are at the end of the road.”

He sighed.

“Aye, my son! I am, certainly, but there is no longer sun on my back. My youth has gotten far away. However...”

He lowered his voice again.

“I have not give up yet. Girls are very desirable, but there is more than girls in this world. I will tell you, in confidence, that I often meet with some gentlemen in secret places. One must hide that, as you will understand, because one is a respectable person and if they were to find out about these shady deals in Seville, that would cause a scandal. We are prudent. We go out after supper with the pretext of a brotherhood that keeps watch over an altar during the night, and in the house of one of us that has large underground rooms, there are some real uproars... Imagine! Women, cards, wine... And don’t think it! They are not whores that we bring there, but decent women who are in need, and who remedy that with us. You will come with me one night.”

“Could you do that?”

“I wouldn’t trust that with someone else; but with you...”

I became thoughtful. He looked at me.

“What are you thinking?”

“I am thinking that if I hadn’t met you, I would end up in sainthood”

“Bah! The idea of sainthood is for people with little intelligence. The same with priests; they preach one thing, and then do another. There are some who participate in our escapades, secretly, of course. You’ll meet them. And you have to hear them when they laugh at pious people.”

At that point a servant appeared and asked, from a distance, for permission to approach. Don Gonzalo shouted back:

“What’s going on?”

“The house lady wants to ask you to do her a favor and come in for a moment. She said it’s nothing important.”

“That’s all right,” he bellowed; and after the servant left he turned to me and said: “Wait here for a few minutes. I’m going to see what she wants of me, and I’ll get dressed while I’m at it.”

He left with long strides. I saw him walk and thought to myself: “You are condemned to death.” Some time passed. I got up and looked at the flowers again. Behind me I heard a window open, and from it someone said something.

I moved toward it, and inside it I saw the figure of a woman hidden behind a curtain.

“Listen, Don Juan.”

I made a bow.

“Don’t waste your time with courtesies. Tonight at ten a lady will come to your house. Go with her, and don’t ask her anything.”

She softly closed the window. I don’t know if she saw me smile.

6. I followed the Commander on the way to the church where the Gentlemen of Calatrava were meeting in order to show proper respect for the processions of Good Friday. He had put on a silk suit and, over it, a long cloak embroidered with a cross that stretched almost from the top to the bottom. He was striding down the street, speaking vociferously, and to those who greeted him he responded by doffing his hat all the way to his feet if they were women, or with a depreciatory but thunderously loud “Hello” if they were men. He looked imposing as he walked. We had agreed to go out together one night, and I would tell him when.

“With discretion, okay? Don’t let any servants or friends know. One must do these things with care. One’s reputation, my son, is most important, but people are stupid, and nothing makes a reputation more refined than seriousness. If you behave like a man they consider you mature. If you make yourself a fool, go to mass every day and say the rosary every four hours, and you spend the rest of the time in meditation and penitence, they raise you to the moon. Therefore, one must be clever, and deceptive. During the day, church; at night, play a game. Now I’m going to meet some pious gentlemen. So, with two or three I will blink an eye, and they will do the same. They are some of the best of Seville.”

“But, Commander, isn’t what you are proposing me a sin?”

“Bah!” he grunted, “for sins we have a beautiful storehouse in our soul that is emptied every year for Holy Thursday, and which then fills up again.”

“And if death comes?”

“A priest will take care of things; if there is no priest a “Jesus!” will produce the same result.”

I saw him enter the church, arrogant and solemn. When the door was open the Commander, with his hat in his hand, made a bow followed by a curtsy. The sacristans almost kneeled as he passed by.

I wandered around Seville for a while and towards noon I went to my house. I told them to send Marianne. She came in looking happy, but also shy. She looked all around, and she looked at me, like she was afraid of something.

I asked her:

“Do you know how to dance?”

“Of course!”

“Why do you say of course?”

“It’s just that in my position, if I don’t dance...”

“Don’t mention your profession again, and forget it; I have decreed that you are not a whore. So what do you need to dance?”

“Music and some castanets.”

Leporello was sent to look for a guitarist and castanets. The table was set, and on it there was meat and cakes. I turned down the meat because of Lent and asked for some greens. With them, and with wine and pastries, I enjoyed myself while Marianne danced. She did it, she explained, in an old-fashioned style, and all her skill concentrated on the head, the arms, and the legs, her body almost motionless. The castanets accompanied her with a gentle noise, and all of it followed the rhythm of the guitar. It was a dance full of composure, slow-moving, with stringent purity, and it lasted until the vegetables were gone. When cakes were served, the guitarist changed the tone and the body of Marianne rejoiced as she sang with a voice that was rough and uneven, but sweet:

Sandy spot of Seville, bravo,  
The golden tower,  
Where people from Seville, and bravo  
play in a circle.

“I like the other dance better,” I thought, because the movements of the body are more noble, though less lively. But now the throng of skirts was rising, leaving legs in plain view, and that sight brought to my mind thoughts about the body of a woman now showing itself capable of something that was totally different from the night before.

“That girl tops it all,” Leporello dared to mutter, and I told him to keep quiet. Marianne bustled back and forth, tapped her feet and spun around, looking at me with every turn. In the clatter of

the castanets there something like a stroke of attention, like a call to repeat one's self, each time with greater urgency. Little by little, without wishing it, my blood accommodated itself to the rhythm of that dance; I stopped thinking about the body of a woman and its mystery, and my right foot began to move softly. Like a flame, Marianne jumped up and shared her ardor with everyone present. The swirls of her skirt seemed to fill the room. The faces had transfigured and the feet twirled around; after that, so did the arms, hands and bodies, as if all of us present had the same soul, and the same will. A servant, who was beside himself, broke into a dance, waved his fingers, and caught up with Marianne. The guitarist played with passion and embraced his instrument as if he were embracing a woman, and was going to kiss her. In a short time there was nothing but rhythm in the room, an insistent, happy, inflamed rhythm, followed by castanets and strumming, so that the souls joined together inside it and were able to dance with it. Then, the main chord broke up with a moan, the spell vanished, and everyone stopped.

"It seems like an angel has entered," I commented.

And at the same time a servant came and told me that Don Miguel Mañara wanted to see me.

The guitarist made a remorseful face.

"God help us, the wet blanket!"

I went to the place where the visitor was waiting for me.

Standing in the middle of the room, his profile outlined against the dim light that came in through the window, the gentleman was waiting. With a slightly curved gesture with his hands extended toward me, he seemed like a warning of death.

I greeted him with a bow, and pointed to a chair.

"Good afternoon, sir."

He moved forward a step and raised his arms.

"My son!"

A voice of quivers, failures, pathetic gestures, making a fuss. All that gave me a start.

"Is something wrong?"

"My son! The entire body of your father is shaking, or at least the intestinal worms that eat his body are shaking, and you receive me with music?"

I crossed my arms and explained:

"A bit of guitar to animate the table."

He looked at me with a threat, moved over to me and put his hand on my shoulder.

"Idiot! Are you the saint Don Pedro thought of, the hope of the Church, the pride of the pious people in Seville? Curses to Salamanca that has made you meat for the devil! You would have done better to remain illiterate, and stick to the path of the Lord!"

"I don't think I have denied Him."

"Can I expect charity from a man who cheers his meals with guitars, without the least respect for the dead?"

"Why not? Ask me, and I'll see if I can give it, at least I hope so, because they say I am very rich."

"It's not about that, it's about your soul."

Good heavens! Now there were no longer shivers, but embellishments in his voice; grimaces like arabesques accompanied by the movement, or the shiver of his fingers.

"We can also talk about that."

"Talk? What do you mean? Repent with a loud voice, confess your sins, realize that death will take over your flesh until it decomposes, until it rots, until it is nothing but dust?"

"Talk about my soul, or yours. You propose, and I will reply; as if I had come to buy something and we can't come to an agreement about the price."

"Don Miguel crossed himself and backed a step. He looked at me with stupor, and a bit of fear.

"Are you talking about your soul, like a gypsy about his donkey?"

"I can talk about my soul as an academic theme, which is not the same. But please do me a favor and sit down."

I pushed him toward a chair and sat down myself. In the dim light the eyes of Don Miguel looked tired and dark. All the charitable ardor was now concentrated in his hands, which were large and dark, like twisted metal. He put one of them on mine, and I shivered as if a skeleton had grabbed hold of my flesh.

"I called you my son, which, of course, is not right. You are a lot like myself, and all at once the memory of my youth, spent in dissipation and orgy, has awakened. I don't know if God brings you to demolish my pride, because I have forgotten my sins. If that's what it is, I kneel and kiss your hands, because you are an envoy of the Lord. You are the one the Lord sends me so my memories

will awaken. I am a sinner, I have offended the Lord, and I do not have sufficient penitence! I am proud and arrogant, and I must humble myself!

He let himself fall on his knees and tried to kiss my hands. I stopped him saying: "Don't do that, please." He sat down again and I felt obliged to caress his grey hair.

"Don't be like that. I don't know what your sins were, but I don't believe they are anything like mine. And if they were like this one or that one, each of us will answer for his own, and the Lord will grant his mercy separately, if necessary."

"I consider myself obliged to direct you to a good path."

"I am not against you doing that."

"I offer myself to the Lord to atone for your faults."

"That will make you thirsty. Would you like me to ask for a drink?"

Don Miguel rubbed his tongue over his lips.

"Yes, some water would be good." I called a servant and requested some. "When I was a boy, I lived extravagantly and like a man I chased after all the pleasures of the flesh, and the satisfactions of vanity, until one night, as I returned from an orgy, the Lord took pity on me and let me see the sight of my burial. Since then, all my efforts have been made in order to save myself. Every time I meet a man who is given to vice, I tell him of my experience as an example."

"That won't help me."

"Why not?"

"Our cases are different. I am neither vicious or vain. As for death, it seems we understand it in very different ways."

The waiter came with the water. Don Miguel drank it quickly, until he choked on it.

"There is only one way to understand death. Everything ends, it's the time of horror and fear! My body ceases to be attractive, and in place of my face a skull appears. Death is cold," he paused, "and black. And the Lord," he stood up. "Because the Lord is there," he pointed at a dark corner with his hand, "armed with his anger. Too bad for the one who doesn't carry his repentance in the palm of his hand! Because that one will be told: "Go to the eternal fire, evil one." His arm dropped quickly, and his hand pointed with insistence at the tiles on the floor.

"I'm, not afraid of death."

"How can you say that?"

"Because I feel it."

"Jesus feared it on the Mount of Olives."

"Jesus came as an example for us, and I am not exemplary."

I stood up.

"It's all a question of how one understands the things that are inculcated in them. I, good sir, am a noble. Ever since I was small they taught me there is no reason to be afraid, and that the worst thing that could happen is for a noble to be a coward. They also told me that those of us who are nobles have a life in order to live it in a way that is, simply, without screaming, and without sending a bill. That was the best thing I learned in all my lessons. I think about death, and I don't tremble. Maybe that's abnormal, but that's the way it is."

"Even if you find yourself in sin?"

"It's such a sort time that I am in sin, that I am still not used to it. It's like I am in unknown territory, and though I don't discount death, as long as I have not felt that way about it, I am not able to answer you."

"They told me that you were lustful, but not arrogant."

"I am not even lustful. Perhaps I will never be, because any type of blindness disgusts me, and as for sins of the flesh, based on what I have experienced it's too similar to the influence of alcohol, which I also don't like."

"Then, why last night..."

"Last night?" I interrupted him. "Are you referring to my sins of last night? What do you know about them?"

Don Miguel hesitated. Then, he told me confidentially.

"I know everything."

"Rumors of lackeys?"

"It wasn't a lackey."

He hesitated again, and in his hesitation I noted the trail of an informer.

"All right, I'll tell you: the Commander of Ulloa."

Don Miguel acted like a weight had been lifted from him. He came closer and whispered.

“We left the capital of Calatrava together this morning. Don Gonzalo was troubled. ‘I’m worried about Don Juan Tenorio! When he was with me last night, we passed by the Eritana Inn, and suddenly, like it was the most natural thing in the world, he decided to go and have a good time, and then, when he was half drunk, he got involved with a prostitute, without any respect for the memory of his father, nor for the Holy Time which it was. And I, who had had thought about him as the possible husband of my daughter Elvira!”

“Of his daughter Elvira? The Commander has a daughter?”

Don Miguel Mañara, a charitable and visionary man, ceased to interest me from the moment he mentioned Elvira de Ulloa. He wanted to go on sermonizing me, but I suddenly had had enough sermons. I dispatched him with a bit of charity, and left the discussion about my situation for another day.

7. Properly considered, the visit of Don Miguel could not be considered an act of fate. There must be some plausible explanation for it; perhaps Don Gonzalo, for some unknown reason, had felt the need to exaggerate the story of my situation, so that Don Miguel, who was known for having a missionary fervor, would come and incriminate me. In that hypothesis there was still an obscure point: I couldn’t guess Don Gonzalo’s secret reason, because the reasonable thing would have been for him to keep his mouth shut, or at least mention some praises of me that would raise my reputation. Although the Commander didn’t think that Don Miguel would shoot his mouth off, it seemed logical that he would have spoken well of me, if our friendship mattered to him, unless he happened to be an expert in embroilments and wanted to play the card of my perplexity. But I wasn’t perplexed. The likely hypothesis, the most human explanation for the event, lasted for a few moments in my imagination. I spent several hours caught up in the supernatural, and I had to attribute the visit of Mañara, or any other event, to some transcendental purpose. It all was clear if its factors were directed to heaven and used God as a reference: then the Commander of Ulloa retained his instrumental role and, as such, was converted into a merely mechanical cause with which Mañara would show up as an ambassador of Grace. That wrinkled old man, whose hands seemed like claws of twisted steel, had been nothing less than the herald of the Lord. How he would have been happy and satisfied with himself, if he had understood that! Maybe he would have forgiven.

But the analysis couldn’t end here, because Mañara, in addition to preaching me a sermon, had spoken to me of Elvira; the news of her existence had disturbed me, it had shot off my imagination, and made me identify her as the woman who, behind the shutters, had given me a warning and had set me up for a date a little after ten that night. Mañara had come as a spokesman of heaven, but, by the end of his visit he was converted to a spokesman of hell, because my sudden interest in Elvira, was in no way something virtuous. And that would not have made Don Miguel very happy.

It was clear. The first hesitation of the charitable and theatrical gentleman permitted me to mark the point of the precise moment when the devil had initiated his intervention; the second showed the victory of the devil, perhaps a minor victory, a venial sin, or something even less, but still effective. Because, when I heard about the existence of Elvira, it occurred to me that my relations with the Commander could not be reduced to a brawl, or a fight to the death. And Elvira’s presence complicated things.

But my reasoning did not stop there. After my sin, and after my experience of liberty (that same morning in the cathedral), God and the devil began their pursuit, not violent or dramatic, but like a prior skirmish, something like a warning they were watching me, that they hadn’t forgotten me, that my freedom was going to be just a game. I felt proud of not having been excluded from the heavenly statute, because, with the other one, that of hell, I was sure I would never be excluded.

I called Leporello and told him to check in Seville and bring me information about my family, the customs of Don Gonzalo, and the opinion that people in Seville had of me. He had just left when they informed me that the seller of fine clothes had just arrived. He was a Frenchman who had taken up residence in Seville, and no one knew more about the latest European styles. With a high-pitched voice, and the modal of a magpie, he explained to me that he served the mistresses of various lords, and that all had been happy with his discretion, and his efficiency. He had brought with him a large chest, and a female assistant; he told her to open it and start removing the merchandise. I asked about the quality of each item, and I was able to feel some of them.

His assistant chose what was necessary for a complete trousseau. After that Marianne came and she measured them, she adjusted one, and widened another, so that by the end of a couple hours

she had prepared her underwear. I picked her outer clothes, according the color of her skin and her hair.

The merchant left, but the assistant stayed. Marianne let her remove her clothes, put on the new ones, comb her hair, and spruce her up, while I, harbored in a corner, watched everything without feeling lascivious, but only curious. Sometimes I asked the name of an article of clothing, commented on the way it fit, and then said how well it suited Marianne.

"This girl has an odd body," the assistant commented. "Too vibrant and slim. Men usually prefer them full and calm."

Marianne did what we asked, if we told her to walk, or stop, or bend over; but the presence of the assistant inhibited her.

"If we were alone," she told me, "I would walk with more grace."

When the assistant left, Marianne asked me:

"What is the purpose of all this?"

"It's for you."

"But why?"

"The woman who is worthy of this house must wear clothes that are worthy of the house, and of herself."

Marianne bent over my shoulder and hid her head.

"I'm not worthy."

8. At exactly ten o'clock I went out in the street and waited by the front door, apparently alone, because Leporello had been instructed to follow me without losing sight of me. The duenna delayed several minutes and then she arrived with short, jumpy steps, keeping herself in the shade of the walls. She came veiled and would have been the same if she were uncovered, because with the way she was walking I could still tell that she was old.

"Are you Don Juan?"

"Yes."

"Come with me then, and don't ask anything."

"Just in case..."

She started walking and I followed her. In the moonlit streets there was the smell of flowers, and sighs in the corners, and the windows. I never thought that in Seville there would be such a lack of breath, or such worry about shadows; because there wasn't one we saw without cheerful tenants. In one of them there was a pair of happy lovers, so absorbed and lost in themselves—that is to say—that an old woman bumped into them and they still didn't separate. Perhaps a breathy "My goodness!" was their only response. The very noticeable silence of Seville used to be filled with groans and gasps, all well protected by the moon. The duenna crossed herself, and complained in a low voice, about the immorality of the public, and how crazy the young people were.

"You're right, mam," I told her to congratulate her; "I don't know where it will end with all this decadence. Is it far away?"

The old woman answered with a grunt. We crossed through streets and plazas, and we entered a side street which I recognized as being close to the house of Don Gonzalo whose façade we had already passed. The duenna stopped in front of a gate and said: "It's here," and she walked away into the dusk. At that point I turned my head and, at the end of the street, in front of a mild glare, I saw Leporello, his legs spread, and with hands raised toward his sentinel.

"Don Juan."

The voice came from behind the flowers. I moved closer. I didn't know exactly what I should do. The memory of things I had seen in comedies told me to raise my hand to my sombrero, but I had the impression that in the dusk my salute wasn't noticed.

"Come here, Con Juan."

My face brushed against the flowers and the bars of the gate. Then, on my cheeks, I felt the heat of a restrained breath.

"Come closer. Don't be afraid."

"Afraid? Why should I be afraid?"

"I could kill you."

"What for?"

She—it was a woman—laughed.

"You're right. What for? It would be absurd for me to call you in order to kill you, when I need you so badly."



I pushed aside the flowers and grabbed hold of the bars of the gate.

"Who are you?"

"You'll find out. Now I want to tell you, faithfully, that you are in danger. The Commander has his house watched. At any moment they could fall on you, and thrash you."

"He keeps it guarded for you?"

"No, for his daughter."

Then it seemed to me as if that weak, almost imperceptible voice, was saddened; only a moment of sadness, though, because she continued right away.

"For that reason, if you wish, you can go away."

"You called me here for that?"

I felt some soft, warm hands grabbed hold of mine; I felt someone's breath on my cheeks.

"No, Don Juan, I warn you..."

"Be careful, sir."

Leporello came running down the street with two dark shapes behind him. On the other side, more dark shapes were approaching. The woman said quickly:

"They're already here. Run to your right until you find a door, and defend yourself until I can open it."

I heard some small steps that were approaching rapidly. Leporello was now by my side.

"This is a trap."

"Use your sword and defend yourself. Don't worry about me."

I found the door and approached it. In the silence of the street I heard the clash of sword blades; I could swear there were also sparks. Two furious dark shaped passed in front of me; Leporello was attacked by a sword. I was about to go out and defend him when behind me the door opened and someone pulled my cloak toward the inside. After that the door closed again. I found myself in a dark place, perhaps a vestibule, and at my side a woman was breathing.

"They're going to kill my servant."

"But they won't kill you."

"This disloyal to Leporello."

"As little clever as he is..."

The clash of swords was suddenly penetrated by a shout. The noises stopped; the silence lasted for moment and then I heard footsteps walking away, and a voice shouted: "Follow him, don't let him escape!" mixed with the moans of someone who was wounded. The woman took my hand.

"Don't put yourself at risk. You servant..."

"Are you sure it was him who was fleeing?"

"Evidently. Come with me."

I let her guide me. Doors, hallways, darkened rooms; the patio where I had been that morning, with aromas and the music of a fountain. Our travel lasted for some time. At times the light that came through windows without shutters let me see white walls, dark closets, and a few paintings. The woman was about my size, and she walked confidently through the darkness.

She let go of my hand and open the latch of a door.

"Wait here."

I heard her come and go. She scratched a flint and lit a candle. She was in a corner with her back turned, and the light revealed her silhouette. She seemed to be wearing nice comfortable clothing, and her hair was hanging loose, as though she had just gotten out of bed. She picked up the candle and after turning around she walked toward me. When she was near me she raised the candle and illuminated her face. She looked like she might be about thirty five years old, and was beautiful. I looked at her figure; the dress only revealed the bulge of her breasts.

"I am Doña Sol, the wife of Don Gonzalo."

"But... you are very young!"

"I am his second wife."

"Even so... The Commander is an old fogey!"

She smiled with bitterness, and left the candle on the table.

"He's even worse."

She spoke now without the disguising whisper and her voice was filled with a certain pathos. She moved to me, she took my arms, and looked me in the eyes. Hers were gleaming with passion, and her lips trembled.

"So what do you think of me?"

"I don't make judgements."

"Look at me closely, Don Juan. Do you like it?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you see how unfortunate I am?"

"Well, maybe a little melancholy."

"No, more than that. Unfortunate. The misfortune has ruined my beauty. When they made me marry the Commander..."

I thought I had heard some noise in the house, but at the height of this discussion it came so close that Doña Sol interrupted what she was saying.

"It's my husband. They have gone to inform him. But don't worry. It would hardly matter if he found you in the bedroom of his wife."

"For me, though, it would be very embarrassing," I joked. "Until now, it seemed we were friends, in appearance at least."

"I'll prevent that embarrassment."

She pushed me toward a little door, opened it, putting me in a narrow little room filled with closets. The door had a glass transom, so I raised up as much as I could to be able to see what happened. Someone had pounded on the door of the room with loud knocks and, on the other side was the loud voice of Don Gonzalo.

"Leave. Immediately. Or else I'll burn the house down."

Doña Sol moved calmly. She took the candle and opened the door. Don Gonzalo entered in fury. After him a young girl, with a shawl over her nightgown. Doña Sol turned toward her husband so that the girl was in the shadow.

"There's a man in the house!"

"And you're looking for him here?"

"I'll look for him in the bottom of hell! I won't stop until he is dead!"

In his right hand he was blandishing a huge broadsword and, in the left, a pistol. Doña Sol didn't seem to be daunted.

"Order them to bring lights, and then search everywhere."

"Here? Why am I going to search here?"

He turned to Doña Sol and looked at her with scorn.

"Nobody is going to come and court you."

"Then why did you wake me up?"

"So you will watch my daughter, while I search the house."

His voice trembled when he mentioned Elvira, and he looked for her in the dim light.

"Are you there?"

The girl moved forward a few steps and the light of the candle made her visible. She was slender and nice looking, and she moved gracefully. The hair that fell on her shoulders was light brown. Her shawl, put on carelessly, allowed her nicely shaped arms to be visible.

Don Gonzalo stretched out his formidable arm with the pistol and wrapped it around her with great passion. She let him do that, without showing enthusiasm. Don Gonzalo kept the pistol in his hand, and his fingers caressed the naked flesh of Elvira.

"The honor of my daughter..." Don Gonzalo started to say, and he pressed himself even closer to his daughter.

"Leave things to me and go ahead; we don't want the man to have time to escape.

"You're right." He took several steps toward the door, still hanging onto his daughter. When she leaves, lock the doors."

"Don't worry."

"I'll split that guy's head in two when I find him!" Don Gonzalo muttered and let go of Elvira, not without caressing her. "I'll teach this guy a lesson, and I'll show the boys in Seville what this is...!"

Doña Sol slammed the door shut so it would cut off the sound of the voices. Her daughter leaned against the wall.

"I'm sleepy," she said with tired voice.

"You don't seem to give much importance to all this, dear."

"I give it the same as you do. I don't have any experience with assaults like this, and I don't know whether to be happy or start to cry."

"But doesn't it worry you that there is a man somewhere in the house, perhaps looking for you?"

"How am I going to be afraid if no man has ever looked for me? But if that's what it was, perhaps I wouldn't be afraid. Men can't be as bad as my father thinks, and some are beautiful. I would like to have one next to me, and always be there."

There was a bit of a joking sound in the tone of her voice, and a smile with some weariness or disenchantment covered her lips. She let her shawl fall and grabbed a fan.

"It's hot in here. Why don't you open the shutters?"

"And what if someone passes by in the street and sees you naked?"

"I said open the shutters, not the trellis. Besides..."

She wore her nightgown fitted tightly, and the cloth was so thin that he revealed the shape of her body. Doña Sol removed the candle and opened the shutters of the window. Her daughter moved over. Then, Doña Sol carried the light to the farthest corner. The daughter raised her arm over her head and pressed her fingers in the tartan of the lattice.

"Elvira."

"What?"

"If you're father would come now..."

"So what? Is it a sin to breath the fresh air of the street?"

"No. There's no sin in that."

"And in knowing that a man who is going to be my husband would worry if they assaulted him, or not, in my house?"

"Not that either. But you shouldn't say that."

"What difference does it make if I say it or not, if I think it? I think about it constantly, with fury, because I'm almost twenty years old, and I know that I am pretty."

She turned around brusquely.

"I am fed up with the confinement that papa keeps me in. I can only leave the house to go to mass, with veils and vigilance! However, I know there is another way of life, the one that the servants enjoy at night in the arms of their lovers. I know it, I've seen it, and I want it. I also want a man who embraces me and makes he happy. If my father doesn't give it to me, I will look for it among the grooms, and at night I'll open my bedroom, like I do for a servant."

She moved closer to the light while she was talking. Doña Sol covered the light of the candle with her body, and the body of Elvira remained in the darkness. Elvira stopped.

"Will you let me sleep here, with you?"

And Doña Sol, shocked.

"Why? What for?"

"Because here one can breathe, and not in that golden prison where I sleep. I would like to have a window like this one of yours where you can look out at the street and see the flowers, and the boys who pass by."

"Elvira!"

They were very close to one another. Doña Sol stretched out her arms.

"I'll tell the Lord, and if he accepts, I'll have them put another bed it here. I'll tell him tomorrow."

Elvira let herself be embraced and be taken to a chair in the corner of the room. She sat down, and I lost sight of her. The frame of the transom divided her legs at the knees. Doña Sol, crouching next to her began to speak in a low voice.

I began to feel uncomfortable, and puzzled: I didn't understand the reason for the different type of treatment, the almost servile respect with which Doña Spoke to her husband and Elvira, and the scornful familiarity with which they spoke to her. I dropped down and waited. Some time passed. I could hear the remote mumble of a calm conversation, and the noises of Don Gonzalo searching the house: voices, doors closing, curses. I began to get sleepy. I had almost fallen asleep when Don Gonzalo returned and, afraid of making some noise, I remained still in the corner. Don Gonzalo said the man had escaped, but the next morning all the servants of the house would appear before a judge, and he would find out, by the use of force, who among the servants had open the door, and to whom. After that he turned to his daughter.

"I will sleep in the vestibule, and anyone who tries to enter will cross over my dead body."

"I could stay with Doña Sol." Elvira murmured.

"Heaven forbid! Doña Sol has enough with taking care of herself, if she wants to. You come with me, I'm your father, and I know what suits your honor. That's the way it is! The father is the only one who ought to take care of his daughters. There is no love in the world, like a father's love."

Footsteps, doors closing, doors latched. Little by little the house became silent. Then Doña Sol opened the door.

"Have you seen her?"

"Who?"

"Elvira."

"I only hear her. I could hardly have seen her..."

"She's quite beautiful."

That sad thing appeared once again in Doña Sol's voice, and I tried to remember where I had heard a similar sound before: until, suddenly I remembered the first words of Marianne, when she said that dramatic "Don Juan" as she greeted me. Doña Sol also had a flamenco voice.

"Maybe you have figured out that I hate them."

She had leaned against the wall, and looked at me.

"I hate everyone in this house. Silently, like a slave, without being able to say it or express it in any way. A hate that stays with me, and does me harm. I'm forced to serve my husband and Elvira, while I smile at them."

"Why is that?"

"Because, if I don't do it the Commander would kill me."

She lowered her head and hid her eyes.

"By his hand, or someone else's. It would be easy to do it, or have it be done. All he would have to do is denounce me to the Inquisition."

She quickly raised her head and looked at me, resolute and proud.

"I am Jewish. Can't you see that in my room there is not a single Cross? I don't believe in the Virgin Mary, or in Jesus Christ."

I gave her a bow.

"I don't have any racial prejudices, and I am not a fanatic. But how is it possible that Don Gonzalo...?"

Then a grateful look appeared in her eyes, and she smiled.

"I would have to tell to you the story of a deceit, and some other things. I'm thirty five years old. They married me to him in secret when I was eighteen. I was an innocent girl with, an attractive dowry, and my father was full of fear, because the Inquisition was trying to get his money. The Commander promised him that, if he married us, he wouldn't have to worry. They arranged the details of a secret marriage, and Don Gonzalo brought a fake priest who baptized me, and then married us. I lived in my father's house, Don Gonzalo came to sleep with me every night, and the Inquisition left us alone. That's the way it was for a while, until the Commander spent all my money. Then, one fine day, they locked up my father, and he died in jail. I didn't inherit his money; instead, it was confiscated, which my husband expected. The judges drove me from my house and I was forced to come and live here, where they confined me as if I didn't exist. For everyone, including Elvira, I have been like a nanny. Since then they scorned me. But before that..."

Her face turned red and she tried to hide it with her arm. I heard her sigh. She let her arm drop, and her sad eyes looked at the floor. Trembling, she said:

"I was an innocent girl, and him, a degenerate. Can you imagine?"

"No, I can't."

"You wouldn't want to hear what he did to me."

"No, I wouldn't; but I can imagine what it was."

"It makes me ashamed."

She spoke with a sincere tone, and her lips trembled.

"He likes girls, and he kicked me from his bed, when I ceased to be one. Meanwhile, his daughter had grown up. He only cares about her. He never bought me a dress; I had to wear the ones Elvira discarded. And I don't know where he gets the money to buy her the most expensive, the most beautiful ones. Soon after that, there would be a day when the seamstresses would arrive and begin to alter the silk or the velvet. They tried them out with Elvira in front of the Commander, and it was he who said if they were good enough or not. And when the dress is ready, Elvira puts it on and shows it off in front of him, walking by in front of his ecstatic eyes. She is his only joy."

She began to cry again. I asked myself why she was telling me those intimate things and, at the same time, I examined her. For the second time there was a woman in front of me; probably we would sleep together, and, nevertheless, like with Marianne, what I felt was curiosity, more than desire. I examined her avidly, I listened to her like with someone you hope to discover some dark secret underneath the obscure words. I wouldn't have been able to describe what I discovered then, and perhaps it was indescribable, perhaps it belonged exclusively to her; but I can think about it today when I have now known so many different women, and I have discovered the singularity of each one. Then, with Doña Sol, the only thing I thought of was to compare her to Marianne and notice the differences: the way she moved her hands, the vibrant frustration in her voice, and that blue vein trembling in her throat.

"This morning the Commander came into this room. He entered without asking, he moved the curtains and opened the windows. "Get out of bed, Jewish dog!" he shouted at me. I did that as quickly as possible, trembling. When I was there in the middle of the room and looked at him with fear, he grabbed the top of my nightgown and ripped it from top to bottom. I was naked then and tried to hide myself. 'Wait!' He looked at me, and moved around me. 'You're still pretty, and you can still dazzle an innocent boy!' He kept moving around me, he fondled me, and pinched me. 'A little flabby, of course, but if you haven't forgotten what I taught you, you're as good as any woman in bed, and better than the other. I should say so! The other could pull the wool over my eyes, but I've got a tight hold on you.' He pushed me onto the bed and kept on talking. 'In reality, you're not my wife, but my concubine. When I married you, a friend of mine disguised himself as a priest to give us the blessings, as I have told you many times. So when I went to the vicarage and confessed it... It's not a valid marriage, and so, your honor, or dishonor, doesn't mean a thing to me. And besides, no one knows you... Because no one knows you as the wife of the Commander of Ulloa. Do you know why in Seville they consider me suspicious? Because I never show you to anyone, and no one will find out there is a slut in my house. I'm not married to you, and if I keep you by my side, it's only out of pity. And for that reason, the Inquisition hasn't burned you yet...'"

She was silent for a moment. She had stopped crying. "The innocent boy is you," she said, and then was quiet again. I must have looked like an especially surprised nitwit, because she smiled in the middle of her silence.

"Are you surprised?"

"No. I know how to handle myself."

"He explained to me then that he could use me as a decoy to attract you and fleece you. Not to this house, but another where he would put me, with new, indoctrinated servants. 'I need money and that dog of your father slipped away to the other world and let me down. I need a bunch of doubloons to make a donation to the Virgin de la Esperanza. It's right that you should get them for me. It will be easy to do that with Don Juan. And, if you're good at it, I'll even share it with you.' I had calmed down. I listened to his insults without making a fuss. I even dared to say to him 'But, wouldn't you feel dishonored if your wife...?' He interrupted me with anger. 'You are not my wife, as I have just explained to you! There is no priest in Seville who would dare to say so. You are my concubine, and I couldn't care less about what my concubine does.' 'Isn't all this nit-picking just a way to deceive yourself?' "Nit-picking?" "Me, deceive myself? I am the most clever fellow in all of Seville, and even kids in school know that. But I would cease to be that, if the money of that fool slips out of my hands.' 'I asked him what you are like, and he said: 'An handsome young man! He will like you, and that's the advantage you have.' 'And is he so rich?' 'The richest man in Seville!' 'A noble?' 'A Spaniard like me!' 'In that case, wouldn't it be more safe, and more honest, to have him marry Elvira?' He charged at me with fury. 'What do you mean? Marry him to Elvira? She is also...' He grabbed me by the arm, pulling me out of the bed, and shook me violently. "Jewish dog! Who do you think she is to get married? The body of my daughter will never serve the pleasure of a man! It's enough to have one slut in my house.' He was furious. I thought he was going to kill me. 'There will be no other man but me in her life and, before I die, I will have her cooped up in a convent. All we need is for my daughter to serve as fodder for the pleasure of Don Juan!' And then he stomped off."

"I find that rather exaggerated," I interrupted her. "No matter how much he cares about his daughter, he doesn't have to act like that. It's not as if he was a jealous husband."

"Soon after that you arrived."

There, Doña Sol's eyes recovered their happiness and the signs of pain in her face disappeared. Then she began to laugh.

"Then, confusion exploded among the servants! The one that opened the door came back in bewitched, and told the others they should look out and see you. In a moment they were stunned; after that they started whispering, calling you handsome, saying they would devote themselves to you. I also went to take a look..."

I had sat down on the edge of the bed, opposite her. Doña Sol clenched her hands and hesitated. Little by little her knees bent and she ended up between my feet.

"Don Juan! Are you a man, or the devil?"

I laughed and, at the same time, started feeling great tenderness for her and I kissed her cheeks.

"God wouldn't like that! I am not even demonized, or, at least I try not to be. That idea does not appeal to me at all."

"Then, why...?"

She hesitated again and embraced my feet, looking at me like she was entranced. But a strange light shined in her eyes.

“...since I have seen you, why have I wished that God didn’t exist, so he wouldn’t be greater than you? Why have I spent the day waiting for you like one waits for the Messiah? And why am I next to you, like I am in Paradise? For me, you are like the Promise made to Abraham! You are my self, my happiness, and my triumph!”

Her hands moved and began to unbutton her nightgown, and in a moment she was naked.

9. I tried not to hope for too much, to control my fantasy; but my prudence was not able to make me avoid the sensation of enchantment and feel that, again, I was plunged into the eternal, face to face with God. Although varied, and more mixed with nuances like it was with Marianne. The main difference was that I didn’t have the desire to kick Doña Sol out of bed, probably because I was now beginning to feel sexual disillusion, or perhaps because I realized that it was not Doña Sol’s fault, nor was it Marianne’s, nor would it be the fault of any other woman in the same situation. I acted with the greatest courtesy without laughing even once, about her practically religious praises, or the markedly mystical forms of love Doña Sol had for me, love that made her rise so high that I was not able to reach her, or from whose depths she rose like a diver out of the sea; although instead of pearls, Doña Sol carried a smile on her lips. At first I wanted to confirm how, in spite of the differences, and the personal inequalities, the effects were the same and, except for the words with which she expressed them, words like prayers, the happiness of Doña Sol seemed the same, at least as far as I could see, as those of Marianne. But, I did not commit the mistake of abiding by the generic; I was convinced, once and for all, that all women feel the same in these situations, and thanks to that, I forgot about their sensations in order to understand their feelings; if I hadn’t done that, my life probably would have been different; because Doña Sol’s lips offered me, without realizing it, the same happiness that the devil had offered me with his first temptation, but what I realized had so much similarity with other previous events, that they mattered more to me; they relieved me from all the temptation of sensuality and quickly restored me to the presence of God. Because what I realized was that Doña Sol did not exaggerate, that she had truly substituted God for me, and that she truly wished God did not exist, so she could be completely mine. That means that in me there was the possibility of vying with the Lord, and there were in my self—or rather, from her—abilities that until then I had never realized, which captivated women, and made them want to unite with me for all eternity, and that in a similar union they found a supreme happiness whose quality really moved me. I will confess that when I arrived at this conclusion, I felt terror, and for some time, I don’t know how long it was, I was unable to keep moving forward, so I fell on the bed, filled with repentance, wanting to kneel on the white and black floor tiles, and ask God to forgive my audacity. But then I remembered once again the wild laughter of my ancestors, the mocking of the man who told me: “Young lad, aren’t you the one who believed he had the strength to defy God? Aren’t you the one who felt that he could commit sins as high as they could go? Run to the side of the Commander and ask him for mercy, and spend the rest of your days in a convent, because there is no other solution.” I raised myself from the ground full of determination, and my arms wrapped around Doña Sol and lifted her above all human happiness, lifting myself above all other men; and when she dropped into herself and not one of her pores gave a sigh of happiness—when that is what I felt inside—my heart thought again of my ancestor, and I gave him the final challenge: “You will see what I am capable of!”

However, the feeling of guilt did not go away; Instead, it got even stronger, each time greater so I had to struggle a great deal until I got rid of it. I was satisfied, though, because in my repentance I saw a sign that the Lord had not scorned me, that He had accepted the fight, and that he was trying to convince me with his most delicate divine weapons. If by the Greatness of my Opponent I could measure my own—except for all the differences, since I never was stupid enough that I considered myself equal to God, and I knew that in the end he would conquer me—my ancestors could be proud of me.

Doña Sol had fallen asleep. I moved over to the window and enjoyed the aroma of the flowers; torrents of springtime aromas came in through the window, and my body clung to them so that I felt I was also part of spring. I noticed Leporello leaning against the opposite wall, his hat covering his eyes, as though he was asleep. The dawn light brightened the colors of his suit. I whistled at him. He raised his head and then ran over to the window.

“Are you ready?”

“I suppose I will leave soon, though one never knows... Wait for me in the corner of the plaza.”

He started to leave without rushing. I stayed next to the window for a few minutes, enjoying the freshness of dawn and letting it enter my veins. Afterwards, I went back in to the dark room. The odor of the flowers mixed with that of the body of Doña Sol forming a disturbing aroma, like that of incense.

Doña Sol had sat down on the bed, with her arms crossed and her head sunk into her chest. I sat down next to her and took her hands. She looked at me sweetly and then moved away.

“Don’t touch me any more, my dear.”

I tried to embrace her, and she shied away.

“Why do you do that?”

She had grabbed me by the hands and was holding me away from her.

“Would you understand?”

I tried to quiet her with my response.

“Why not, if we are one, and your thoughts flourish in me, and are also mine?”

She smiled.

“No, Juan, We have been one, or at least I have felt myself in you and, at the same time, I had you in my body and in my soul. But the enchantment has now broken...”

“We can always restore it.”

She moved her head.

“Not now. I didn’t know. What happened tonight only happens once, and that’s all. Besides...”

She waved her hands and let her arms fall weakly.

“...I no longer desire you, nor could I desire you. It was... how can I say it?, more, much more, than I expected and what I wanted, and that is also something I had never expected, something that was different from pleasure. If I had known that I knew all these things, and that I abhorred them! This morning, when I saw you, I understood that I would receive something else from you, I didn’t know what, but perhaps something more beautiful than love.”

She had jumped out of bed and started to get dressed; while she did it, she seemed to recover her shyness and hesitated.

“You’ll never know, Juan, what I found up there in that world where you lifted me, and which I wanted so much to enter...” She stopped for a moment and looked at me warily. “You won’t laugh at me will you?”

I took her hand and raised it up, and kissed it. She held on to mine tightly.

“Thanks, Juan... I was afraid. It was so extraordinary, and yet so natural. You carried me to love and made me feel it, and is it strange in than I found the Lord in your arms? You see, I wanted to make you my God, and I hoped to forget mine, and you led me back to Him... Don’t look at me like that, Juan! You have made me be aware of God more than I had ever been, even as a child, when my faith was greater. And for that I love you even more.”

I am not able to imagine the kind of stupor, or perhaps stupidity, expressed in my eyes; because, from Doña Sol, I would have expected many splendid words, or many crazy thoughts, except those. She spoke with such ardor, like a visionary, without suspecting that she was tearing down my pride, and making me discover that God had pulled my leg.

“I know that I will no longer be able to do anything bad in the world, and I feel myself capable of any sacrifice. Yes, Juan, even being burned at the stake, so that God would forgive my husband. Some day that will come, I am sure. Until then, I will be his slave, and the slave of his daughter. For her I would...”

She hesitated again, and grabbed my arm.

“You have to marry Elvira, Juan! You have to free her from her father! Steal her from him, if you have to. I will give you a hint about what you can do. Write to her and ask her to meet you in church, and let her see you there. She will love you right away, and in your arms she will be sweet and charming. Don’t tell me you can’t do it, Juan!”

Her look was imploring, her voice struggled, and I didn’t feel capable of smiling at her.

10. We arrived at my house when the sun was shining. I felt irritated, and at the same time, the calmest part of my spirit insisted on reasoning, and trying to explain the situation. “Evidently, Juan, you have slipped. God is love, and if Doña Sol found love in you, how can it be strange if she found God by chance? You don’t have to take things so far. Instead, remain on the edges, let Him decide exactly if the God she sees is you. That way you won’t send her automatically to His arms, and she will stay in yours. That is, of course, in case they believe. Because with the non-believers, it would not be a bad job to show them the charms of Eternity, and be able to tell the Lord, ‘Here I give you

this gift, that came to You because of a sin.' No, that wouldn't be a bad job, no... The reasoning seemed irreproachable, it occurred to me then to test Elvira with this new method. Doña Sol had promised me a hint, she asked me to write to her step-daughter, and she even told me the place and the time when she went to mass every day. I still had a couple hours.

Leporello helped me get ready and brought something from the kitchen, because we were both hungry. Then he asked me if I intended to go to bed, and I told him no. He asked me if he could get undressed, and I told me to keep his clothes on because we would leave early. Before retiring he brought me a pen and paper, and while he took a nap in the antechamber, I started writing my first love letter. I wrote a long one that was dull and syllogistic, and when I read it I destroyed it, furious at myself because, at twenty three years old, I wasn't able to send a girl some words of passion. It occurred to me to look at some of my father's books to see if the words of some poet would inspire some warmer concepts, but it turned out that all his life my father had read nothing more than authors of heroic epics and treatises of devotion. Then I was even more furious, and the fury made me get up and take a walk in the patio during the early hours, alone and gloomy. I watered the roses and the orange trees, and the swallows drank the waters. A well-nourished cat spied on them in a corner, and when it jumped out to catch them, the weight of its belly made it miss its goal. It occurred to me to interpret that as a warning; a long-winded letter would be counterproductive. But how would one write a short letter that would say in six words all that I wanted to say to Elvira? I sat down on a bench near the rose bushes; I let myself enjoy their aroma and began to think. The urgency of the situation told me not to beat around the bush and try to use rhetorical devices like syllogisms. It also didn't seem smart to use concepts that were too spiritual, because what I could give her began with flesh, and would perhaps remain inside her. I retook the pen and paper and wrote again; this time I ended with a letter that was a little shorter, on two sheets of paper. It was still too long, but with a tone that was more real, and more convincing. I began to cross out things here and there; I shortened paragraphs and removed preambles, and after a long hour the letter was reduced to these terms. "It was I who entered your house the other night and was so close to you that your father's pistol chilled my soul. I am what your heart wants. I will return." So I signed my name. As one can see, the letter has a pathetic lie, the most important claim did not belong to me, since the first words of Marianne: "I am what you have been waiting for." If they were given by the Commander, as I had always believed, since they would never have occurred to an uneducated girl like her, I sent the ball back, though with a stone inside it.

The clock on La Giralda chimed 8 o'clock. I went up to my room to change my clothes to some that were a bit more delicate and attractive and, with Leporello following me and the letter in my pocket, I headed toward the church where Elvira would attend the 9 o'clock mass. We got there early enough to wait in the vestibule and spy on those who were entering and leaving. There were lots of pretty girls, girls who looked at us, hoping for a compliment, with guardians of their honor who looked at us threateningly. I gave some gold coins to the poor and then had to hide in order to stop the blessings.

Elvira arrived at nine on the dot, with a duenna on either side, and two squires behind her. I saw her from a distance and moved closer to the entrance to wait for her; a beggar woman gladly gave me her seat, and even blinked her eye, when she understood what I was up to. "If you should need anyone for some discreet message, you can count on me, sir." Elvira approached and I looked at her with impudence. She stumbled, and I smiled at her. She let her veil fall leaving her face uncovered, and I expressed my thanks with my look. I saw her hands were trembling, and I showed her mine with the letter folded between them. Elvira stopped and sighed. I told her with a gesture that she was free to accept the paper or reject it. As she passed by, she happened to drop her prayer book; one of the squires hurried to get it, but I put my foot on it. The squire straightened up defiantly, and I also straightened up. We stared at each other, and it was obvious who stared the hardest, because he stepped back so I was able to bend over to pick up the book. Elvira told me loudly, "My father will kill you for that." I answered her: "That would be hard to do, because his daughter already has made me dead." She hid the letter in her glove and entered the church with more wind than a frigate. The beggar woman winked her eye again, and said: "You've got her in your lap, sir." I felt obligated to ask for an explanation, since I didn't understand her expression.

We entered the church. Elvira and her guardians occupied one of the first benches. Hiding in back of a column, I watched her for a long time. She was reading her prayer book and didn't raise her head, but I thought I noticed that her lips were trembling. At my side, Leporello was distracted by a fly, but that didn't worry me.



“While I follow her as she leaves, look to see if she threw away the paper I gave her.”

A fat priest started the mass; and another, who was even fatter, went up to the pulpit and said foul things about the world, the devil, and the flesh: his voice raved over the heads and filled the inside of the temple. The faithful listened as they watched him, except for Elvira, as if those words about sobriety and chastity did not apply to her. Although it's not impossible that those lewd ideas mentioned from the pulpit may have disturbed her; because the priest did not beat around the bush and called the bread bread, and the wine wine. And as he talked about sin, he revealed his science and his experience at the same time. It was not that the devil was giving him advice; but I hoped what he was saying gave my purpose, as well as the desires of Elvira, an unexpected alliance.

If the mass had lasted a long time, the sermon would be even longer. Elvira hadn't moved, nor did she seem aware of what was happening around her, because one of the duennas had to warn her when they were offering the blessing. When she left, escorted by her guards like she had entered, I got ahead of them to see her leave, and so she could see me. Four looks of indignation tried to fulminate me, but in the fifth I thought I saw an indication of hope. Mine tried to say: “You will soon be in my arms.”

It was early, and in the blue sky of Seville, a flock of doves was crossing over. The bright light and the heat of the walls made the shadows even darker, almost black. A subtle aroma of jasmynes penetrated me, but at my side the beggars gave off their professional stench. Leporello crossed the threshold, stretched out his fist and put in my hand some small pieces of paper. I looked at them, and tossed them into the air.

“Let's go.”

“To our house?”

“Yes, we've got things to do.”

I locked myself in a dark room with bright floor tiles, and remained in shirt sleeves, bare chested, and with bare arms. The heat started to bother me, and my mind functioned slowly, as if it wanted to stop, and leave my body with only the merest sensations. I asked for something cold to cool me off, and they brought me some anise-flavored cold water that loosened me up. Little by little my mind recovered its agility; but my body was tired. I laid down on the divan and let my spirit think freely, but went to sleep. And when I woke up it was already past noon. Leporello was walking around me on tiptoes, but when he heard me moving, he came to me.

“They have brought you this package.”

I broke open the wrapper. There was a key and some papers. Doña Sol had sent me the plan of the house with an indication of the path to Elvira's room, and some written words: “Elvira has told me that she saw the most handsome man in the world by the door of the church. Was that you? Thanks! I told her that perhaps that man was hers, and her eyes lit up with hope. Don't get me wrong! I think everything will work out easily, and you will be able to get a priest to marry you. I would enjoy it so much to be there! Will you let me? I swear that seeing you happy will give me the strength to deal with my sacrifice. Write to her, Juan, and do it today. If you send your servant with the letter at the call to prayer, I will put it in my bag and then leave it on the pillow of Elvira. I will tell her that you are the one she saw in church.”

How innocent Doña Sol is! By now I know that all women go overboard to protect love affairs, to arrange secret meetings, and help the two who love each other, to love each other even more; but then, I think that Don Gonzalo's wife surpasses the normal magnitude of spirit, so just a few hours are enough for her to advance noticeably on the path to sanctity. I promised myself that I wouldn't disappoint her, and since her letter had excited my imagination, at once I wrote a letter to Elvira:

“Like this letter comes to you, one of these nights I will come to your lips. You can depend on me. Don Juan.” I gave it to Leporello with instructions.

“Is it for the woman of last night, sir?”

“Who remembers her? Its for another one, although in the same place.”

“Can love be that short?”

“I can't give a direct answer for that. The one of yesterday hardly lasted, and it's likely that the one of tomorrow won't either, although there is a risk...”

An idea flashed in my mind, and I hesitated. There is the risk of getting married. I knew then, that my kind heart would not let me abandon Elvira if I managed to seduce her and my own moral principles would carry me to marriage, even if my heart had already turned cold. Matrimony was part of the game, an agreed game I was about to play, a game that I had to accept or reject in full, without reservations or exclusions. Until now, the reasons were from me, but if I seduced Elvira and then left her, the Commander would turn against me then call me a villain and spit in my face.

And, nevertheless, I knew the game was not honest; I knew that when I accepted it, I accepted it along with a trap, with my eyes voluntarily closed; I accepted it because if I opened them and dug through the game until I unlocked the truth, it would be dangerous for the social order. I knew it from my years in Salamanca, when my flesh was still innocent, when my spirit was not thinking of rebelling against the Lord; because, then, I already liked to dig into the simple truths and find the hidden lack of reason, the conclusion brought by the hair, and the sophisticated foundation. "Point one," the professor told us, "it's a sin to seduce a woman, since it is against the will of her father." "And if she doesn't have a father?" I objected. "And if it is the father himself who reports it?" The professor liked to cobble different ideas together. "Why is it a sin if the woman does it freely, and the man does it freely?" I objected once more. And I concluded in front of the angry schoolmaster: "It's clear that if God explicitly prohibits it, it's because it is a religious act..." The professor told me: "Mr. Tenorio, you have a heretic mind of pure disagreement." I answered him: "Only methodically, sir, and if you prefer, only courteously. I am making objections so that you can resolve them and show us the sharpness of your mind." But the professor has never explained to me satisfactorily why a man finds himself obligated to get married to a woman who he has seduced, and not with a prostitute whose body he has bought.

And now, after thinking about my moral commitments with the girl, plus their consequences, I realized that marrying her and killing her father did not seem like compatible logics: acts that were elegantly related. El Cid had married Doña Jimena after Lozano was dead, but he had not seduced her before that; on the contrary, if the romances don't mislead, it had been a sort of compensation imposed by the King on Don Rodrigo, a judicial compensation: as if, after killing the old man I would ask for the hand of his daughter in order not to leave her alone and defenseless.

No. No. Death was out of place, it would be a miscue, a stridency, a stain. Death gave a nuance that was unnecessarily tragic to a comic adventure. It would be better to call the Commander and tell him: "Since you are stupid and a monstrosity, I have preferred to abduct your daughter, and to marry her after that, to ask for her hand and have a proper marriage. Now, after this has been done, you can do what you like. I have taken her to my house as my wife, and I warn you that this marriage is perfectly legal; etc." The Commander would kick up a fuss and would threaten me with all the charges in this world and the next, and he would also demand money. And I would give it to him. And there, in the heights of the afterlife reserved for the Tenorios, my honorable ancestors would curse me. And the one I spoke to would laugh with his laugh of a superior man who had returned. "And to accomplish that you made yourself tragic? For that, dear nephew, we proclaim your reasoning against God? You gave some shouts that tried to reach heaven and move Him. For me, at least, you left me preoccupied. Pure rocketry, dear Juan, mere rhetoric! A marriage settled everything. And Don Gonzalo got what he wanted, your money, in the way he had planned, by making a fool out of you with a woman's body. Whether it was that of Doña Sol, or his daughter, does not matter"

Unfortunately, he would be right, and there would be nothing I could say to him.

"In which cases, Leporello, is the seducer of a woman freed from the obligation to marry her?"

"Not in any, if he is a gentleman. Unless there is..."

"Unless there is what?"

"Unless he is already married; but in that case, the sin is worse, because it would be adultery."

"You think that adultery is dishonor for an adulterer?"

"In all territory of ordinary people, my Lord, the husband is dishonored. Or the father, if she is single."

"Do you find that just?"

"I don't mess with things like that. That's the way they are."

"The devil made them that way."

Leporello gave a start, and looked at me with anger.

"Why put the blame on the devil for something that is not his fault? Men are also capable of doing bad things, without being influenced by the devil."

I laughed and grabbed him by the arm.

"That's what your theology says?"

"I don't know if it says it or not, but I know what to deal with. Take the devil out of the world, and you will see that nothing is better."

I led him to the window where there was a light breeze.

"Don't ever say that in public. That is a heresy. And nevertheless..."

"What?"

"That I am trying to do something evil in my own way, that is, without the help of the devil, and even against his will. For me and before me, I want to do something evil that harms men as little as possible, an evil that is like an academic game between the Lord and me. And doesn't extend beyond the two of us."

"Well, if you don't stop thinking about it... Because if you blaspheme out loud, the children will hear you."

"And wouldn't there be a way to do good with a blasphemous intention?"

"That seems very subtle."

"But not impossible. For instance if I now..."

"What, my lord?"

I grabbed him by the shoulders and looked him in the eye.

"What would you think of me if I were to marry Marianne?"

A spark of light brightened his eyes.

"I'm a servant, sir. I am not allowed to judge the person who pays me."

"I would do something good for Marianne, I am sure. But then, that would really be a form of blasphemy, because that marriage would only be a way to avoid making my conscience feel obliged to marry a girl who I plan to seduce one of these nights."

"The one in the church?"

"Precisely."

Leporello looked at me thoughtfully.

"Would you allow me to give you my opinion?"

"Of course."

He lifted his hands to his eyes, with his fingers in a knot.

"She's a smashing girl."

"Is that all that occurs to you?"

He smiled

"I'm not a Tenorio, sir. Those of my class don't have honor, because we don't have money, and we are not obliged to make reparations. One sleeps with who he can, and tries to avoid the consequences. Our conscience is not as fragile as that of the lords. We are villainous by definition, and we behave as villainously as our means of fortune permits us. And not much is asked of us. So if I were you, I wouldn't be worried about casuistries, and I would cut to the chase. But, I repeat, I am not a Tenorio."

"A little cynical though, right?"

"Only if necessary, sir, only if necessary."

"Am I to understand that, with that, you are advising me to cut to the chase?"

"I wouldn't dare. I am speaking from my point of view, which could not be yours. What I would do, being who I am, in a situation like yours, is something different. What you ought to do does not apply to me."

"Nor to me either, believe me. At least, not until a few days ago. Before that, things were easier; everything was in its place, and it wasn't necessary to think. But now it's different."

"Why is that, sir?" he smiled mischievously, and blinked his eye. "Because you already slept with two different women? That happens to everyone at a certain age, and then one gets worked up. But soon things get back in place."

"The thing is, I don't want them to get back. I like them the way they are, deranged..."

"In that case..."

11. About six o'clock I took my chances and made the decision by myself. I went to the house of a notary and gave him the deed of an endowment of all my belongings to Marianne, as a matrimonial gift, along with the power to act as owner and mistress in my absence. The notary made some changes to the amount, and advised me that it was not a juridical custom to make a complete transfer of the fortune of a husband. I invented a few reasons that, if they didn't convince him, at least they would him keep quiet. With the papers in my pocket, I went back home. I wrote a letter to the Commander, making a date at ten o'clock, and sent it with Leporello. Afterwards I looked for Marianne whom I hadn't seen all day. I found her in her room, kneeling in front of a Crucifix where she seemed to be praying. When she heard me, she turned her head; when she saw me she got up and ran to receive me; pinned to her chest, there was a bouquet of tuberoses.

"What are you doing?"

"Praying. I never had so much time to do it."

"Do you like it?"

"Of course! I like it after today. Because before..."

"Forget about before, forget about yourself, because now you're a different woman."

I looked at her new dress and her hairdo. The smell of the tuberose warmed the blood in my veins and made me want Marianne; but I had determined not to make her sin any more.

"I guess I look like it."

"You are, and you will be, even more yet."

"I moved her in front of mirror."

"Do you think you're pretty?"

"I don't recognize myself! If my friends in the Inn were to see me...!"

"It's not them, but me, who has the right to judge you."

"You think I am worthy of that?"

"I am going to marry you, Marianne.!"

She smiled sadly, and rested her head against my chest.

"Don't mock me, sir."

I grabbed her by the shoulders and, holding her in front of me, I looked her in the eyes.

"We're going to be married, Marianne, this very night. We're going to be married here in my house. I will pretend to be dying so the priest can do his job, shortening the proceedings."

"But, isn't that a deceit?"

"Yes, but one that is permitted. The only possible way to get married when one is in a hurry."

Marianne lowered her head.

"I am in sin."

"My death won't occur so soon that there wouldn't time for a priest to hear your confession."

"Why are you doing this, sir?"

"Because you deserve it."

"I don't understand it. I am a prostitute. An honorable man should not marry me. What will people say?"

"People will understand that your soul is pure, and that your heart is capable of the greatest love."

She smiled.

"That's true. I am capable of dying for you."

"That won't be necessary. It will be enough that you do me the honor of marrying me."

She started laughing.

"Honor? Me give it to you?"

The sadness and fear had vanished from her eyes, and they now shined with a jubilant glow.

"Now, get control of yourself and get ready. I have to go. But I'll be right back. With this, I will not delay."

The sun was setting with a sweet golden glow, full of pleasing aromas. I went to see the lawyer who had handled my father's litigations. He was surprised to see me, and he told me to come to his office where he offered me something to drink. I explained the reason for my visit.

"I am going to kill a man one of these days. Now, don't look like that, mister lawyer! I am not a killer, nor an assassin, but a man of honor who is going to remove an offense with blood. Isn't that what they say? Remove an offense with blood. I will kill him in a duel, but I am afraid that the judges won't think that a duel is a legal way of sending an evil man to hell. They will try to take over my goods, which wouldn't matter to me, if they were just mine; but yesterday I endowed them to the woman I am going to marry tonight..."

The lawyer opened his eyes wide with surprise, and a fearful expression appeared on his face.

"...and I need to have it so that, with that woman, they don't touch a hair on her head."

"That will cost you..."

I put a bag of ducats on the table.

"Count them and see if these are enough for your charges. Then give me a receipt that states the amount of money, and the purpose for which it was given."

The hand of the lawyer trembled, and he looked for a pen and paper.

"And what about you, Don Juan? What are you going to do? Go to jail?"

"Slip away unnoticed. Or maybe just hide myself. I don't know yet."

He began to write.

"The usual thing in cases like this is that the killer goes to war. A good military assignment is usually enough for the king to pardon him."

"I don't need a pardon from the king."

The lawyer raised his eyes questioningly. I continued:

"Since when did we, as Tenorios, ever recognize the authority of kings? You ought to know. It's been more than a century that their majesties have left us alone."

He signed the receipt and handed it to me.

"There it is. But, why...?"

"You are a clever lawyer. You must convince the judges that not a penny of my wife's goods belong to me; that all of her goods and money were hers before marrying me, as is stated in a document dated this same afternoon. There is no reason, therefore, for me to respond monetarily for any of my actions. That's an obligation, and so that you will fulfill it scrupulously is why I have just given you a considerable amount of money."

I stood up.

"I am the best lawyer in Seville."

"And I am the best swordfighter in Spain."

I called his bluff to make him understand that I would kill him if he tried to deceive Marianne, and he seemed to understand it. He gave a foxy chuckle.

"I was under the impression that you were only a good theologian."

"In Salamanca you are taught everything."

He accompanied me to the entrance. On the way, he tried to convince me that I should think about it carefully.

"...because killing a man..."

I went back to my house. Leporello was already back, with the agreement of the Commander.

"Now, I have found out where the parish priest lives, and when he goes to bed."

12. By nine thirty that night I had lost my confidence. Without knowing why, I was suddenly pursued, like an unexpected sneeze, by the fear of being mistaken, that I had embarked on a stupid adventure, without a way of escape. I remembered in the immediate past the moment when my bare arm had sunk into the water of the river, and I had imagined fantastically, not with the fantasy of a dream, but of a farce: as if everything had happened in a scenario created especially for me, in a theater whose actors knew their part, as well as mine; all were characters in a comedy in which I had been given the part of a fool. I was just about ready to give in. Interior voices called me an imbecile and told me to forget about the whole thing and take advantage of the Commander's visit to ask him for the hand of his daughter, so I could marry her as God wills; these things that I had imagined were so strong that I wondered if God, in a final amorous effort, had sent them Himself. And I couldn't help feeling flattered about that deference, or that predilection of the Creator for his humble, blasphemous creature. But I also asked myself, as a dialectic caution, if it was the devil who caused them; and that saved me, because then I understood that God God would never have advised me to marry Elvira, a creature who was poorly suited to lead anyone by the right path. I began to be irritated then by the diabolical fraud, the filthy temptation of virtue, the lure of an apparently Christian life, but mixed with these trifles that would lead one to hell, without glory or nobility. Now I am sure that sinners like me are an annoyance to the devil, because we cause him so much work, and at any moment people like us can turn things around and fall into the arms of God; because of that, the devil has always preferred the mediocre sin of those who think they are good enough to be guaranteed Paradise and go on through life making others suffer with their intolerable righteousness. During that moment of doubt I didn't know it yet, but I sensed it. With better instincts, I would have gone to do penance and marry Elvira as God wanted. It's possible, though, that by not doing that, I saved Elvira's soul; because if she had married me, we would have both gone to hell.

I thought about all that while I was waiting for the Commander, on a night that was warm and profound, a fragrant night in which the touch of the breeze on your arm was like the caress of a woman. How that night in Seville affected my body! How it refreshed it and sweetened it, and made me appreciate life! I have always had to defend myself from my sensuous body, like saints have to defend theirs. My body would have carried me to matrimony, perhaps to Purgatory, which is the remedy offered by God to those who are mediocre.

The Commander arrived like a torrent, and I asked him, "Is something wrong?"

We were in the patio. Only the corner where I had waited for him was lighted. A glow of moonlight spread over the limestone wall and illuminated the tops of the cypress trees. Below that the orange trees and the flowers were in darkness.

"Your letter frightened me," he said.

"Calm yourself. I asked you to come because you're my friend, and in a difficult moment I need your help. I am going to get married."

He remained in one piece. Never, like in that moment, have I ever seen him with such a face of papier mâché, like it was painted with the paintbrush of a painter of giants with enormous heads.

"What did you say?" his voice muttered.

"That I'm going to get married in a half an hour, and I need you as a witness."

Don Gonzalo's hand waved about in the air and found the back of a chair. His other hand wiped the sweat off his brow.

"You're going to get married," he broke out. "But with who? Because you don't know anyone in Seville."

"I'm going to marry Marianne."

Don Gonzalo took a seat. His forehead scowled, and his eyebrows raised up.

"I don't know her."

"Yes, the prostitute the other night, in the Eritaña Inn."

"The prost..."

He broke out in a laugh, a profound laugh like thunder, prolonged like the noise of the waters of a river. He laughed with his entire body, like an enormous belly with immense hands. He laughed like the ground that brakes up when there is an earthquake, and he himself seemed to break up with that laughter. I felt like leaning over him and pounding him until his nose was smashed and then placing him under a fountain, to see what remained of him, wet and deflated.

"What are you laughing about, Commander?" I asked with soft voice.

The Commander began to calm down. His mouth still trembled, but his words were easy to understand.

"Are you all right in the head? Is it because you have been out in the sun too long, and your brain is overheated? They say that those in Seville..."

"No, sir, I am perfectly sane."

"Then I don't understand you. When you were in my house you seemed like a perfectly rational boy, and no one would have guessed that you were going to do anything so absurd. Still more, we had arranged that on one of these nights..."

"Let's leave this until sometime later. It's true that before yesterday I hadn't thought about getting married, but it's also true that I was visited by Miguel Mañara, a holy man that you must know."

"And was it Miguel who convinced you to get married to that...?"

"No, Don Miguel doesn't know her. He also doesn't know that I have lost my innocence in the arms of Marianne. They told Don Miguel I was in sin, and he came to convert me. He succeeded. You can't imagine the eloquence he used when he spoke to me, the sensible manner he gives to someone who is faced with the torments of hell! Especially his manners... and how he uses them! They seem like the tools of the devil that have already touched the flesh of the poor sinner!"

The Commander huffed and looked at me scornfully, and then smiled.

"He touched my heart, do you understand?" I continued. "He really scared me. And since then I have been brooding about ways to reconcile myself with the Lord."

"But come on, lad, that can be done with a confession. We can do that, if every time that we...!"

"Yes, who doubts it? I have already confessed; but, in addition, I have stripped my soul before the Lord, I humiliated it, and I asked Him for an inspiration to retake the right path, and follow it. And then the Lord told me clearly..."

"The Lord? You heard Him?" His face was more eloquent than his words; it revealed that he did not believe in miracles.

"Like one hears these things; as if an idea popped up in my spirit which, otherwise, would have never occurred. An idea, on the other hand, that is logical; an idea according to which I myself, on my own, would have been able to have a clear my mind. Because anyone who is not blind knows, Commander..."

He leaned back in his chair and looked at me with curiosity.

"Anyone? Explain that, explain what you mean!"

He rubbed his hands.

"It's quite obvious; it's enough to turn something over, like one turns over a syllogism in order to prove it. Suppose a very confident man seduces a girl who is a virgin. Isn't he obliged, in moral and customary terms, to marry her?"

The Commander wrapped his arms over his belly as if a new belly-laugh was about to come out.

"Of course. It's the obligation of a gentleman."

"Let's suppose something else, Commander. Suppose you had a daughter, and I had seduced her? Wouldn't you demand me to...?"

His face darkened, and his eyes were filled with rage. He let go of his belly, and he stretched out his arms and stuck his fists in my face.

"That's a supposition I can't tolerate, because a daughter of mine..."

"Doesn't it occur to you that my father, may he rest in peace, would say the same thing?"

"If your father was in my place, he would have already given you some good punches. A man of honor like him, have a prostitute as a daughter-in-law! His bones must be shivering with horror!"

"On the contrary, I think my father would be happy with my decision. He has already learned the Truth, and he knows, as Mañara told me, that every time a man and a woman are joined, the Heart of the Lord saddens, or rejoices, depending on whether they are sinning, or not. My father knows now that the union of a man and a woman is eternally sealed; he knows, therefore, that when I united with Marianne the other night, it was as if we were married. If I was to go ahead and marry her, I would only sanction what was already done."

The eyes of the Commander contracted with a frown.

"And is that the way you recover your lost honor, really?... in the arms of that whore."

"Exactly."

"And your head will grow horns as enormous as cathedral, of all different kinds: horns of a bull, of a deer, of a gazelle; horns of charcoal, horns of plenty. All the horns in the world on the head of Don Juan Tenorio, of the purest lineage of Seville, except for mine!"

"You're being too frivolous, Commander. Do you believe in God?"

He jumped to his feet.

"How do you dare to doubt it?"

"It's just that you don't talk like a Christian. What does the past of Marianne matter, if her sins have been erased by a confession?"

"Does it also erase the memory of her body for the men who slept with her? How many boys in Seville can say 'I slept with her' when they see her pass by?"

"I don't have any reason to worry about those poor guys. Let them take care of their own sins. The important thing is that, by virtue of the sacrament, Marianne has purified herself, and for me she is like a virgin. As for her honor, she will have enough with what I give her. Since I have enough for a multitude of prostitutes."

He kept looking at me; after that he shrugged his shoulders and stood up.

"Okay, lad. You've made your bed, now lay in it. But don't expect anyone to approve of you."

He turned his back to me and started to walk away. But then he stopped and started to come back slowly.

"What do you want to say about that?"

"You told me about some parties... I would like to visit them, when there are no women, of course, because I don't want to deceive mine; but with dice and cards and all that... Playing a game is not a sin, as far as I know."

"No, my son, it isn't, nor is it to marry a prostitute! It's just that it looks bad, and in your case, complete stupidity. But with the way that you explained it to me, I can see there is no way to talk you out of it. Let the thing die. With respect to those nocturnal parties..."

I interrupted him.

"Not tonight of course. It would be bad for me to abandon my wife on the night of our wedding. But tomorrow, for example..."

"So soon?"

"Why not? Although I am rich enough, and since I expect to have a dozen children, I will need a little more money. At least that's what I'm thinking. With gambling, one wins it easily."

"Of course, lad, of course! Why not? You are a lucky man, and you will win sometimes, I'm sure. And if sometime you lose, the next time you'll win. And if you have a bad run of luck, deal with it. In gambling is where one cools their spirit. Although, for you, it will be easier. You are so rich. With the amount of your assets, you could lose for a whole year."

His voice had sweetened, and he recovered his rapacious smile. He even patted me on the shoulder.

"But I advise you not to tell anyone you are married, and certainly not with whom. People have many prejudices, and if they know about it, it would affect your friendship with other men... So just

keep it secret, at least for the time being, okay? Later on you will find a way..."

"You don't know how grateful I am, and how much I thank you!"

We agreed to meet each other the following night at ten thirty. I accompanied him to the entry because I hadn't been able to convince him to serve as a witness; his fundamental principles kept him from doing that. I saw him march down the street with long steps. His guffaws woke up the swallows on the eaves.

"Dear Lord, I wouldn't want to send him to hell. A guy like that does ugly things wherever he goes. I ask you, therefore, to give him time to be repentant for his great stupidity."

I told Leporello:

"Now, I am going to go to bed. Have them bring me some blankets and some very hot soup. When you see me sweat, go and look for the priest and tell him to come at once to marry a couple in articulo mortis."

13. I went down at dawn. I wanted some fresh air, and even the water. The patio was dark and fragrant, and in the cypress tree I could hear a nightingale sing; I took off my clothes and dove into the pond. The water was cold, and in its chill I felt purified, free of kisses and caresses. It seemed like the water restored the possession of my body, given away that night. And when I recovered it, I felt like it had been stolen.

Marianne was still sleeping in the very large bed where I was born. For me, love had made me unable to sleep.

"I expect my lord will need a towel."

"Are you there, Leporello?"

"I woke up, sir, as is my obligation."

I couldn't get a good look at his face, but I was pretty sure he was laughing.

"Yes, bring me a towel."

He helped me dry myself. He pick my clothes up from the ground and then waited for me to get dressed.

"I have also prepared the lord some hot water, and a shot of old wine. It's what feels best at times like these."

"Have you ever served someone who was just married before?"

"No, never, sir."

"Then why is it you're so well versed in what to do?"

"I deduce it, sir."

He left, and then came back with a tray with a snack. I invited him to join me.

"Thanks, sir. I'm hungry too."

I poured the wine, and offered him a cup.

"Here, take it. Drink it for me."

"For your happiness?"

"No, for me."

"For you, then, sir."

He drank, he cleared his throat, and smashed the cup on the floor.

"In some part of the world one finishes like that."

"In your land?"

"In some part of the world."

I drank in my turn.

"To your health, Leporello."

"Thanks, sir," he reached out his arm and stopped mine, "but don't break the cup. I'm not worth the bother and, besides, my luck doesn't protect secrets. That is..."

He stopped for a moment and looked at me.

"I suppose that in the future we will go to bed at a more reasonable time. Because I don't know if my master realizes we have stayed awake for the last three nights. What would the respectable people in Seville say, if they knew?"

"Is the opinion of respectable people of that much important for you?"

"I'm thinking about my master. For me, personally... I confess, that it's true, that I would like to sleep when I feel like it; but if I am wanted to stay up all night, I do that. It goes with the job."

"We are probably going to stay up all night, Leporello. Maybe we will spend the rest of our life staying up all night. It hasn't been decided yet."

"But... your wife, sir? She will have gotten married expecting to sleep with her husband."



"Yes. She will have."

"And you?"

I stood up and Leporello moved back a step. I moved over to him and grabbed hold of him.

"Are you trying to drag something out of me?"

He smiled.

"I'm curious, and, besides, I would like to know something about the life that awaits me. On the other hand, the great regard I have for my master, and the many things he has already confided in me permit me to wait on this occasion..."

"What are you hoping I will tell you? Something about a pornographic novel?"

"Nothing like that, sir, and intimacy is intimacy. But... what is it? I have spent hours rocking my head, trying to understand this marriage... and, for the life of me, I haven't been able to do that. My word, sir, I just can't understand it."

"Me either."

He started chuckling and tried to hold it back.

"I am puzzled," I continued. "Perhaps I am also a little blind, perhaps tonight I have been in a world where my eyes and my intelligence are useless. For the time being, I have been happy."

"Don't tell me that, sir. All the taunting in the world has been in the tone of your words. Happy, that's what happiness is called?"

"It's easy. All you have to do is not ask things for more than what they can give you. Then, you discover they are different, that they are richer, that they are even relatively satisfactory. It's like looking at a hand from very close up; you don't see a hand, but designs on the skin."

"And, in them, their destiny. I'm talking about the lines on the hand."

"I'm talking about things as simple as the company of a woman. If you curb your appetite, if you refuse to merge with her and be ontologically one, if you are satisfied with the minor pleasure of the flesh, then the companionship is quite beautiful."

"Two in one body."

"That's what is not true! They are inexorably two bodies, and they will be that forever, at least in this world. That is something not to be looked for nor desired. On the other hand, you have a life, that ceases to be yours, and is now of two."

"In a certain way..."

"Only in a certain way; don't forget it. I have just experienced it, but, in order to do that, I have had to forget about myself, about my past and my future; though, for one night, I have accepted a future that will never be mine. We have been drawing patterns between the two of us, but the drawings were not created by us. From His heights, God has drawn them."

"God again, sir? Why doesn't He leave things as they are, and care for the earth? Even in that, there must be limitations."

"One must always find God present, but today more than ever. He has fought with me all night, and some times he has beaten me. I would never have thought that Marianne could be His trap to annihilate my freedom. If I live with that woman all my life, I would end up as a saint. By her side, evil is not possible. She lavishes charity, and transmits it."

My soul still suffers from having loved that night; for having loved, through Marianne, the entire Universe, and all living creatures. For even having loved Don Gonzalo de Ulloa. The water of the pond hadn't frozen me completely.

"You see. God doesn't set limits to that. He lets you love who you want, get deeply involved in love, and include all noble creatures in just one sentiment. Everything feels good, and that which is badly done does not cause indignation, but, at the most, a smile. 'So, look here, the Commander has acted like a scoundrel!' Even the devil looks at him with sympathy, and his misadventure makes you feel sorry."

Leporello seemed to be startled.

"Leave the devil where he is. Don't even mention him. In this case, as far as I can see, he has had nothing whatsoever to do with it."

"No, not this night; but yesterday he also kept tempting me. And what he offered me was less appealing, and much more uncouth."

"God has more imagination. In the selection of qualities, He chose the most attractive."

"But he uses the same procedures. God also tempts."

"It will be because it produces good results."

"This night, He did it more than ever."

"And has He convinced you? Are we now able to consider Him the pathway to the stars?"

That amused me. I raised my arms and lifted them high in the air, like in front of some imaginary altarpiece.

“Saint Juan Tenorio. It doesn’t sound bad, right? Saint Juan Tenorio, patron of the cuckolded, the Commander would say. And Saint Marianne, repentant.”

I felt a sudden outburst of joy. I grabbed Leporello firmly and looked him in the eyes.

“Don’t you see?, all this is possible! All I have to do is stay with Marianne, and be submissive to her enlightened words. But, you know what that demands of me?”

“I don’t, sir. I thought you were given everything, with nothing expected in return.”

“It wants me to deny myself.”

“It must be something less.”

“It’s written somewhere but, until today, I didn’t understand what it meant. ‘He who wants to lose himself, will be saved.’ But I don’t want to lose myself, right after having found myself. Yesterday I was satisfied with myself and then accepted the consequences of my own satisfaction. Why do I waver now?”

“Sir, it must be because they have made you see a version of yourself which you hadn’t thought about, and that must not be a bad one, since you like it.”

“Yes, it’s not a bad one. And if it tempts me, it’s because it is strong, and heroic. Say goodbye to: your name, your riches, your world, and your freedom. Humble yourself and obey. Annihilate myself in a continuous act of love, and live only for others... What would the Tenorios say if a saint with their name were to sit down among them? Do you think they would dare to reject me?”

He looked at me as if I was crazy.

“I don’t understand you, sir. What do the Tenorios have to do with that?”

“I am a Tenorio.”

“Yes, you’re one of them.”

“I am all of them, I represent them. They live in me. From the other world, they pass on their laws to me.”

“Are they the ones who ordered you to marry a prostitute?”

“In a way, yes. Because they make me preserve my honor, and I feel dishonored for having lost my innocence with a common woman. But when I made her only mine and gave her my own honor, I cleansed her and, at the same time, cleansed myself.”

Leporello smiled.

“That’s a curious way of understanding it. I fear that the Tenorios would agree with it.”

“I approve it, and that’s enough.”

“So where does that leave us? Do you obey your own law, or that of the Tenorios?”

“I try to harmonize them.”

“And if you are thinking about becoming a saint, do you also hope to harmonize your own law with that of Christ?”

I moved over to him with somberness.

“If I follow Christ, I have to give up my own law.”

“And have you done that yet?”

“Not yet.”

“Why don’t you flip heads or tails? If Buridan’s donkey had tossed up a coin, he wouldn’t have died of hunger.”

He quickly took a silver coin out of his pocket.

“Here you have it. If it’s heads, it’s a sin; if it’s tails, it’s sanctity. Does that do?”

“It does. If heads, hell. If tails...”

“No, not that, sir. Neither a coin in the air, nor your will compromise God or the devil. What you are going to gamble is your life, this life, not the destiny of your soul. That will be seen after you die. Because if God has said: “This man belongs to me,” a sin doesn’t have any affect. It will be enough to give Him a repentance at the final moment.”

Leporello was speaking with a strange tone; he was speaking as if those words didn’t belong to him and he was saying them against his will. To me they sounded like heresy. But thinking that God could have chosen me for Himself, and that no matter what I did I wouldn’t stop my salvation, made me feel a burst of pride in my soul. With a violent push I knocked over the tray with what remained of our snack.

“So toss the coin in the air! May God say his word, then I will say mine.”

Leporello looked at me as though he was doubtful. But then he tossed the coin and we both watched as it flew into the air. It rose so high that the first rays of the sun made it shine brightly

over the blue background of the morning sky. After that it fell back on the stones of the patio where it bounced and jingled, and began to roll toward a bed of carnations.

Leporello pointed at the coin.

“Heads or tails?”

He bent over; he rose up immediately, as though he was disappointed, and his finger pointed to a place on the ground.

“It fell on its side, sir.”

I didn’t fall to my knees although I felt like it; but instead I bent over and made a salute to the heavens.

“God is a gentleman.”

Leporello handed me the coin.

“There you have it. Keep it as a charm. It will give you luck.”

“I will need some luck. Because, with this proof of my freedom and my good relation with God, from this day forth I choose sin. He knew that, but He still wanted to give me the opportunity. So I will kill the Commander and sleep with Elvira. Afterward...”

Leporello raised his hand and let it fall on my shoulder.

“Forgive me, sir, for this familiarity. Don’t you think that, between sanctity and a life of sin that you plan, there must be some middle ground? Be good one day, and not the next, and do that till the end. And according to which side it is when you die, you will be saved, or condemned. It’s all the same, but less tiresome. It’s the human way.”

“Yes, what is human is despicable. Ignore God and sin comfortably, or disguise sin with virtue. God must feel disdain for the sinners. But I dare to sin face to face, and sustain the sin, knowing that I am gambling. I know that, in the end, I will lose, and I accept defeat; but until then I will sin with the pride of a victorious soldier. And I will vindicate sinners before God and will be the first one who is worthy of Him. At the end, I will show a smile.”

Now the sun covered the entire area of the patio. In its nook in the cypress tree the nightingale had become silent. The only song left was that of the fountain in the clear space of the morning.

13. At five in the afternoon Leporello left to get the horses and arrange the departure from Seville in the small hours of the night, or at dawn; he came to an agreement with the watchman of a secret side entrance with a bribe of two ducats, and, as for the horses, he told me he couldn’t have found any that were faster, or better looking.

While he was gone, I wrote a very short letter to Elvira: “Tonight, after twelve o’clock, Don Juan.” Leporello took charge of sending it. I asked him how he would handle things: “There is always a servant who is sensitive to caresses, or money.”

“The two things are best. It’s more certain. And if you consider it necessary, you can arrange to see her at the same time. That way you will be getting used to it.”

After that I had a long discussion with my manager; I examined the state of my property, I had money sent to two or three places where I planned to go, and I gave instructions to follow the orders of Marianne while we were gone. She asked me if we would be gone long.

“It isn’t in my hands.”

“Whenever we leave on a journey, dear, the return is in those of God.”

Marianne had found the pleasure of reading and sewing. She spent the day with her needle. It was already late afternoon when I went to see her. She had sat down next to the bars of the fence and was singing a song. She had put some jasmines in her hair, and around her neck were the emeralds that had belonged to my mother.

I sat down next to her; she smiled at me and continued sewing and singing. I watched her for a long time. She sighed from time to time.

Eventually I took out some papers and showed them to her.

“Here it says that you are the owner of all my property, and in this other paper it gives you the authority to work freely in the absence of your husband. Take good care of them.”

Her face saddened when she heard me.

“You are leaving?”

“It’s a matter of business that will keep me for some time.”

“I could go with you.”

“I would like to take you, but what I am doing doesn’t suit the company of women. And since you will find out anyway, I want you to know, that tonight I am going to have to kill a man.”

She shouted and embraced me, gazing at me with fear. She cried and asked me not to do it.

“He is a man who has gravely offended me.”

“But can’t you forgive him? You must do that, Juan! The Lord tells us we should forgive!”

“And, if the offense had been against you?”

“I would forgive him!”

“Your heart is beautiful, but if I don’t kill him I will never be able to raise my head in front of other men.”

“And what does that matter? You could raise it before God.”

“I have to live in this world.”

“You call living, being pursued by remorse?”

“It’s more certain that I will be pursued by the police. For that reason, I have to escape.”

“I will die without you!”

“I will always be with you. Every night I will walk around your heart, and you will feel it, I’m sure. And some nights it will be my hands that wake you up.”

She continued to embrace me, and her lips kissed me. It made me feel sad to abandon her. And I could tell hers was greater than mine, and that her tears, her caresses, and her words were not enough to express it. Without knowing why, I carried her to the bed and then I discovered that two creatures can unite themselves without the slightest appetite for pleasure, just because they are both living something that cannot be expressed with words.

We ate by ourselves, without saying a word. Afterward she accompanied me to the vestibule. She listened to my final recommendations, and she said goodbye without crying. Night had fallen and the street was dark.

“Now go to bed and pray for me.”

I kissed her once more and then closed the front door. Leporello was waiting a few steps ahead. I listened, and I could hear the sobs of Marianne.

“If God made things well, we men have certainly ruined them,” I said to Leporello.

“That’s my thesis too.”

“Are you reclaiming your paternity?”

“I am simply saying that I agree with you. We men are always capable of rotting things up.”

“But also of purifying them too, don’t forget. A few days ago that woman was selling her body for a few coins and waiting for an embittered death. Today she is suffering with an honorable love and is capable of all virtues. If someday the Lord asks me what good I have done in the world, I will be able to show him the honorable soul of Marianne.”

“I wouldn’t be too certain of that, until the end.”

“You mean you doubt that?”

“Only as a dialectic precaution, sir. It’s always good to allow for a margin of error. Apart from that, there is no doubt that you have transformed Marianne; it’s easy to see that. But don’t forget that you have left her, so to speak, inherited. Virtue, with money, will be more demanding”

I didn’t know what to say to him. We continued silently toward the bar where the Commander was waiting for me on the sly.

“Follow us when we leave. When you see us enter the house, wait outside. And, when you see I have finished, go get the horses and position them in front of the commander’s house.”

In a dark corner of the bar, Don Gonzalo was savoring a glass of wine. He stretched out his hands with excessive joy untimely, and had me sit down by his side. He asked for some wine for me.

“In situations like this it’s proper to enjoy yourself. Not so much that you lose your head, but enough so that your spirit is confident, and you are not frightened by the risk. Did you bring the money?”

I rattled the bag of ducats.

“Gold! Is it gold you brought?”

“It seemed more polite than silver. The quality of the person goes with the quality of the metal.”

“Let’s see. Let me feel it.”

He emptied the bag on the table, and his hands caressed the ducats like they were a woman’s flesh. And his eyes stared at them with a serious look.

“Do you still have more in reserve?”

“A chest full.”

“Are you trying to buy all of Spain? How is it possible, lad, that you got married? With your money, you could sleep with the most beautiful woman in Seville. The way things are, everything is bought and sold, and for a man who can buy women, why would he want to get married. Marriage is for poor people.”

“What does it matter, if I can live as a bachelor? My wife never stops me from leaving the house.”

“Certainly not! I hope she hasn’t compromised your freedom.”

“You can count on me, any night that you choose.”

I started to pick up the money, but he urged me to let him take care of it. He put the coins in the bag one by one, taking a good feel of them, as if he wanted to verify by touch the face of the king that was engraved there. He counted one hundred, and then closed the bag and handed it to me.

“Now use caution, eh?, and don’t lose your temper, if you have bad luck. With beginners, it’s capricious; one has to test the air and wait until it opens up. No strokes of genius; take moderate positions, spend some time, and wait until the bull is squared before you take him by the horns. And if this night doesn’t go well, take patience and, wait until tomorrow. A hundred ducats can be lost in a couple of hours.”

After that we left. As we left, Leporello put something in my hand. I pressed it, and felt that it was a coin, perhaps the silver real with which we had decided the state of my destiny with a flip of a coin that same morning. I had forgotten it.

Don Gonzalo led me down a street, where the moon was starting to dim, toward a nice-looking house where he knocked on the door with several soft knocks, until the door was opened. A man with a lamp illuminated the Commander’s face, and then mine.

“He’s the new one,” Don Gonzalo said, and he whispered in my ear that I should give a tip to the porter.

After we were inside, we went down to the basement. There were new precautions in front of a small door. “It’s for the justice,” the Commander explained. They finally let us enter a vaulted room, which at first sight, was dark. The Commander greeted the men who were gambling on the tables. He went from one to the other, shaking hands with one, and a slap on the neck for another; to some he spoke with a low voice, and with others he joked, almost shouting. I had remained in the doorway, with my cloak on my arm, and my hat in my hand. The power of the lights didn’t reach me; they fell vertically over the card tables, illuminating the nervous hands that were holding the cards, and the money. From where I was, that seemed like a conclave of phantoms. But down below, a little above the level of the basement floor, there was a sort of opening with more light, and there an important looking, well-dressed man was seated and seemed to rule the roost, with only his smile and the gentle movement of his hands. Don Gonzalo went over to him. They spoke of me, and Don Gonzalo pointed at me. The gentleman worked his way through the tables and gamblers, and ran over to me with a sugary smile.

When he was close enough, he stretched out his arms.

“Don Juan Tenorio! How happy I am to see you in my house! Only you were missing from our company. Because those here are from the best families in Seville; future Grandees of Spain, titled Castilians, and Magistrates. Tonight it’s the boys turn. On Wednesdays and Fridays we close the doors to them, so that their fathers can have some time for relaxation.”

“Was my father one of your clients on Wednesdays and Fridays?”

“No, not your father. As I understand it, he was very old school. But now things have changed, and the older people recognize the change and then adapt themselves to it. Solely to keep up appearances. and keep one’s distance...”

He took my hat.

“If a sword were to strike it...”

“It’s a mere adornment.”

“Some leave them on the coat rack. That way, if they have a dispute, they settle with fists things that swords would damage.”

“I don’t ever dispute. What for? I’m a man of good taste.”

The Commander had joined us. He started to give me advice; that I shouldn’t rush to gamble, that I should turn around a look, to see how the others were playing...”

“One doesn’t need great science, but just a presence of mind. Head over there, and if you want something to drink, you only have to ask for it. The house invites it.”

He patted me on the back and pushed me toward the tables. After that, I saw him chatting with the Commander, as if I didn’t exist.

They were gambling on four or five tables, with cards, or with dice. There were lots of onlookers. I walked over to the tables. At one of them a man with a sly face put down a card and waited for the bets; he put down another and picked up the money. I watched him carefully and could tell that he was cheating.

I slipped into an empty space and, without sitting down, I asked him:

“So if my card is the same as yours, you win.”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“And if you draw seven or eight, you always win.”

“Exactly.”

“Would you let me draw a card?”

The banker looked at me derisively; the other men smiled, and the onlookers laughed loudly.

“Of course, that’s what we’re here for. Have you got money?”

“Naturally.”

He shuffled. I felt myself looked at, studied, and despised. I covered my card with my hand, with my bet inside it.

“How much are you betting?”

I showed him the ducat.

“The whole thing?”

“What else?”

Greed trembled in the eyes of the banker. The others stared at the coin as if they had never seen one like it before, with more hunger than for a woman.

“Look at your card and ask.”

“And if I don’t look at it?”

“You’ll be playing it blind.”

“I’ll play it blind.”

“That’s tossing the cards.”

“I like to toss them.”

The banker didn’t laugh. He took out a six. Collected three large bets, and paid a small one.

“Let’s see your card.”

“You turn it over.”

He stuck out his shaking hand and stopped. He looked at me.

“Turn it over. Or is what I did wrong?”

“No, it’s not wrong.”

He turned over the card. It was a six. I felt a chill.

“I win, right?”

“Yes, you win,” he answered with a snort.

He sorted his silver coins until he reached an amount that was equal to a ducat.

“Don’t you have any gold?”

“No, but it’s the same amount.”

“Then keep it. Silver makes me sick.”

I picked up my coin and left the table. The banker, the gamblers, and the onlookers followed me with their eyes. Someone said:

“He’s one of those from Peru.”

I sat down in a corner and when a servant went by, I asked for a glass of wine. I pretended to act like I was distracted, but I kept my eye on the coming and going of one after another. One of the onlookers had come over to the Commander and the well-dressed man, talking them while waving his hands and looking at me. The Commander seemed to calm him. The well-dressed man listened with the face of a person who is above any circumstance. After the onlooker left, he spoke to the Commander, and Don Gonzalo, indifferent, came over to me.”

“What? Are you bored?”

“Just waiting.”

“What are you waiting for?”

“Until some serious people come. These youngsters don’t have enough money to gamble with me.”

He sat down beside me.

“They are wellborn kids who gamble with what they have. Not everyone is an inheritor like you.”

He leaned over and spoke in my ear:

“They’ll be leaving pretty soon, and those of us who are better off will stay. Then, if you want...”

“Of course I want.”

“I thought, however, that it would be a good idea to train you.”

“Commander, gambling for a stack of silver coins doesn’t interest me. For that, I wouldn’t have left my wife all alone.”

He got up.

"It's up to you. But if you lose later, don't complain."

"Have you ever seen me complain?"

He patted my left shoulder.

Again was alone. I put my hand in my pocket, and my fingers stumbled on a coin. I took it out and saw that it was Leporello's silver real. I immediately remembered his advice that I should keep it as a memento, and his insistence that I should always have it with me. It would be, in fact, a talisman? In case it was, I shouldn't have it in my power, at least, as long as the matter with the Commander had not been settled. I hid it in a crack in the table so it seemed like I was just setting down a peso that, luckily, was not mine.

The players were beginning to leave the tables empty. A few new people had come in, but they stayed in the shadows, as if they were waiting. In a very short time the clientele had changed. Two servants cleared the tables. People came to sit down. The Commander put down a bag of money and said:

"Ready!"

He sat down, and they brought him a deck of cards. The new people began to fill the seats. Each one of them took out their quarters and put them in a pile in front of them. I took a seat opposite the Commander and took out my ducats. Once they had seen and heard them, everything became silent, a deep silence, like the silence of a danger. Everyone looked at the money, and then at me. I heard someone ask in a low voice:

"Who is that nut job?"

"You'd best change some of those coins," the Commander told me, "because most of the bets won't be for a ducat."

At the same time he stretched out a pile of money. We made an exchange. My gold still stood out among the filthy chunks of scrap iron. Don Gonzalo set them aside, like blond children that are separated from street urchins.

He dealt the cards. I got a five and made a small bet. I asked for another card, and I got a queen. I took a stand. Others had gambled more strongly. The Commander added five. He paid the weak ones, and collected the big ones. When he paid me, he did it with a smile.

I put down a shiny ducat with the first Jack I got. There were more jacks, and some large bets. One shy fellow with a pail face, and teeth like a wolf, came up with seven and a half. Seven in the bank. My ducat passed through his canine teeth. I had followed the Commander's movements and had seen that he took a card out of his chest, just under the cross. I put another ducat on the table with whatever else was offered.

We went on playing silently. I won some small bets, and lost some big ones, just about the same as everyone else, except for the guy with the teeth, who was piling up my ducats. He already had ten, carefully placed in front of him.

The well-dressed man was in back of him and also close to me. He could see my cards and those of the wolf. Once he came over to me and said:

"Be careful. You don't look at the card that way. You must do it carefully, do you understand? Choose it by the way it looks. He explained to me what the look should be, but I had noticed that between him and the Commander were also looks and winks.

I assumed that the winner of my ducats was gambling for the house, and the well-dressed man was acting as a semaphore. The other gamblers didn't matter to him, only the one with ducats. They gave me a card. Without looking at it, I put five coins of the most attractive color at risk. The well-dressed man told me: "Don't do that," but I pretended not to hear him and asked for a card. They gave me one, and I found that it was the King of Diamonds.

"Six and a half in the bank," the Commander exclaimed, and picked up my money. Then I asked him:

"Can I be your banker?"

There were laughs, nudges, and looks. But the Commander answered me seriously:

"Naturally, lad, although I consider it dangerous. You're not accustomed yet, and you will lose."

"Am I not already losing?"

"I assume you're not complaining."

"Heaven forbid! I have the greatest respect for my luck, but I have a feeling that it's going to change if I take charge of the bank."

The Commander pushed the pack of cards over to me.

"There you have it. You've made your bed, now lie in it."

I picked up the deck of cards, shuffled them, and set them down in front of me.

The Commander made little piles of coins.

“But, aren’t you going to give me more than that?”

He looked at me, puzzled.

“Don’t you want the money too?”

“No, I have enough of mine, I guess. But those cards you hide under your cuff, under the table, and in your chest, don’t they correspond to me?”

I gave my most innocent expression. My hand pointed to the Commander’s cross. I felt behind me, more close, the body of the well-dressed gentleman. My words had paralyzed the movements of the others at our table. All had turned to look at the Commander, and one of them shouted:

“Explain yourself, Don Gonzalo!”

Don Gonzalo had backed up; he had knocked down his chair and had a sword in his hand.

“What are you saying, boy? Are you accusing me of cheating?”

He looked at me with ferocity, as if the fury in his eyes was going to scorch me.

“Don Juan was joking,” the well-dressed man said; he gently put his hands on my shoulders. “He will beg his pardon immediately, I’m sure. If not, what would these gentlemen say?”

The other players had stood up, they protested, and demanded that the Commander should be in shirtsleeves. The one with wolf teeth picked up his winnings and acted like he was going to slip away. Two big guys with guns came out of some dark place and moved over to me. Don Gonzalo continued shouting insults at me. I thought he would kill me if I didn’t do something in time. The hands of the well-dressed man increased their pressure on my shoulders, like they were trying to fasten me to the chair. The thugs were now at his side. I slipped under the table and shook it with my shoulders; my ducats mixed with the Commander’s money fell to the floor. And also the money and the candelabras. There was an uproar of shouts and curses. Everyone wanted to grab the money, and they scrambled around on the floor to grab it. The well-dressed man shouted: “Don’t let them get away!”, and the thugs hurried to block the door. I was able to get out of the turmoil to grab a candelabra from the floor and light it. By the time they started to get up off the floor, with their hands filled with my ducats, I had moved to the upper part of the room, with the sword in my hand, and the lights above my head.

“The Commander is cardsharp” I said. “I want my hundred ducats back.”

Smiling, the well-dressed man moved out of the group.

“Mister Tenorio, I am ready to forgive your impertinent remarks in view of your inexperience, and perhaps also because of the inevitable stupidity of your young age. Go get your hat and leave.”

“My hundred ducats. These men should also be able to reclaim their money. He has deceived all of us, except for the man with the long teeth.”

The other players were whispering to each other and were obviously upset. Don Gonzalo was still protesting, threateningly. The well-dressed gentleman got serious.

“Don’t be an imbecile, Don Juan; and leave, if you don’t want me to tell my men kick you out.”

“First I am going to have to fight with the Commander.”

The response of Don Gonzalo exploded in the middle of the murmurs, and echoed beneath the vaults of the basement. It was one of his best bursts of laughter; gigantic and limitless.

“Fight with you? My sword only fights with worthy gentlemen, not with an cuckold! Because you should know, gentlemen that yesterday Don Juan Tenorio married a prostitute. And he had the audacity to ask me to be a witness.”

“Listen to me, Commander.”

I don’t know why my voice sounded dense and imperative. Not only Don Gonzalo listened to me, but also the whole group, including the well-dressed man.

“Listen to what I am going to tell you. Standing in front of me is not the place to mention a cuckold, because you are one too. That woman you keep in your house, that Jewish woman you married in secret, slept with me a couple nights ago. And as for your daughter...”

He gave a furious shout, a sincere shout, and jumped into the middle of the ring, with the sword in his hand.

“Don’t mention my daughter, if you don’t want to...”

“...as for that daughter that you are in love with, I intend to sleep with her tonight, after I kill you. I have the key.”

He roared and whirled the sword around, and got ready to kill. The mask of his face had fallen apart, and his voice fluttered and howled, repeating: “My daughter!” in all the tones of a tragedy.

“These men are witnesses of how you have insulted me. You spoke of my daughter...!”



I dropped the candelabra and went down the stairs into the basement.

"Take off your jacket, Commander. It's going to get in your way."

"To kill you, I don't need to...!"

When he saw me next to him, he changed his style. He laughed, he made feints in the air, and he jumped with agility on his long legs. By his side I seemed like the little toe of the foot of a giant.

"Let's go! On guard! I'm in a hurry to cut you apart."

With his hands raised, the well-dressed man intervened.

"We must see if there is some way to settle this. The Commander has been doubly offended and has his reasons. But we all know he is the best swordfighter in Seville. He will kill you Don Juan, and it would be sad to see you die so young, although I agree that your impertinence deserves at least a beating. I propose, however, that you ask his forgiveness and let him have the hundred ducats as an economic compensation. If you do that, I will ask the Commander to excuse you, and you can leave in peace. Although never to return to this house, of course."

"A hundred ducats! Who thinks that I am going to sell my honor for that miserable sum. Blood is what I want!"

"Then, let's say two hundred, Commander. Don Juan Tenorio will sign a paper, and we will trust his signature"

He turned back to me.

"Does two hundred satisfy you?"

"No."

Then he approached me calmly, with a contemptuous look, and gave me a little push.

"But what is it you want then, you poor fellow?"

"If you want to, I'll fight with you, after I'm finished with the Commander."

He shrugged his shoulders and turned to those who were present.

"All of you have witnessed how I have tried to dissuade him, and will agree with me in which the conditions were very light. I wash my hands from his death."

The Commander continued skipping around, swinging his sword over my head, and shouting at me.

"On guard. To the slaughterhouse with cuckolds!"

They left us a large space. The bigwigs remained by the side of the door, with their hands on their swords. I turned to the owner of the house.

"I have the right to ask that the door be clear."

"Whatever you like! In the end, you're going to slide through it with your feet sticking out."

"Come on, boy! That's enough preambles!"

"I still think you should take off your jacket."

We crossed swords. Don Gonzalo attacked with intensity, and I stayed on the defensive during three or four assaults. At the same time they were enough to verify his agility, his strength, and the limitations of his tricks. First, he tried a stab in the throat: I deflected it by turning my shoulder. After that, he tried a stab in the chest; it passed through my armpit. Finally, a stab at the belly, that went through the space between my legs. Then Don Gonzalo's strength seemed to weaken, and his eyes looked at me with surprise. He kept on shouting and threatening; but he made mistakes and tried to defend himself even when I wasn't attacking.

The crowd had followed the fight, holding their breath, and shouted in unison with each failed attack. I could see them, and I had a feeling of danger. One of the braggarts had a dagger hidden under his shirt cuff. The well-dressed man had taken out a lace handkerchief, and his hand, adorned with emeralds, played with it. "When it lets go of it, he's going to kill me," I thought. It could happen at any second, and I have my chest undefended.

I disarmed Don Gonzalo with a violent blow, and his sword flew over toward the door. All the eyes followed it. Meanwhile, I grabbed hold of a stool with my left hand. Don Gonzalo had fallen to his knees. He was deflated and, with a small voice, howling like the air that escaped from a balloon,

He begged:

"He's going to kill me! Help! My men, come here. He's going to kill me!"

The well-dressed man dropped the handkerchief, and he launched the dagger in the air, aimed for my heart. It fell on the neck of the stool and was nailed there. I pulled it out, I looked at it, and I threw it quickly toward the neck of the thug. When it sunk in there, a squawk like a death-rattle was heard, and the body of the bigwig tumbled. Don Gonzalo continued pleading with words that were now incoherent. Nobody made an effort to remove the body.

The well-dressed man raised his hand.

“That’s enough, Don Juan. Recover your ducats, and the matter is closed.”

“After the Commander is dead.”

I put my foot over the cross on his chest—without intending sacrilege, of course—and I knocked Don Gonzalo over with a push.

“Go get your sword, and get something to drink if you need it. In hell they don’t have drinks.”

The well-dressed man tried to come back again, this time with both hands raised.

“But, isn’t that enough? You’ve killed one man, and you have humiliated Don Gonzalo. We know, besides that, that you are an expert swordsman. What do you want now?”

“I need to kill him,” I insisted. “He disgusts me. He is an old pile of dirt that shouldn’t be living among good men, though you all seem to think he’s beyond reproach. He is a crooked cheat, there’s no doubt about it and, with his death, the gambling den will be freed from an excellent collaborator. And I don’t care about your interest.”

“As you must understand, Don Juan, this will be reported to the police.”

“And so what? I’ll be far from here.”

“If you escape, it’s because you’re afraid.”

“If I escape, it’s because I cannot defend myself against the law of the King, whose authority over me I completely deny.”

Discouraged, he let his hands drop.

“What kind of a man are you, Don Juan?”

“Anything but an idiot, or the stupid imbecile that you think.”

The well-dressed man smiled and bowed his head.

“I ask you a thousand pardons, but they misinformed me.”

“That misinformation will cost you a fight with me, once I have finished Don Gonzalo.”

“Aren’t my excuses enough?”

“You wanted to kill me.”

He smiled again, but this time there was a new element in his smile, perhaps triumphal. He looked in back of me, longer than I expected, and it alarmed me. I turned my head and saw the Commander slip out through the basement door.

“You can have my ducats!” I shouted; and I turned around and ran. I had the advantage, and when they opened the door to the street, I entered the vestibule, pursued by the voices and the steps of the gamblers. The porter tried to stop me, and I told him to get out of the way. I looked out into the dark street which was now deserted. I looked from one side to the other.

“To the right, my Lord, and hurry.”

The shadow of Leporello darkened the limestone of the front wall.

“Watch out for the horses!”

I started running. I turned the corner and I discovered Don Gonzalo almost at the end of the street, running and running. I shouted at him: “Here I am!” and the shout paralyzed him. When I reached him, he had leaned against a doorjamb, asking me to forgive him. I made him take his sword and fight me again. It was hard for me to try and kill him because, suddenly, my heart was filled with pity, and I had to fight against my own feelings, more than the arm of Don Gonzalo. The sword must have penetrated him at about the top of the fourth left intercostal space. He gave a moan, slipped over, and remained silent, like a big fallen statue.

His supporters were already out in the street. They were holding lighted torches and were calling for justice.

14. The road toward the dead man’s house was starting to become painful, because very soon the sorrow and the remorse were starting to hit me, along with the doubt that I had done the right thing. Two men killed in just a few minutes, two men who were now in hell. My rapidity had not given them time to repent. Neither of them had said: “Jesus!”, perhaps because they didn’t believe in Him. They had gone to the other world just like they were, with all their vileness and cowardice. The bigwig, and the Commander.

That wasn’t part of my program. It must be true that the Lord has thousands of ways to exercise his Mercy, but to judge by the appearances, my dead had gone to the other world without it, and that must have been painful for God, who was not under my influence. I understood, though, that although, in my intentions the killing had only been an exception—the death of the Commander was not part of his program, but actually was part of his condition, his point of departure—and was this time inevitable, like it was for the loudmouth thug, and in similar cases there was no other

remedy than to deal with the consequences, moral as well as juridical. That calmed me a little. Sometime after that I was able to understand from my own experience that nothing quiets down a scrupulous conscience more than accepting responsibility for one's actions, including those that are unconscious. What enrichment, what exquisite sensibility, the soul acquires in a situation like this!

I lost myself in the streets of Seville. All that was lighted with whitewash and moonlight seemed to be a graveyard, and I, a shadow that wandered among the tombs. Still lost, I kept walking, until the sound of twelve o'clock on La Giralda helped me find my way. From the cathedral it was not hard to find the way to the house of Don Gonzalo. In front of it, in the corner of a square, I saw the silhouette of two horses. I walked over to them.

"Did everything go well, sir?"

"Until now, yes."

"Is the old man dead?"

"He's on his way to hell."

"I wonder if they want him there."

"It depends on the tolerance they have for cowardice."

"Well, I wish you good luck now."

"How about you?"

"Nothing workable has been arranged with the servant messenger, and I have to keep thinking of her as a consolation."

"Don't go to sleep."

It was the same side door where Doña Sol had let me enter several nights ago. The lock was opened, and the door opened wide. The light from it lit up the patio a bit. I closed it and waited. Little by little the silence was penetrated by small distant noises. Barefooted, with my shoes in my hand, I move forward a little toward the first columns. The area there was filled with aromas, the aromas of spring flowers that followed me in Seville, that stirred my blood, and once again made me, against my will, and against my experience, have exaggerated hopes of what the flesh could offer. I had to take a deep breath. The blood tingled in my back and, for a moment, my legs weakened. And how the sound of the fountain jarred on my skin!

I had to climb a stairway to reach the gallery, and then down a corridor, counting the doorways... I looked out at the patio and then looked up at the windows. Lighted by the moon, I seemed to see the outline of a girl. Had Elvira come to wait for me? I didn't count on that kind of courtesy, nor on such an anticipated decision, but on some sort of struggle, with protests of fear, and the virtue of honesty.

Nevertheless, there, very near the corner of the gallery on that floor, the white and brown body was covered in the face with the silvery moonlight.

I kept leaning on the column, but I felt like a violent tug was pulling me away from it, as if my waist was tied to a rope and, from above, Elvira was pulling it. Step by silent step: the patio, the stairway, by the moon, or by the shadows. I was afraid that the fear that my excited heart would wake up the birds.

I reached the balcony. The wooden floor creaked under my weight. A little rat ran in front of my feet and hid on the edge. I had to reach the corner and turn around it. I stopped and caressed the edge. I leaned my head out. Evidently Elvira was waiting for me next to the light of the moon.

I put on my shoes and went forward. Elvira moved away from the window. My footsteps cracked, and it seemed the whole house was shaking. Elvira was still advancing. We were now very close and could see each other. I stretched out my arms, and she fell into them.

"Like the water of the river flows to the sea, I have come to you..."

The literary phrase was just what she wanted. Love is made with literature. Other words would perhaps have taken me on a different path, but those words expressed the present reality exactly, as well as the one that preceded: "Like the water of the river to the sea," that is, with no freedom. Necessarily, inevitably. In my arms, Elvira breathed anxiously and didn't know whether to cling to my chest, or offer me her lips. But I no longer thought about her mouth, her shivering body, or her heart, that was beating next to mine, but the rope tied to my waist, and the strength that drags the water to the sea and had also been dragging me blindly. It was not my will that moved my feet, or that wrapped my arms around the shoulders of Elvira, but the life and the blood, the same that gives aromas to flowers, without counting on their will. I felt like a prisoner, embraced by arms that were vastly more powerful than mine; I felt that neither Elvira's will, or her mind, had received me, but the will submissive to the obscure imperative of her blood. It didn't matter, though, what had moved Elvira to wait for me in the light of the moon, or what was producing the same sound in

our hearts. I understood that I had fallen into a trap, and that I was no longer free, and once more my angry heart was rebelling.

I made an effort to separate myself from Elvira.

"The water of a river cannot stop and go back, but I can."

She looked at me without understanding. But she saw something in my eyes, in my gesture, that made her raise her hands to her mouth, and a light of fear shined in her eyes.

"Juan!"

Once again that gypsy voice, once again my name pronounced harshly! I laughed.

"What are you doing?"

"Perhaps I'll come again someday. Now, goodbye."

"Juan!"

She tried to follow me, but I hurried away, without caring if the noise woke up others in the house. I went back to the gallery, and started walking down the steps, when the voice of Elvira, shouting out of the window.

"Help! A man! There's a man in my house. He wants to violate me. Help! Father!"

I jumped down the stairs two at a time, and reached the patio. Up above doors were opened. Shouts, questions, and rapid footsteps filled the house. I ran out into the street and kept running, until I reached the square where the horses were waiting.

"You're already done, sir?"

Leporello came out of the shadows and handed me the stirrup.

"Did you sleep with Elvira in such a short time?" he insisted.

"Virtually, yes."

He laughed at me. I would have liked to see the laughter dancing in his shameless eyes.

"Is that a new way of sleeping with women, my Lord?"

I couldn't give him an answer; but then a flash of light, accompanied by voices, came out of one of the streets that led to the square. Leporello also turned to look at it.

"It's best if we leave."

"Wait."

We took refuge in the nearest corner with the horses. Some men carrying torches entered the square with a dead body on a stretcher.

"You think that's the Commander?"

"Go over there and see what they say."

Leporello got off his horse. The group of men moved slowly, with the solemnity of a funeral, praying for the blessing of souls. In the distance I saw the pale face of Don Gonzalo in the moving light of the torches. They had resettled his body, they had crossed his arms over his chest, and laid his sword on top of him. The plum of his hat hung to one side, and the sound of guitars filled the street. They crossed the square, stopping in front of the front door, with columns on each side adorned with violets. In the silence you could hear the sound of drumbeats. Lights appeared in the windows, and one opened. Those down below explained that they were bringing Don Gonzalo who was dead. There were shouts and cries, and the voice of a woman started asking for justice. The door opened, and the torches, the stretcher, and the dead man entered the vestibule.

Above the soft voices, the sad laments, and the threatening insults, my name was heard, and they called me a murderer.

Leporello suddenly appeared, as if by magic.

"It would be best if we left, sir, before they see you."

"What did they tell you?"

"Insults for you. The least they called you was a devil."

"You see how things are, and how they establish unjust reputations."

"I don't know exactly what happened, but they also accuse you of raping Elvira."

"That's not true!"

"Just try to convince them of it."

"But she could tell them..."

We had left the square, and the hoofs of the horses resounded in the deserted streets. Behind a small screen we heard a baby crying, and the lullaby his mother was singing for him.

"She won't say anything, not that you raped her, nor that you didn't. She'll let the story go on, because what bothers women more than anything, sir is being a virgin. For that reason, they don't forgive a man who backs out, and then blows his horn. Women are insensitive to their own mystery, and they want to free themselves from it."

"I didn't back out."

"I believe that, and you also. You are justified for a thousand reasons, but the truth is that you bolted, like many others, like all men have done, whether they admit it or not, with a virgin. It is one of the things that, when the Lord created the world, has amused Him the most. Because everything the Lord put on earth and in heaven is useful and necessary, except that. It was given to women, and to females of the superior species, like a thing of luxury. And to us men He says, "Go on, look for a satisfactory explanation, you, who find explanations for everything!" And when we don't find one, we feel afraid. Haven't you thought, sometimes, about all the things that the famous feminine virginity has give rise to? If they lose it when they're not married, the fathers get furious, as if someone has thrown all the filth in the world in their face. They die or they kill, and they believe it has been for the most sacred cause. As for husbands, the amount of things they have suffered for not being innocent when they're married, speaks for them. There are men who worry about that even more than their farm, and even still more than the salvation of their soul. You see, according to what they say, the Moors won Spain because of the virginity of a woman."

We had reached the opening. It was next to the river, and the noise of the water calmed my feelings, while Leporello came to an understanding with the gatekeepers. A lantern swayed in the air; coins jingled and, after that the hinges creaked, the door opened.

"Let's go, sir!"

We left Seville and traveled along the bank of the river.

"Leporello, do you believe in the mystery of women?"

"I don't know if I believe or not, but I try not to think about it. However, I have heard it said that, with virgins, they are protected by the wings of an archangel."

"Perhaps this night it was the archangel who watched over Elvira, but I thought his glow was the light of the moon and didn't pay attention to it."

"However, the archangel achieved his purpose."

"That was pure causality. What I was thinking when I left had nothing to do with the woman and her mystery."

"But were you thinking?" Leporello asked with a laugh. "I though it was fear. And not because I thought badly of you, you can be assured. I have just finished explaining it to you."

"And I thank you for the explanation, because it has clarified some things for me. It was as if in the darkness a light had illuminated the path where I was going to travel, without knowing where I was going. It made me remember what it was that had been surrounding me, and what had even entered inside me during the last few days, without me paying sufficient attention to it. Don't you think the part that women have been playing in these last few events is suspicious? Marianna, Doña Sol, and now Elvira..."

"I have just thought that it was a lot in such a short time, and maybe it was because fate wanted to compensate you with quantity, for being so separated from them until now.

"I see it differently. I just thought that, to give me more facilities, the Lord had wanted to show me the terrain where I could exercise my enmity more appropriately. Because I have found that women are happy in my arm, perhaps, more than they should be; they are like they should only be in Paradise. And by giving them such happiness, I am taking from God what is His, what only He should give."

"That seems to me like a strange theology, sir, and at the same time like an intriguing intellectual mystery. But I ask you the same question as the other day: why not leave God out of it? Aren't you thinking about Him even more than a Carmelite nun?"

"The nun and I have it right."

"However, right now it would be more practical to know where we're going."

"It doesn't matter to me where the road is going, because in it I will find more women."

"Have you started to like them?"

"It's more complex. I have chosen them as instruments of my enmity with God."

"A very attractive instrument, no doubt. And if they work for you..."

We had come to a parapet. From up there, we could see the lights in the walls, and the ships anchored in the river.

"From here, we go to Cadiz, sir..."

I didn't respond. A violent burst of springtime, the humidity of the river, the sound of crickets in the field, the immaculate light of the moon, had all shaken me, and paralyzed me. With their complicity, probably, those four days had had an effect. Now I wanted to say goodbye, because I rejected spring, because spring had imposed an obligation of pleasure on me. I felt capable of

controlling the flesh, and being able to use it like a triumphant ascetic. I needed to exercise control over it, like over a powerful horse, because for me the flesh was going to be like a horse for a rider in the races, and I couldn't drop the reins and let it travel on its own if I didn't want to lose my freedom in a love trap, in the spring captured by the arms of some woman.

I made an effort, and the smell of the ground, the humidity of the water, the moon, the odors of the field, and the noise of the crickets, all ceased to disturb me.

"To Cadiz, you say? Right. Let's head for Cadiz. There we can find a ship that will take us.

## CHAPTER V

1. And where did they go?

"To Italy, of course." Leporello was drinking a swallow of whisky, and he relished it. "Remember what Zorrilla said:

...searching for more space  
for my deeds I decided to go  
and travel all the way to Italy  
because Italy is the right place.

Although we weren't going in search of pleasures, at least my master."

"Yes. What your master was looking for was the perfection of blasphemy."

"Or something similar that you would never understand."

Leporello had come to see me on the afternoon when my return to Madrid was arranged in the coach of a friend. He appeared suddenly and ordered me, or almost that, to unpack my suitcases, because this very night was the premiere of a drama that it was important for me to see.

"It's titled," he added without looking at me, "While heaven is silent," although it ought to be called "The end of Don Juan."

I jumped onto the sofa. Leporello took his handkerchief and wiped off the surface of the piano. He was wearing a hat that leaned backward a bit, and there were some gloves hanging out of his pockets. The humility of our last discussion had disappeared; he stuck out his chest and looked at me with fierce arrogance. Leporello was acting like a triumphant winner who was offering me a mouthful of bread.

"Because I suppose I would be curious to find out how that story ends."

"What story?"

"The one you wrote some time ago." He turned to me, shaking the dust out of his handkerchief on top of my pants. "I would very much like to read it."

"You mean you have forgotten it?"

"It's always nice to remember."

"It's a nonsensical story."

"Why did you write it then?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I know. You wrote it because you had no choice, because a superior power made you. But don't think that you invented it. That story has nothing of yours, you know that. None of the words belong to you."

He moved over to a chair where he sat down and served the whisky.

"The writing is yours, there is no doubt about that. And you could publish it, but not with your own name. They would laugh at you."

"I am a writer."

"A journalist, nothing more, don't forget. You have never written an interesting story. Because you lack the imagination."

"I could have changed it... But it was because it was so extraordinary."

"Okay." He offered me a glass. "If that's the way it is, continue the story, and give it a proper conclusion. How did Don Juan Tenorio end? Why is he still walking around the world?"

He didn't expect an answer from me. He rose up, went over to the writing table, and picked up a pile of papers. When he came back to sit down, a tear was sliding down his cheek.

"Forgive me if I am emotional, because it's my story too."

"The story of a devil reduced to the role of a comedic servant. A pretext so that his master won't be the one who speaks by himself, because monologues are not theatrical."

"As you like. Recognize, though, that in the story I am given a certain intellectual and personal quality. In that, my master was always very sensible and never forgot that we had studied in the same classrooms."

He tipped his head back and wiped off the tears with the back of his hand.

"So will you let me read it?"

"Make yourself at home."

"I need to read it, you know? It won't bore you to hear it."

"You mean you're going to read it out loud?"

"Don't worry. I'm an excellent reader, and especially with verse. When my master is sad, I read him Góngora, who he likes very much, or perhaps like you, the tangos of Gardel take him back to his early youth. When he was twenty, my Lord was a passionate champion of avant-garde poetry."

He drank and began to read. The first sheets, while he was seated, but then he stood up and began to move around. He recited, doubling his voice in the dialogues, repeating gestures, and movements described in the text, or sometimes he invented them when the text didn't mention them. If he imitated Don Juan he smiled; if it was Don Gonzalo he deepened his voice; and when he imitated his own voice, he lightened it. He kept on reading, only pausing, to take a few sips, when he mouth was dry. I fell asleep once or twice.

"No one would have suspected, right?"

I rubbed my eyes.

"Suspected what?"

"That my master had started out like that."

I stretched my legs and made an effort to frighten away my sleepiness. Leporello had finished reading, and carefully organized the papers.

"We need to number them. It was a mistake not to have done that before."

"But don't blame me. And don't forget that I was following someone else's directions."

"Yes, my master tends to be careless with things like that."

He took out a ballpoint pen and began to number the pages. I picked up a cigarette and lit it. Without saying anything, Leporello stuck out his left hand, and I handed him another one.

"Light it for me, if you would."

We smoked in silence. In spite of the cigarette, I fell asleep again.

"What kind of a character are you, my friend? Of course, you lack the least intellectual, as well as human, curiosity. Or, if you are curious, you prefer trifles, rather than transcendental themes. You have the mentality of a small-town gossip, and the only thing that interests you is if my master was Don Juan, and if I'm really a devil. And whether we have pulled your leg or not. What does that matter, after all that has happened? An old-age pensioner from your town would at least ask me important questions."

He placed the sheets of paper very carefully on top of the piano, underneath a lamp.

"You said you are a journalist. What wouldn't the best of them have given for an interview with my master? Can't you imagine that? Ten pages from "Paris Match," with texts and illustrations. And what headlines! Do you want to write that article? I can give you the photographs."

"That doesn't interest me."

"You couldn't do it, even if you wanted. My master never lets himself be interviewed. He's very much above the movie-makers, and princesses who want to marry a sausage maker. But I could give important revelations, at the risk of a reprimand. The discretion of my master, that silence about himself that was so insistently maintained, had a number of mistakes."

"In short, what you really want is for me to interview you, so it will then appear on two pages in "Paris Match." Because as far as I can see, you don't feel you're above movie-makers or princesses.

He twisted his lips in a way that I benevolently thought could be a smile.

"Evidently I have been a servant for so long that I have contracted something of a professional mentality. And what servants like most is to talk about their masters. There is a difference though: I would never reveal his trifles. If I am to be sincere, I would say I never noticed any. My master is grandiose. He has always lived in G major."

He opened the top of the piano and pounded on a single note. I don't know if G major exists on a piano, and if that was the note he was playing.

"For example, one of the things that would most interest the public is the lovemaking technique of Don Juan. Especially the women. It is one of the aspects of his life that the poets have been most mistaken about, even our admirable Zorrilla. Do you remember that phrase "One to fall in love, another to win their love..."? It's nothing more than a gross vision of a hurried love affair. It

gives an impression of improper rapidness that my master used in his love-making. In that, my master was not a typical Spaniard. He never was in a hurry, and there was nothing further from his style than an abrupt style, like that of Lope de Vega. My master aims carefully and always ends in the clear. You have seen that; he is a calm, sober man and knows that the love of Sonya lasted for many months... That doesn't mean that he took so long with all of them, although some of them were more difficult than others. But it's not on the path of time where the shots are fired. One of the errors of Tirso de Molina was his phrase "As long as you trust me!", but it was an unavoidable error because, with the legend of my master, Tirso wanted to create an exemplary story and had to bear in mind his final repentance. But among other things, Don Juan never worried about that, because he repented every day, since every day he had to struggle against repentance; because he struggled effectively until a given moment. And that given moment should be of interest to you, because it is a key to the story."

"You had referred to the technique..."

His eyes filled with jubilation.

"Ah, yes, the technique! Do you like bulls?"

"Yes, but why?"

"And do you understand?"

"Yes,"

"Really? Because when they are outside of Spain, they say they know bulls better than anyone, and I have verified that the only ones who really understand them are the French. Spaniards, that is, just a few Spaniards, only know bullfighting."

"But the reference is inevitable, because the behavior of Don Juan seems like that of a great bullfighter. A great bullfighter, or an outstanding bullfighter, is not one who invents swords or espadrilles, not one who fights long or short, nor harsh or ornate, but precisely the one who knows the uniqueness, the inimitability of each task, the need to fight each bull in an exact way, that can't be just any way, but the one required by the bull. The bull isn't a blind, nameless force, but as singular in his manner as any man. That's why each bull has a name. The great bullfighter only has to see the bull to know how to approach him and wave the cape at him, how many lances and what force is needed, how many goads and what style, how many passes and what mark. Said in another way, for a bullfighter there is no specific way to fight each bull, but a specific technique that corresponds to the animal in front of him. The one who discovers it and is capable of using it reaches the end of the fight with the bull squared and the head lowered, so that he can kill him easily with one stab."

"That is what Don Juan did with his young heifers."

"Precisely. For my master there isn't 'a woman,' but rather 'each woman.' who is different from the others. Having discovered the particular personality of each one, even in those where it stays hidden, is one of his best achievements, that no other conqueror, more or less a Casanova, could ever outdo him. What intuition he has, my friend! How many times haven't we met some woman, a woman who never would look at a man, if it wasn't Don Juan! I would say to him, 'Sir, she's just an ordinary woman,' and he would tell me, 'Wait a few days.' And, little by little, the crust of ordinariness would wear off, leaving a resplendent soul out in the open. It's true that wouldn't be possible just with intuition. The ordinariness of some women is impenetrable for even the eyes of my master. But my master has always counted on his own fascination. When they were fascinated, the women drop their guard, leaving an opening that could be penetrated."

"You have just referred to a typical manner of behavior."

"What do you want, then? That the women stop doing that? Everything that is individual is mounted on what is ordinary, or what you call typical. All kisses are the same; what makes them different is the person who gives them. And what skill my master had to arouse these singularities! What skill, until a certain moment!"

"In this aspect of the story is there also a 'certain moment'?"

"Yes, my friend; and the blame falls on something else. My master took a liking to numismatics, he became obsessed with it, and began to disregard women. He resorted to them as long as it was necessary to keep himself in sin. And then he would create a valid technique for all of them. It didn't cease to be rather amusing," he added melancholically; "He told them his history, he sang songs, and showed them a portrait of himself disguised as a monk."

"And that was enough?"

"At least it was for my master. Although, in truth, the women of that phase that we could say were influenced by him were unworthy of those of the earlier phase. Nuns, neurotics, virgins, sexy



girls, widows wrapped in the fire of memory, and a few other unsatisfied married women. Mere sexuality, my friend, was something my master always rejected.

I felt a sudden happiness, the happiness of success that no longer matters. I rose up and pointed a finger at Leporello, who looked at me with surprise.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

“What you just said in recognition of the decadence of Don Juan! Will you permit me to analyze it? Two points, nothing more: the technology of the procedures, and the quality of the women that were seduced!

“Don’t waste your time. I also believed it then. But I made a mistake, just like you have done now. My master hadn’t become decadent, but only had transferred his creative enthusiasm to numismatics. In the beginning he was only interested in unique coins; he knew by memory the lists of all the collections, and he rejected any type that was already possessed by others. But his way of acquiring those coins and taking possession of them, was just the same as the way he enamored women. How could I tell you the way we had for obtaining a gold coin of Heliogablus possessed by an Ottoman Turk from Mythilene, except to compare it to the rapid courting and seduction of the Princess of Cleves they were taking to marry a Landgrave of Saxony? I could not tell you, dear friend, if the coin was more beautiful than the princess, but I can say that the passion of my master for both of them was the same. And the continuous adventures...! It’s true that...”

He stopped and he stared at me, and his nose twitched two or three times.

“Will you go to the theater tonight?”

“Yes.”

“Then listen to me. “The Death of Don Juan” is not an isolated work, but the third part of a trilogy whose earlier parts haven’t been able to be showed. In order to understand it completely, what you know is not enough to understand it completely, since that is more or less the first part. I am going to tell you the second part. It happened a thousand six hundred and forty years ago, and it has something to do with the gold coin of Heliogablus, won by an Ottoman Turk of Mythilene... Will you give me another cigarette?”

I handed him the cigarette case. He took one, he felt it, and put it between his lips.

“The Vatican and the Kingdom of Spain wanted it, and they made tremendous offers of women and money, and we had to struggle against their agents. Eventually we stopped them, but neither the Chancellor of the Vatican or the Ambassador of Spain forgave us for it. Have you ever spoken to Simone, a Jewish girl who is a communist that my master seduced during the occupation of Germany, and later conveyed her to the hands of the Lord?”

“Yes, she told me that Sartrian story.”

He remained silent, with his hand in the air. He clicked his teeth and picked his nose.

“Why do you mention Sartre with such disdain, when in your heart you envy him? What more would you want than the mind and the pen of Sartre? Besides, it’s not a Sartrian story. One sees clearly that you don’t understand modern literature. Everything my master was involved in was, by definition, antiquated. My master has a bad reputation more than anything, because of those who try to imitate him. How could Sartre care about a story whose most brilliant representation is now by Senor Roviroso? The great literary themes suffer eclipses, but they reappear.”

He had left his nose in peace and now was scratching his ear.

“The story of Simone and that of Ximena seem like the same story. Except that Ximena commits suicide. A very painful affair.”

“Your master is to blame of course.”

“That’s not for sure. As a matter of fact, there could have been an instrumental cause... Because as you know...” he smiled at me, “or perhaps as you knew, suicide is something that you carry inside you, like a child; it is helped by one’s own life, and it happens when some external situation favors it. There are cases, of course, when it occurs suddenly like an explosion. Perhaps the suicide of Doña Ximena was one of those. I don’t know... Since I never expected that she was going to commit suicide, I never bothered to think about that possibility.”

“No matter what, she was a woman who condemned her soul, because of Don Juan’s fault.”

“Chi lo sà?”

“You ought to know it better than anyone.”

“But I can’t say so. We are prohibited. And look, in a way I find it natural. Because if hell could express its propaganda directly, who would be able to stop us from falsifying the statistics? Just imagine grand trusts with trillions of numbers! People would respond en masse, because nothing favors more the condemnation of men than the conviction that almost no one saves himself. The

idea of a vacant heaven is our best slogan. For that reason we try to make use of indirect methods, like that of the nun from Madrid who descended to hell every night and identified those who were condemned. "I saw there Don So-and-So!" And the people who considered Don So-and-So as a relatively good man would use logic to think that if Don So-and-So had been condemned, very few of them stood a chance to save themselves. That nun, with the greatest will in the world, was one of our best agents."

"That should have reduced your sorrow considerably."

"I can't say that either. The accounting of sorrows is also secret."

He stretched openly, and opened the palm of his hand.

"All right! If Doña Ximena was saved or condemned is one of those things that nobody will know until the day of Final Judgement, or are important enough to make us rack our brains. Even Don Juan himself has ceased to worry about it."

He moved his chair closer to mine and extended his hands.

"Imagine that someday a man from the Gestapo would come to our house and say to my master: 'There is a girl who is annoying us. We know she exists and what she does, but there is no way we can catch hold of her. We had taken her prisoner, we were about to execute her, but she slipped out of our hands.'"

I interrupted him.

"Did the man from the Gestapo speak with that jargon?"

"Of course not. He spoke French with a devilish accent but an excellent syntax. I just translated his words to the usual language."

He waited for my ascent, and then continued:

"That guy wanted my master to raise the glove with the woman who was seduced and annul her politically, perhaps leaving her pregnant. 'And if I don't do that?' Don Juan asked. "In that case, sir, we would have to condemn some of you activities and send you to a concentration camp." "Well go ahead and prepare the place!" The fellow from the Gestapo left, and the same thing happened to my master in Rome when the Chancellor of the Vatican came to see him personally and ask him with a threat of calling up the Roman inquisition, if he didn't do it by seducing Doña Ximena of Aragon."

He lifted both hands in the air.

"That was the best thing, believe me. The manners of a Chancellor of the Vatican are always more courteous than those of an agent of the Gestapo, and much more elegant. The Chancellor at least gave my master an explanation for the reasons of his demand. Doña Ximena of Aragon was a descendent of the last king of Naples, and he wanted to free his country from Spanish tyranny. That didn't bother the Chancellor. Besides, Doña Ximena wanted to unify Italy into a single country, which also didn't bother the Chancellor, on the condition that the Pope would be king, and not Doña Ximena. But all this was challenged by a Friar like those who intervene from century to century trying to purify the Church, and that disturbed the Chancellor, who was rather corrupt. The Friar, Dom Pietro, was in agreement with the politics of Doña Ximena, and with what affected the Church; Doña Ximena was in agreement with the Friar, so that the movement was like a coin with a religious face and a political cross. Because of that, the Ambassador of Spain intervened in the matter."

Leporello began to laugh, probably not at what was said, but what he remembered, and he kept laughing for a short time without paying attention to me. Then he continued, as though we was talking to himself:

"For the Ambassador of Spain, the purification of the Church seemed okay, but the liberation of Italy seemed like an unforgivable sin because, for that Grandee with so many surnames and sins against God, to sin against His Majesty was perhaps more serious than offending Jesus Christ. He also came to see us and told my master that if he didn't free him from Doña Ximena, and if he didn't dishonor her publicly, he would ask for his extradition for killing the Commander of Ulloa, and they would take him to Spain in chains; but if he did what he asked with Doña Ximena and left her politically useless, we count on the pardon of Don Felipe IV."

Suddenly Leporello rediscovered my presence and looked at me again.

"Now you can see the curious path those guys were following as they waged diplomatic war and came to ask us to do the same. My master who, for several years, had already slept with ordinary women for purely moral reasons, as I told you before, quickly gained a strong interest in Doña Ximena, and he sent me with the task of finding out who she and Dom Pietro were, and what they thought, and what they wanted. And then he gave me detailed instructions concerning the lady:

find out if she looked nice and had a pretty face, if she had long legs with a narrow waist, and if she was unmarried, or a widow..."

"I left that same afternoon and went to the church where the Friar worked with his congregation. It was the church of a convent of nuns, and the first person I discovered was the Pope, dressed like an ordinary Friar, and listening to the sermon with great interest. That gave me the clue I needed, and just by listening to Dom Pietro I figured that a legion of devils must be close by. Dom Pietro spoke of a happy and hopeful religion, and you don't know, my friend, how enthusiastic they are in hell, each time a saint like that shows up. Because, after two generations the reaction to a gloomy, pessimistic religion will guarantee us a good harvest; but the propagation of a happy religion will leave us without clients. Each time a Saint Francis comes to earth, hell warns his best followers to hinder him. And I am not saying that Dom Pietro was a Saint Francis, but he was happy like him, and there was no way to criticize what he was preaching, since it was completely orthodox. For that reason the Chancellor found himself defenseless, and even more so, if he knew, as he should have, that the Pope was secretly supporting what he was preaching; he would not have let them put Dom Pietro in jail, or burn him as a heretic."

"I used my prerogatives to enter the monastery and snoop around a little, partly because of curiosity, and partly because that was where Doña Ximena of Aragon was living. There were about three dozen Cistercian nuns, and although some were young and pretty, I swear I have never seen more saints from close up. Why hadn't my master discovered that hotbed of stupendous women? And, above all, why hadn't it struck him in the nose, and why hadn't his sense of smell sniffed Doña Ximena, who was the most saintly of all, as well as the most beautiful? She was about thirty years old, a widow, and although she was a laywoman, she led the nuns spiritually with the permission of Dom Pietro, and in agreement with the Abbess, who was his most ardent supporter. But Doña Ximena not only told them about Christ and led them to Him, but also the unity of Italy, and she did that with such skill that the idea of political freedom and religious perfection seemed like the same thing. Those Cistercian nuns were as fanatic Catholics as they were fanatic nationalists. They loved Doña Ximena, and venerated her, hoping to establish her as queen of a theocratic kingdom where there were no rich, nor poor, but only saints. Dom Pietro gave them confession and, in the afternoons, he directed his words from the pulpit. And gathered as a group, they listened to him like the voice of heaven. And an amazing, fevered mass took over the Church and, almost every afternoon, some listener got carried away, climbed up to the chancel, declared his desire to live happy in Christ, and gave a public confession of his sins."

"As I said, Doña Ximena lived in a convent, but she left it in order to make her conspiracies, and, when she did that, she dressed like a man. Almost all of her supporters were in Naples, where she went sometimes, using precautions, because the Spanish were spying on her. If you remember who Tomas Aniello was, I can tell you that he was also one of her collaborators."

"I had delayed a week so I could get up to date about the situation and the people. During those days I kept silent. Finally I told my master everything I knew all at once. He listened. Afterward, he told me: 'It would be despicable to do away with such an admirable woman, only because she is bothering the Ambassador of Spain, and the Chancellor of the Vatican. On the other hand, it would be very nice to help her.' The same thing he told me three centuries later, when the agent from the Gestapo left our house. 'But my collaboration is not incompatible with the seduction of that Doña Ximena. To seduce a saint is tempting, especially, when in the end she would return to the arms of God, and strengthen her sanctity. The character of a saint is not complete without the experience of a sin; it would be like a portrait where the nose is missing. So, Leporello, let's go and get started. This afternoon you must take me to that church.'"

"So that's where we went. It was jam packed as always, and the friar began his sermon. Don Juan listened with great interest. From time to time he agreed. 'You see, if I had heard that man when I was twenty, things would be very different. But it's too late now.' He also told me that this was the best theologian he had ever heard. 'His only mistake is in choosing to selecting only the finest women. Women like that are more concerned about their pride, than the poor sinners. And, between pride and lewdness, there is a bridge for whose toll I have the key. It would be no more work for me than to destroy the sanctity of this monastery.'"

"The friar had finished his sermon. There was a commotion among the congregation, because someone was asking them to help him up to the chancel; a poor man who confessed half a dozen sins for which wanted to ask for absolution from Dom Pietro. My master helped things without batting an eyelid. The fire in his eyes returned again, the light that I knew so well. He opened the way and arrived at the altar. The people began to march off. He raised his arm and said, "Wait!"

Many people were awed by the sight of that slender figure dressed in black with his cape dropped down, when they heard him order them to stay. They stopped, and those who had left came back inside. The friar was looking at my master, as if he were seeing the devil himself, like a saint was looking at him, I mean; and willing to fight.”

“Don Juan waited for them to calm down and then began to talk. His voice had never had such a dramatic tone, and his words were never better. Like a great actor, he told the story of his life, the real story and, in it, including both God, and the devil. And he assured them that no theater audience had ever been more moved by a performance, than they had just been by Don Pietro. Each word of my master was like a knife that cut into the heart of the listeners and made them bleed. They wept, they remained in suspense, they twitched their hands and grabbed each other, shouting with fear. Even Dom Pietro lost control and let himself be captivated by that pathetic story. But I knew that neither the faithful nor the holy father meant anything to my master. That abundance of rhetoric was directed only at Doña Ximena, who was there among them. And since I was also more interested in the select women than the common ones, I left my sleeping body in a corner, and joined the chorus.”

“The nuns were gathered silently in a semicircle. Slightly in front of the others, Doña Ximena did not move. The mother abbess put her hands on the pulpit, as though she was tired. Of all of them, Doña Ximena was the only one who could see Don Juan, although through the lattice. But the words probably had more strength than his appearance. They had filled the air with sex-appeal, like a lightning storm charges an afternoon with electricity. A shaking eyelid, some trembling skirts, the white knuckles of some closed hands, sunk those darts of Don Juan into those innocent hearts, into those spirits where, for the first time, a sin displayed all of its dark immensity. They didn’t understand it, like one can’t understand an abyss, but they felt themselves drawn, and won over by it. Until, suddenly, the abbess beat the drums, like someone who wakes up from a dream, and she pounded on her prie-dieu with a wooden mallet. “Let’s go!” she shouted, and the nuns left two at a time, looking impassive, but obviously disturbed. Only Doña Ximena stayed in the choir with her hands pressing on the lattice.”

“My master ended his confession. ‘That is my life,’ he said to Dom Pietro. ‘Think of it, if you can, as the happiness of the Lord.’ He descended the steps from the altar with his cloak dragging, his hat in his hand, and his head bowed. He made his way through the speechless congregation about to applaud his exit. Then Doña Ximena came out of her quietude, hurried down the stairs, and ran toward the door of the church. My master had moved away, but I waited for him; I walked over to her and saw that she was disoriented, with her eager eyes looking for a disdainful face among a crowd of contrite faces. I asked her if she was looking for someone. ‘For that man. Do you know him?’ I gave her the name and the address of my master. It was my duty as servant.”

He said that with an excessive amount of pride, as if he were responding to an objection that no one had made, and that I wasn’t about to make either. And suddenly he fell into a chair, as if he had lost his strength. He dropped his head in his hands, hid his face, and was silent for a while. I waited for several minutes. He didn’t move, and I didn’t hear him breathe.

“Are you okay?” He waited a moment longer before answering me.

“I have the right to be tired, no? How long have I been talking by myself? That tires you out.”

I poured a glass of whisky and offered it to him. He took a large swallow, licked his lips with his tongue, and set the glass on the floor, on top of the carpet illuminated by the sun.

“Thanks. But I just lied to you. It’s not talking that tires me, but the inner struggle with myself.”

After that he started laughing.

“With myself! That’s rich. I meant to say I was struggling with the nervous system of Leporello who was very sentimental; against the tendency to release adrenalin. My heart feels like crying after the memory of that woman. Don’t you think that’s ridiculous?”

His hand reached for the glass. He was no longer laughing. But he still had a little grimace in the corner of his mouth. He took another drink.

“That night we waited for her. Neither of us said a single word, because Don Juan and I understood each other with our expressions. Don Juan counted his gold coins, while I dozed in the corner. But then by midnight Doña Ximena still had not appeared. Finally my master began to speak out loud, and he asked me humbly if he had been mistaken, and it would be necessary to try something else. “It wouldn’t be surprising if my best weapons had faltered because of lack of use,” he concluded. And he asked my opinion with a look. I told him that I had never heard anything as convincing as his confession, and that Doña Ximena ought to be totally overcome. ‘In that case, why didn’t she come to see me?’ He added, that perhaps another day, and told me to go to bed.”

I left the body of Leporello in the bed and headed back to the Bernardine monastery. These roman nights are suggestive, and as soon as one tarries in the bedroom of palaces, or the beds of a slum, one learns substantial things about human ambition, greed, and lust. But that made me feel attracted to the tormented souls and the shaken hearts of the poor nuns. I went through the cells one by one. The nuns were sleeping, the pure fatigue of constantly trying to deal with nothing. Because those poor creatures did understand about sin, the vivid blasphemy of Don Juan had not reached their understanding and, nevertheless, it had slipped inside them, it snuck through the smallest cracks, disturbed their consciences, that were calm until now, as if they had stirred the most recondite monsters of their subconscious, and begun to wake them up. None of them dreamed sinfully about Don Juan, but all felt nameless desires, desires that made the surface of their soul tremble, that made them give deep sighs, even though they were asleep. I confess that the spectacle of the Bernardine nuns sleeping gave me a sudden rapid professional sense of shame. A veteran devil would have needed years to cause that havoc in the feminine group of Don Pietro; but my master had achieved that with only his word in a quarter of an hour. I had always admired him, but then I admired him even more. I admired him with the sincerity and the frankness of an expert who judged the work by a competitor of great stature."

"He had left the visit to Doña Ximena until last. Doña Ximena wasn't sleeping; she was twisting and turning in her bed, or walking around her cell, or else she kneeled in front of a figure of Christ and asked for His help. A flame had been lighted in Doña Ximena's heart and it's fire was now spreading through her veins so that it blinded her mind and burned her heart. Doña Ximena knew what it was to desire a man, and she desired Don Juan with the wholesome eagerness of her thirty solitary years. She struggled with the memory and tried to expel from her mind the memory of my master; but at the same time she wanted to keep it. The sins of Don Juan had frightened her, it's true, but at the same time, it had aroused her pity and now divided her soul between fear and love. It would be difficult to help her, because her desire was covered by a sense of obligation, and by following the orders of her heart she felt that she was also following Christ. By dawn, after her frenetic struggle, Doña Ximena finally calmed down and accepted, as her duty, the urgent need to find salvation for Don Juan. She was finally able to sleep after her heart accepted the struggle with devil, for the soul of Don Juan.

"She showed up in our house during the afternoon of the following day. She had supported her prayers by drinking holy water. She came dressed as a man and presented herself to my master with the signs of her anxiety painted on her face. She was extraordinarily beautiful, she was also agitated, with her eager hands leaning on the doorframe. Don Juan stood there staring at her, and she told him: "Don't look at me like that, because I am a woman." Don Juan responded: "Yes, I had noticed that," and Doña Ximena laughed. My master told her to sit down, and things continued like a game of pleasantries. After that, Doña Ximena confessed that she had listened to him yesterday afternoon and that she had come to help save him from the devil. "I cannot accept your help in this situation, unless you, in turn, accept mine." "With what can you help me?" "With that struggle you're having with the Spaniards." "But, aren't you one of them?" "Yes, but not so bound to the monarch, that I cannot take up arms against him." "I'm not trying to make you be a traitor." "Nor do I want to distract you from what you're trying to do." "Do you think that without my help you will lose your soul?" "I also think that, without mine, the King of Spain will defeat you." After a long argument, they finally came to an agreement. My master agreed to have a private interview with Dom Pietro the following morning."

"I couldn't falter and I had to use the body of a dove in a cage in the friar's cell. The poor little thing, a grey pigeon with a kind of red tuft over his head, fell dead when I abandoned him, and the prayers of that saint were not enough to bring him back to life. I know that that was cruel, but the body of a pigeon, no matter how noisy it is, is not made to be able to support for a long time the powerful spirit of a devil. And watch out, because pigeons can be a nuisance!"

"My master arrived, and the friar received him with a smile. 'I listened to you the other day, and I confess that your story moved me, but it also worried me. I have spent two nights thinking about it, and I think that now I know what to tell you."

He was a good fellow, that friar, capable of smiling at death itself, and finding an optimistic explanation for all the worst wrongs in the world. "Because what has happened to you, if I understand correctly, is that they have deceived you about the pleasures of the flesh..." He laughed at himself and added: "Forgive me if I call them that, but I'm accustomed to clerical terms. It seemed to you once that there was some disproportion between the expectation of a sexual union, and the actual results." "That's the way it is," my master said. "That's what it seemed like

from the beginning, and it still seems that way today.” “And do you also think that is unfair?” “Of course,” “From what I could tell, you are not ignorant of theology.” “On the contrary, father, there was a time when I was well-informed.” “And how are you with poetry?” “I think I understand it pretty well.” “Then, my friend, I’m going to permit myself to translate for you some verses that I wrote, on a certain occasion, that could be useful now.” “You don’t need to translate them. I also know Latin.” The friar went to his desk, took out some papers, and began to recite.”

Here Leporello stopped again. His hair had fallen over his forehead, and some drops of sweat ran down his cheeks. I gave him a cigarette, and a lighted match. “Thanks. I needed that.” I also gave him the glass that was almost empty.

“I remember the Latin hexameters by memory, but it would be useless to repeat them, because you wouldn’t be able to understand them. And don’t tell me you know Latin just to make yourself look good. You’ve forgotten the few things you learned with your Bachelor’s degree. It’s a shame. It’s a perfect poem, with verses better than Ovid. Do you remember who Ovid was?”

“Oh, come on! Are you trying now to give me a literature test?”

“Don’t be upset, man! After all, having forgotten Latin is not a matter of dishonor. But I’m sorry, I’m really sorry. They are some verses that you really should know, and my master and I know them better than anyone.”

I interrupted him.

“I didn’t say what you think.”

“But you think it. And you are expecting them to be a monstrosity. They are not, believe me. It’s a pity that I can’t recite them to you. They sound like heavenly music...”

He closed his eyes and stayed there, as if he was frozen. The cigarette slipped out of his hand and began to burn a hole in the carpet. I had to grab it and pour a bit of water on the smoldering little hole. The air smelled like a singe. Leporello hadn’t noticed it. And then:

“If I mentioned heavenly music it’s because I know it. I’ve already said that I know how it sounds. It was many centuries ago, an infinite amount of time before this! But sometimes my ears remember, and the nostalgia overwhelms me. What happens to me with that music is the same as when you, and the majority of people, recall the songs of your youth. When you go to concerts, you pretend to understand the music of Prokofiev, and even that of Honegger, but what you really appreciate are the tangos from when you were sixteen. I have the advantage over you in that the music I remember is of better quality.”

He began to hum and then prance around the room, dancing a strange dance. For a moment, it seemed like his feet weren’t even touching the ground.

“Excuse me, but I have forgotten how it continues.”

And he added right away:

“Something very similar to this was what David danced before the Arc... Similar, but not exactly the same. By then the tradition had declined. But if you manage to save your soul, you will be able to dance the same way I just did. Not as perfectly, but more like a distant echo... You don’t know it, but the Seraphs direct the dance. They are, as we would say, it’s creators. They never repeat the same movement, and they are always creating new combinations. The cherubs who come, and are very intuitive, figure out the invention of the seraphs immediately, and they reproduce it right away. Then there are the Dominations, the Crowns, and the remaining angelical orders. They dance with the same impulse, with the same movement. The only difference between their dance and that of the other creatures is that they do not imitate, but reproduce it. What is most similar to that are the waves of the sea. What a spectacle it is, my friend, to see the myriads of perfect spirits dancing with the same rhythm, creating, in the crystals of heaven, tireless changes for a completely original dance! The best thing created by the movie-makers of Hollywood is not even their caricature. Remember the water dances of Esther Williams? They are an affectation. But the secret lies in the fact that the music proceeds from the Lord...”

Once again he was sunken into a nostalgic silence. Afterward, he shook his head.

“The poetry conserves an echo of that music. Also the poets, like the seraphs, want to create movements. Dom Pietro has done that too. The poem was what attracted my master, but what seduced me was the form. Everyone has combined hexameters and pentameters. It’s also done in lyceums. But that friar has been able to set every syllable to music. They had a meaning, and an independent value, like the notes of a harp. What a shame that you can’t hear it! But, when it comes down to it, it doesn’t matter. For you, like for my master, what interests you is the content. And what the devil does that matter! Dom Pietro had accomplished some of the many things that happened, on a certain memorable occasion when the whole thing began.”

Leporello looked at me out of the corner of his eye.

"I am referring, as is obvious, to the sin of Adam and Eve. The poem of Dom Pietro, in Latin distiches, also refers to that, as I'm going to show you."

He opened the top of the piano and began to play. His fingers started in the area of deep notes.

"Retain this music, its rhythm at least, and try to accommodate my poor, opaque words to it..."

Standing next to the piano, he turned his body toward the light of the window, and he slowly raised his arm. He showed the attitude of the Spanish Americans when they begin to recite...:

"The joy of the sea...!"

"...And the wave broke against the shore..."

Leporello let his arm drop.

"In the immense twilight of Paradise that autumn afternoon, it had stopped raining. The palm trees spread out, and tuberoses shook their drops of rain onto the bright grass.

Adam had fallen asleep in his crystallized grotto, and the Lord had to call him several times in order to wake him up."

"I'm coming Lord!," he answered, rubbing his eyes, and he went out through the opening of the grotto.

That afternoon the Lord had put on a rainbow suit, and, once again, Adam was dazzled.

"Good afternoon, Lord!" he said, bowing his head, and the Lord smiled.

"You went to sleep. eh?"

"Yes, my siesta was very long this afternoon. Since I have nothing to do!"

The Lord approached him and put his transparent hand on his shoulder.

"Are you bored?"

"It's not that," Adam said. "Not really bored, no. But I would like to do something. I am never happier than when we are together; but I know that you have more important things to do."

"Not right now. Everything I had to do is done."

"Have you finished the heavens?"

"Look at them!" the Lord said; and the view of Adam spread through the clouds and sank into infinity, until it reached the last galaxies.

"It's beautiful. But it must be a lot of work for you to set it in motion every day."

"It's in motion forever. Until the end of time."

"Ah!"

Adam's view became entangled in the constellations, followed the moving stars, and studied the Milky Way.

"Once again, it's beautiful. I can't imagine how you were able to do all that. I would have made it more simple, and much smaller, but without the solemnity and the elegance, and with a lot less brilliance. Of course you have much more imagination than I do."

"You see..."

"And is all that good for something? I mean, is it like the fruits of the trees, or the waters of the river, so I can nourish myself, or like the flowers and the insects..."

The Lord saw Adam's look and the gesture of his lips.

"Useful, as for being useful, it is not; but to me it seems entertaining and amusing. Besides..."

Adam raised his head toward Him with a questioning expression.

"All the things there are in the Universe love me," the Lord continued, "each one in their own way. The caterpillars the same as the worms, the weeds the same as the birds. That enormous group moves, out of love for Me; because of love, the animals live, the plants in the field grow, and even the crystals in your grotto have their way of loving me. Do you understand?"

Adam confessed, not very well.

"They love me the same as you," the Lord explained. "What happens, is that their love is not expressed with words, and, if you insist, it hasn't been expressed yet. Because that is precisely why you are in the world. Until now, you are bored with nothing to do, but now that the Cosmos is complete, you must explore it to bring me the message of love from each thing."

Adam bowed his head.

"I don't understand, Lord."

"You're going to make a trip, you're going to travel through the universe until the last stars. You are going to dig in the fields until you find the hidden roots; you're going to question the creatures of the air, of the sea, and of the earth; you are going to question the gold and the diamond, and all

the subterranean lumps of stone. You will ask them if they love the Lord, and once they have given you their answer, you will bring it to me.”

“That would take a lot of work!”

“Don’t worry... If you know how to do it...”

“And during all that time, will I be unable to see you?”

“Probably, but you won’t notice it.”

Adam said okay, and the following morning he set out on his journey. By the clock of his pulse it lasted entire centuries; by the clock of the Lord, only an instant.

It was another afternoon in Paradise, but it hadn’t rained. By now Adam was tired, and a little sad. He let himself fall on the bank of a river, and drank for some time. Afterward, he decided to lie down, he fixed his eyes on the clouds, and his heart was puzzled. And he stayed like that until he heard the voice of the Lord who was calling him.

“Where have you put yourself, Adam?”

“I’m here, Lord!” the man replied; and he quickly jumped up.

The Lord approached slowly, giving Adam time to shake off the dust and smooth his hair a bit. When he felt decent, he went to meet God.

The Lord put out his hand and, after shaking it, Adam felt his fatigue vanish, along with the sadness in his heart.

“How glad I am to see you, Lord! I feel so much better by your side!”

An impulse lifted him into the arms of the Lord, and he rested his head on His chest.

“I am very ashamed, and I think it would be best if I told you everything.”

The Lord caressed his forehead.

“Have you had a bad time in these worlds?”

“They are very beautiful, and the journey was interesting. Really, from here one doesn’t realize how much you have done, and how nice it is. But...”

He interrupted himself, and looked for courage in the eyes of the Lord. The Lord smiled at him again.

“Go ahead, tell me.”

“How am I going to tell you?” Adam’s voice trembled. “When I am next to You, it seems like there are no distances between us. I call you, and you respond; I look at you and you smile; I love you and you love me back. I don’t dare to say that we are one, but it seems like we are. However...”

His voice became bitter, and a deep frown appeared on his forehead. The Lord looked the other way to hide His rejoice.

“Things don’t understand me, nor do I understand them. Whether they’re stars, frogs, waterfalls, lions or carnations, when I speak to them of love, they look at me without understanding. We are different, we don’t speak the same language. I feel as if an abyss separates us.”

“And that has made you sad?”

“Especially, Lord, because I am not able to fulfill your order, and also because I would like to be able to understand things that are nearby, as well as far away. Until now I lived with them without realizing I didn’t love them, and that I was indifferent to them. Our reciprocal love seems right to me, Lord. But they love you, and You love them, and it pains me to be outside of that union and not be able to give you...”

A sob interrupted him, and he started weeping in the arms of the Lord, and God smiled again but while he was crying, Adam didn’t realize it. The divine smile was for Adam like the juice of poppies; then he dropped to sleep in His arms. The Lord took him and carried him toward the crystal grotto which, at that time of day, did not glitter: once there, he continued watching him. Once in a while He chuckled. Afterward, He spread nighttime over the sleeping body and told the entire Universe to remain silent. When it heard that, the Universe was taken by surprise, because the Lord had never interfered in the timetable of light and shadows; but everything stayed silent, even the music of the stars.

That night the Lord was very busy. He traveled back and forth in the garden of Paradise. His hands dug into the sand, and his fingers felt its refinement; or He put them in the water and checked its delicateness. He also traveled through the heavens and the bottom of the seas, and he studied the color of the firmament and the coral, the brilliance of the suns, and the transparency of the oceans. In the jungles the soft skin of the wild beasts, and on the beaches, the beating of the waves. He heard the voice of the snails, the murmur of the night, and everything in the creatures of nature was sweet, delicate, and beautiful. When He had finished studying everything, He sat



down in a corner of Paradise and, with His hand on his cheek, He thought for a while. The things of this world did not dare to breathe; they waited with suspense for the Lord to move. And when they finally heard His shout of triumph, a movement of happiness spread through the Universe, like the swell of the sea to the shores.

The Lord remained in Adam's little cave until dawn. Then he went out to the river to wash his hands, because they were covered with mud. After that he called the angels and told them to sing, in full chorus, the Hymn of Universal Love. The angels obeyed. They sang in the heavens, and the creatures of earth served as second and third voices in the chorus. The Lord had seated himself in front of Adam's cave, hiding the entrance with his back. From the angels to the ants, all were curious to know what was happening. But the Lord kept them at bay with his look. To a tortoise that acted like it wanted to climb up on him, he gave a flick that pushed it away. "It's just that I live here, Lord," the tortoise complained; but the Lord told him to be quiet and, as a punishment for its curiosity, it would sleep from now on during the winter. After that the tortoise also lost its voice.

Adam woke up when the sun came out, and when he heard the singing, he wondered if it was a fiesta, and if he had not been polite to the Lord. He jumped up, and when he did that, he saw Eve sleeping on the ground next to him. He was startled, he opened his mouth, and his first feeling was one of fear, which caused him to run and hide in the back of the grotto; but seeing Eve lying there motionless, with his eyes focused on the curve of her hips and the surface of her muscles, it seemed like something so beautiful that it couldn't be anything frightening. He approached her, though very slowly and dared to touch her; he caressed her heel, which was closer to him than the rest of her body, and Eve moved. Adam gave a cry of joy; when she moved, Eve revealed her face, and Adam confessed that he had never seen anything so charming.

"I must go and tell God," he thought, "so He will also come and see her..."

He started to run and immediately bumped into the huge shoulders of the Lord. The divine hand grabbed him, and made him stop running.

"Where are you going, Adam?"

"I was going to look for You, Lord. Come into my grotto and you'll see...!"

"In your grotto? What's in your grotto?"

"There's... something new. She looks like me, but is not completely the same. You have to see her. She's so beautiful!" He raised his hands and pointed at the blue sky. "Look, something like those stars that you put so far away that one has to cross through space in order to see them."

"Ah, yes!" the Lord said, without giving it much importance. "You're referring to Eve. It's what I hadn't done yet, so tonight I did. It's for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, so you won't get bored when you are alone."

"Then, I can touch her?"

"Of course. You ought to do it right away. And when she wakes up..."

Adam had already gone back into the grotto without waiting for the instructions of the Lord, and he was now kneeling next to Eve. His hand timidly caressed her long dark hairs, and he separated them so he could see her body. Then Adam could see Eve's breasts, and then he was paralyzed and filled with stupor, looking as though he felt like a fool. Eve stretched her arms, her face hidden by her long locks of hair and said something. After that she opened her eyes, and when she saw Adam, she smiled and said: "Come here!" Trembling, Adam moved a little closer and took the hand that Eve offered him; "Come, come here!" she said, as she took his hand and pulled him closer. Again Adam was frightened. He let go of her hand, stepped back, and left the grotto.

"Lord she woke up!"

"So what?"

"She says she's coming out."

"And you?"

"Lord, I... It makes me rather frightened. She's not like You, or like me, she is..."

The Lord grabbed him by the ear.

"Come here, fool."

For a while He talked to him through his ear. Adam made grimaces, he became astonished, he was sometimes and sometimes full of fear.

"It's okay, Lord. I'll do what you say."

Then, the Lord parted his shoulders and let rays of sunlight enter the cave. Adam found himself enveloped in the light reflected by crystal on the walls; the light of mica, the green light of emeralds, the red light of rubies, the blue light of sapphires, all of which, with the light of the

crystals, came from the walls of the grotto. Eve was waiting for him, so Adam followed the Lord's advise.

Outside, all through the Universe, the music continued, and the Lord, who had composed the score of music and had already tested it for that occasion, raised his right arm and set the rhythm. Until, suddenly, all the creatures of all the worlds echoed a unanimous cry of joy. A cry that rumbled more than thunder, and made the axis of the stars tremble so that the music filled the outermost parts of infinity. The Lord crossed His hands, and bowed his head.

"Good...!"

He waited. Groups of animals also hid themselves. The music was shutting down. Calm returned to the Universe, but it was different, more brilliant, more solid, as if until then, all things made by the Lord, which were endless, had been provisional and, at that moment, received from God, the mark of eternity.

The Lord directed his words to them.

"When Adam reappears, all the world must be silent. He has to speak, so wait until he tells me the important words. After he speaks, you can make all the racket you want."

Adam appeared. First he was alone, then hand in hand with Eve. He was slightly ahead of her, as if she did not want to follow him. His head was raised, and his face looked satisfied. Eve became hesitant and tried to hide her face with her hair.

"Go on, don't be afraid. The Lord is very kind."

The Lord got to his feet and waited for them. He was slender and gigantic, like the cedars.

"Lord..."

He took hold of Eve by the shoulders and embraced her tightly.

Eve was not calm. She kept trying to hide herself. Adam became serious.

"Come on, woman, or else I'm going to forget what I have to say!"

"Keep still, Eve. Adam is right."

They made a beautiful couple, and it also became obvious that Adam was a good person, and that he was in love with Eve.

"She's beautiful, isn't she."

The Lord agreed.

"So what were you going to tell me?"

"Yes. I wanted to tell You that I can now bring You the message that everything has for you, because, in my heart, I have felt the flow of love that comes from them to You, and also the love felt by You for the entire Universe. It resonates in my heart and my life, and I offer it to You as a prayer from all your creatures. I am grateful to Lord, Lord for having been able to cover the abyss with this bridge—he pointed to Eve—and for having made us in such a way that I feel in my heart the flow of her blood, and she feel mine in hers, and both of us, that of the entire Creation. As if we were all one..."

He pressed against her as if he was trying to pull her inside him.

The Lord opened his arms.

"I am content."

He may have been going to say something else, but Adam had turned to Eve and was whispering to her:

"Go on. Say something to Him. Let him hear you."

"I don't dare."

"At least, tell him thanks."

Then, Eve pulled away from Adam and came over to the Lord; and, kneeling, she said:

"Thank you."

And the Lord caressed her head. And since Adam seemed eager to reunite with Eve, God said He was going to take a walk, and left.

Things would have worked well since all was done well. And they did for some time, without being able to say exactly how long it was. The Universe functioned with no need of readjustment or change of pace. Things happened with a regular rhythm; Eve took them into her heart and then, through the heart of Adam, offered them to Lord. That ebb and flow of love made them happy. Their communication was perfect. If a wasp landed on Eve's shoulder, Adam felt the tingling on his skin, even when he was asleep.

But Satan was waiting outside. Satan, with his followers, had taken refuge beyond the edge of nothingness and, from there, was contemplating the Universe filled with love, like the tribes of the

steppe look at the fertile fields from the highest mountain; except that the red wings of Satan were spread around the Cosmos and embraced it, as if they wanted to hold it, and make it part of them.

Satan had the tendency to consider everything like a personal offense. And Since God paid him no

attention, he let off steam with his followers. At the same exact time when Adam and Eve joined with each other in which the sap of life was turned into love, their hearts were filled with tumult. Satan turned his back and directed his confidence to his people.

“Well yes, the Other has invented something beautiful.” They laughed at him, but a little flicker had lighted up in the dark eyes of Satan. For some days—or centuries, who knows!—Satan was by himself and was preoccupied, so he went out in the night. The guardians of the border saw him venture through nothingness and sink into it, far away, in the light of the Universe. Satan went right to Paradise, entered Adam’s grotto, and studied things with scientific objectivity. This happened night after night, without anyone realizing it, because love had made the Universe confident. Satan went in and out, witnessed the movement of life, and studied its nature; eventually he withdrew to his camp and meditated for a while. Then one day he gathered all his people there.

“I think the Other has made a mistake. He has made Adam and Eve free like we are.”

All of Satan’s followers broke out with laughter.

“But, could that be? Hasn’t He learned his lesson?”

“As far as I can understand, He wants to run the same risk as last time...”

“He’ll do that?”

“If it was in my hands, Adam and Eve would also have to chose. And what actually is in my hands will make us choose them.”

“But that will be a defeat for the Other. Because he has created men as a consolation for having lost us.”

“The Other would not recognize the defeat, and He would even be capable of doing something extraordinary to mitigate it. But the remedy, if it is what I suspect, will have to cost Him blood.”

“Blood? You mean God has blood?”

Even in rebellion Satan was prohibited from telling certain secrets. He feared that if he were to reveal the confidences that God had made him when they were still friends, he would be destroyed. So not being able to answer his follower’s question left him hanging in the air.

“It’s a saying, a metaphor...”

He went back into the Universe again, and hid himself inside the skin a serpent had abandoned on the edge of a forest. He was able to have a chance encounter with Eve, and he made a flirtatious remark. She was surprised, so she stopped.

“You really think I’m beautiful?”

“Yes, I do. And you have a happy look in your eyes.”

“That’s right. I am happy. Adam is very good, and the Lord...”

The serpent coiled around the silvery trunk of an alder tree.

“I already know the Lord is also good, but He is not treating you fairly.”

“How can you say that?” Eve seemed indignant and she started to frown while she looked at the serpent with an look of ire. “There is no one better than God; Adam assures me of that everyday. And, as for loyalty, hasn’t he told us the secret of the Universe? Hasn’t he made us regulators of love and movement? I confess I’m not sure what that means, but Adam says so, and that’s enough. Adam knows many more things than I do. He is wisdom itself.”

“Adam is quite a fool. He knows what God permits him to know, and Adam closes his eye before the things He keeps secret.”

The serpent stretched until his tongue caressed Eve’s cheek.

“The Lord has a secret,” he whispered. “The bright people like you ignore it; but subterranean people like us have known it for a long time. For us, the Lord has a very different manner. We have watched Him when he descends to the subsoil to watch over his fortified treasures, the veins of silver and gold that spread through the heart of the world. In those places the Lord doesn’t smile. There, He gives free reign to His fears, and speaks out loud, since there no one can hear. But for us subterranean people, it is easy to hear Him, because the words of God vibrate in the metals and reach our caves. This way we know the secret of God.

“Will you tell me what it is?”

“No, because you would reveal it to your husband.”

“Actually, what I want is to have something to hide from him! That would make him much more manageable and he would be so proud and so serious. I think that a secret in my hands would let me use it to do what I really want.

“But perhaps that is not for the best. He is Adam after all.” The tone of the serpent’s voice revealed admiration.

“And I am Eve, right? Just because I came to the world a little later doesn’t mean that I am less than him.”

“Yes.”

“But he doubts that. If I had an important secret, he wouldn’t doubt it any longer. And even more, were it a secret of God...! Possessing a secret of God should give a great deal of importance.”

The serpent pretended to be thinking.

“I’ll see...”

And he slipped away through the leaves of the forest. Eve ran after him. She shouted the name of the serpent and disturbed the sleep of the crickets and the frogs, that began to chirp loudly.

The next day at the same time, Eve waited in the place she had met the serpent. She had some strings of coral hanging around her neck, and some emeralds in her ears. She was feeling a bit irritated at Adam, who preferred flowers as adornment. “What’s wrong with you is that it bothers you to bring me corals and emeralds, and that you like flowers because they’re easier to acquire. And I ask myself: am I not worth a little effort by my husband?”

The serpent showed up right away, as if he was just passing through. “You’re very pretty, Eve,” it said, and began wriggling through the trees. But Eve stopped it. She had brought vegetable milk in the shell of a pumpkin and she invited the serpent to snack with her. First, they talked about things. The serpent asked how Adam was doing, and Eve chattered, until they got to personal matters. Since she hoped to get the serpent to reveal God’s secret, she deliberately kept on chattering.

“The best thing of all,” she said, “is that I feel my joy and that of Adam. And he says that he feels the same way with mine. It’s as though, instead of two bodies, there was only one.”

“The same thing happens to me with my snake.”

“Oh! really?”

“Yes. And all those I have talked to have told me the same. It’s the way it should be.”

Here, the serpent stuck his tongue out to Eve’s cheek and whispered in her ear:

“But it could be better.”

“Really?”

“Infinitely better, of the Lord would not steel part of our joy.”

“What do you mean?”

The serpent pretended to move away.

“Pardon me; I didn’t mean to say anything. Without intending to, I mentioned the secret of God.”

Eve extended the pumpkin shell and gave him a drink. After that she asked him if he liked her corals or her emeralds, and that if he did, she could give them to him.

“I wouldn’t say anything to Adam,” she dropped down, while she brushed her hair. “The secret will stay with just the two of us.”

“Many people already know it.”

“I thought it was only you.”

“All the subterranean animals know it.”

“Oh! Then I will tell it to a viper. For days it has been pestering me, wanting me to start a conversation. It was probably because of that.”

“A viper only knows part of it. I am the most well-informed. Actually, the only one who knows the secret of the Lord fully is me. It’s very simple. I already told you He steals part of our pleasure. He does it because he needs it. He nourishes Himself with our love, like you with potatoes, and me with nuts. If He were lacking...”

“If He lacked what...?”

“I don’t know. Probably he would start begging us...”

“The Lord? Begging us?”

The serpent answered emphatically.

“Yes, begging us. And then we would see if it was given to Him, or not...”

“But what would we gain from that?”

Satan was about to make a mistake. He said: "The power." But then he bit his lip and rectified with a loud voice:

"More pleasure. An incalculable pleasure, like what the Lord receives. It would be as if you and Adam refused to give each other the pleasure that rises from us; it would be like if you were to lock yourself inside yourself, and enjoyed your own pleasure, without thinking of others. Once the flow was interrupted, each couple would keep what is theirs, and all women would be more beautiful. Because what beautifies us is pleasure. Haven't you noticed that, if there was some night your man was tired and went to bed early and slept until the next morning, you would be less favorable?"

"Until now Adam hasn't ever forgotten anything."

"He will forget. When they are tired, men prefer to sleep. But if the pleasure was only for us, men wouldn't get tired out, because, just like it makes us more beautiful, it gives men more vigor."

"That's strange..."

Just then Eve felt a sense of urgency. She remembered that Adam was waiting and she gave the serpent the pumpkin shell, with the rest of the milk. The serpent thanked her, and then they each went on their way.

That night Eve covered the door of the grotto with cluster of dry branches.

"Why are you doing that?"

"I thought it would keep us more alone."

"Alone? What do you mean by that?"

"Alone, just you and I. Without being in the moonlight, without..."

Adam sat down on the ground.

"You know very well that, at this time of night, the whole Universe starts to love, and you and I here, receive that marvelous wealth of love and, offer it to God... Before, I knew what it was to be alone. Now, since you have come, I feel through your body, like a brother of Creation. Solitude is impossible, and also immoral."

Eve made a grimace of disgust.

"You don't want me because of who I am. You care more about the distant glow of a star than the pulse of my blood. You came to me out of obedience, not because you cared about me. You are doing it as an obligation."

"I do it because the Lord showed me that that's the way I ought to love you, and since the love I feel for you contains all the love, of earth and heaven."

"I don't care about earth and heaven. I care about you."

Adam got serious.

"What is this you are saying? I don't want to hear it again!"

"In the dim light of the grotto, Eve began to sigh. She went to a corner and got ready to sleep. When Adam came to caress her, she pushed him away.

"No, not tonight."

"But, woman...!"

"I can't, Adam. I have a headache."

"But, what will they say tomorrow...?"

"That's what you worry about? You worry about what your Lord will say tomorrow? And what will be said by the golden orioles before Him, the squirrels by His side, and the trout in the pond? And I'm still not more important to you?"

Eve was impossible. Adam, desperate, walked over to another corner, and from there he heard her weeping and became even more upset. He went out the door of the grotto to get some fresh air. The oriole in front, the squirrels at the side, and the trout in the pond, asked him:

"What's going on, Adam?"

"Nothing. Eve just has a headache."

Behind the nocturnal shadows, millions of loving eyes asked the same question. Adam felt ashamed, and went back to Eve. He tried to convince her; but Eve either pretended to be asleep, or she repeated her refusal.

"...unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Unless you do what I asked. Forget all the rest, and think only about us. Closing the door of our hearts to the love of others, who don't matter anything to us."

"But, that's nonsense, Eve! It can't be like that!"

In the darkness of the little cave, the caressed body of Eve began to tremble with desire, and its odor excited Adam. Between sighs, between caresses, requested and denied, Eve said:

“Nothing more than one time, nothing more than just a moment! I want to be your god, and your universe, like you are for me...”

“One more time? Is that a promise?”

Eve smiled in the darkness. She opened her lips, and she moved them close to the lips of Adam.

“I swear it.”

Frenetic, Adam embraced her passionately. And shortly after that there was a tremendous moan from all creatures, animals, vegetables, and minerals; from terrestrial and heavenly bodies, from aquatic and areal, as if it had broken the cord of the heart of the universe. In the jungle, a lion jumped on a peaceful cow and devoured it; in the air, a condor dove over a dove and darkened its wings with blood; in the sea, for the first time, a shark ate a child. The most remote stars began to grow dark, all living beings felt that life was bitter, cracks opened in the ground, and the air was filled with bad-smelling gasses.

A dog fell into a pond, and a nut it had just eaten damaged the stomach of the anthropoid. It bit a weevil in the wheat, and a worm in the pit of an apple. The teeth of a woodworm bit the wood...

And so on, and so on...

“Adam, what’s wrong with you, so that I cannot feel you? Why is it that my joy doesn’t spread out of my body? Why doesn’t yours reach my body?”

Adam was weeping. He also started feeling like hitting his wife.

“Eve, we have sinned against the love of the Universe, and that was also the love of God.”

They heard a powerful voice calling Adam by his name. Adam felt the flesh of his body shake. He left Eve and fled to the bottom of the cavern. A scorpion bit the toes of his feet.

Outside, in the saddened air, the voice of God kept calling:

“Adam, Adam, where are you hiding?”

2. Leporello dropped down on a sofa. He was dripping sweat from his brow, and he had become pale. A dark lock of hair dropped over his face, a curly lock, like that of a child.

For a half hour he had recited, gestured, and performed. His eyes shined, his hands twisted in the air, his face gesticulated, and his body danced. Once he had grabbed hold of a mushroom and, with the power of his words, had converted it into an image of the Universe. When he mentioned Satan, he had frowned, and his voice had become bitter, perhaps spiteful.

“Aren’t you going to give me something to drink?”

I filled a glass, and I put ice cubes in it. Leporello didn’t move. I picked up the glass and handed it to him.

“Thanks. What time is it?”

“A little after five...”

“We have time...”

In Don Juan’s living room it was starting to get dark; I turned on the lamp on the piano. Leporello breathed a sigh.

“My master had listened to the friar with silent attentiveness. Sometimes he smiled. Others, he looked at the dove that I had locked in a cage, and not because he suspected shady dealing, but because it was the only thing in the cage where he could focus his gaze. When the friar finished his lecture, my master applauded.”

“A beautiful poem, although not like the style of this time. I congratulate you.”

“Do you find it antiquated?”

“No, it’s not that. Rather early, or perhaps both things at the same time.”

“Did it mean anything to you?”

“It actually came to tell me what I already knew: that everything that is beautiful in this world was spoiled by the Original Sin.”

“Including what you have used as a pretext for your enmity against God.”

“Yes, that too.”

“It’s not legitimate, then, to throw the blame at God, for what a man has done...”

“For what Adam did...”

“Even if that’s true, if you try to use logic...”

“I would have to reproach God for creating Adam, and not a more virtuous man. I would never have let myself be seduced by Eve.”

“Have you ever loved God?”

“My dear Don Pietro! If I had loved God, I would have never had the occasion to listen to your interesting poem. I feel respect for Him, and admiration. But, love, what we call love, that is what I

have never felt for Him. I would have actually had to see him, and been dazzled. Perhaps then, if He is as resplendent as they say, if He is equally fascinating, I might have forgotten my objections, which you already know of, or others which you might imagine, and have become engulfed in His love. And don't think that I am the only one in the world who this has happened to. Few men love God, and God knows it. Those who believe in Him, fear him, and try to deceive Him. Only I am frank, and sincere, and confess my lack of love face to face..."

Dom Pietro looked at him, and his look showed that he knew he was wasting his time. However, he responded:

"We might discuss this a little more calmly."

"Yes, but some other day. Today it's getting late, and I can steal the time of a saint"

"God gave me the time so that I could use it in His service. And there is nothing that God likes more than to chase after the lost lamb."

"Don Juan swelled with pride."

"Does God really believe I am a lamb? Hasn't He found a simile more suited to reality? In any case, look for it outside of the Gospel, because in the Gospel there's nothing similar to me."

We left the monastery. My master spent the afternoon with Doña Ximena, and by the time it got dark, we left for Naples with her. We traveled on horseback, through some side trails where it wasn't easy to find soldiers of the King of Spain. Doña Ximena was suddenly silent for a moment, and then suddenly loquacious, and sometimes she stopped to listen. A distant bustle, a shout in the dark, made us hide ourselves. Don Juan was amused by our precautions, and in his response to the lady, there was always a bit of irony. Doña Ximena, on the other hand, spoke with a warm voice, and beneath what she said one could always sense an "I love you!"

We spent the day secluded in a roadside inn. We left by nightfall. Soon after that Doña Ximena stopped her horse and said:

"I'm getting tired. I would like to spend the night in my house, which is not far from here."

We entered a small woodland, and after we traveled for an hour, we arrived at a small castle. My master had ridden slightly behind us, while she was slightly ahead of us, so that they hadn't exchanged a single word. In the castle they received us with surprise. Perhaps also with some fear. The steward said to his mistress:

"We are unprotected, and there are soldiers not far away from here."

"It doesn't matter. They think I am in Rome..."

She told them to turn off the lights and raise the gate. She and my master ate supper in an interior room. Doña Ximena told them to use the silver plate and put on a beautiful old-style dress. I served the table and enjoyed its magnificence. They spoke a little about politics, but a hidden dialogue filled their eyes, their hands, and their trembling of their lips. Doña Ximena sang some songs while playing a guitar. Then she rose up.

"Tomorrow we have to get up early, so let's retire now. Don Juan, the servants will take you to your room."

I stayed by the door in a long hallway. I heard Don Juan move through the room, back and forth, back and forth, with that calm confidence I knew so well. At midnight Doña Ximena appeared in the hallway, wrapped in a cape, with a candelabra in her hand. She passed in front of me without seeing me. She opened the door to my master's room and closed it after herself.

I continued my watch, hour after hour. From there I could hear the echoes of their love-making: words, moans. At dawn I heard a noise outside so I got up and looked out. A regiment of Spanish soldiers had surrounded the castle. They had placed ladders against the walls and were already climbing up them. I ran to wake up my master. Don Juan got up then, but Doña Ximena was still sleeping. I explained to Don Juan in a low voice what had happened. He began to get dressed and took his sword.

He was silent, his face petrified. He went to the window and looked out at the soldiers who were now entering the patio stealthily. Already threatening.

"It's as if I had betrayed them," my master said.

He went back to the bed and woke up Doña Ximena. She listened calmly. She asked for the cape she had wrapped around her body, and then put it on.

"What are you going to do?"

She didn't answer. She looked out the window and watched the silent coming and going of the soldiers. Some of them had formed a squadron, with their spears in the air. Others had scattered around the castle. Doña Ximena gritted her teeth, and shed a tear. Then she turned to Don Juan and gave him a hug and a kiss.

“Thanks, Juan.”

She let the cape fall, and then, suddenly, with an unbelievable effort, she she jumped out of the window and her body landed on the spears. The soldiers shouted. My master moved over to the window and saw how the blood stained her nightgown. The leaders removed her body and put it face up on the flagstones of the patio. Seven spears were still stuck in her body.

They knocked on the door. Don Juan was strangely quiet. In his eyes there was an unusual expression, like surprise and disgust.

“Go open the door, Leporello.”

I let in an officer and two soldiers, who disarmed my master and took us prisoner. When we got to the patio, they had removed the spears, and some soldiers had covered Doña Ximena’s body. My master passed in front of her with his hands tied. He stopped and looked at her with the same expression in his eyes, and then continued moving. They put us in a damp dungeon that was dark. I make a joke, and Don Juan told me to shut up. He had leaned on the wall and was still on his feet, his head high, and his eyes closed.

I don’t know how long we were there. A soldier brought us something to eat from time to time. We slept on the floor and urinated in a corner. Don Juan hadn’t pronounced a single word, and I didn’t dare say anything. Then, one day a soldier came and led us to the main hall of the castle. There was a bunch of people. We recognized the ambassador of Spain, and the Chancellor of the Vatican.

When he saw my master, the Ambassador ran over to him. “Please forgive us, Don Juan. My soldiers didn’t know who you are. And I give you my thanks for your help. Without you, that woman would have escaped. Of course we didn’t want her death, and especially like that. We would have ordered her throat to be cut, which would have suited her nobility.

The Chancellor also came over smiling. In his hands, he brought a roll of parchment that he gave to my master.

“Take it. By this Bull you are pardoned for your sins, and your excommunications are removed, on the condition that you confess and fulfill your penitence.

“And I bring you the pardon of the King of Spain,” the Ambassador said. “You can return to your country whenever you want.”

Don Juan raised his tied hands and the Ambassador himself cut the bonds with his dagger. He continued to ask his forgiveness, explaining... The Chancellor had left, and he praised the conduct of my master to another fellow.”

“I want my horses back right away,” Don Juan, demanded.

“But, aren’t you going to stay with us for a while? Don’t you want to rest after the days spent in this dungeon? Come to Naples with us. There you can spend some quiet time until you leave for Spain.”

“My horses.”

So they brought them. We went down to the patio without saying goodbye, and silently got on our horses. All the way to Rome, Don Juan never said anything. There he spent several days, isolated and silent. He paced about the room, back and forth, and back and forth, without sleeping for many nights.

Finally, one day he called for me.

“God has turned his back on me,” he said. And since I laughed, he added: “He abandoned me, and forgot me.”

“Said in that concise way, my lord, I don’t understand why you went mass.”

“Because it’s obvious. This time His grace has been denied to me. I haven’t repented for the seduction of that woman, nor was I sorry for her death. Not even human pain, or shame for having betrayed her. What surprised me when I saw her fall on the spears of those soldiers, was that my heart didn’t shake or cringe with remorse. Do you understand now? The Lord had never failed me. I sinned, and He gave me repentance, a sign of His presence, and our battle with each other. Then, I struggled inside myself, until I silenced the voice of God, until I was victorious. But this time, although I looked for Him in prison, when I was alone the voice of God never came. My heart is still calm, it’s only my head that is spinning... I want to understand but am not able to. I have the evidence in front of me, and I reject it. Because it is evident that the Lord has abandoned the fight before it is finished, that he scorns me, or ignores me... And it’s not right. Bargains are bargains, Leporello. The battle can’t end until I’m dead. And until my death, the Lord cannot claim victory. Is that clear?”

“Yes.”



“But I don’t accept it!” he shouted. “Even if I have to call at the doors of heaven; I don’t accept!”

“Leave heaven in peace, my lord, and, above all, don’t put us in the situation where we have to explain things that can be understood without it. What’s happening is, simply, that you are tired.”

He looked at me with an expression of anger.

“What do you know? I’m not tired, because I feel capable of doing anything. Vigor lifts my heart, and pushes me...”

He grabbed me by the neck and shook me.

“Listen to me. We’re going to go to Seville.”

“What for, my lord?”

“I don’t know, but I have the feeling that, there, where everything began, there will be a chance to do something that breaks the silence of heaven.”

“That will be a real mess!”

“I don’t know what it will be yet, but I feel humiliated again as if, with its silence, heaven is still mocking me.”

“Why don’t you go and see Dom Pietro. Perhaps he, who is so wise...”

“I think they have put Dom Pietro in prison. But even if he is still free... He is a saint, he has the answer for all questions, but only the Lord can answer mine. And perhaps that is what I am going to do in Seville: ask God for an answer.”

“How would you do that, my lord?”

“I don’t know. But my heart, which has never deceived me, is telling me we should now return to Seville...”

I shrugged my shoulders and bowed my head.

“As you like, lord.”

3. Leporello took me in his coach to the door of the theater. He left me in front of a solid built bourgeois building where, on its doors, a black poster written with red ink gave the name of the theater, and the name of the comedy. A little below that, on a sheet of paper stuck to the wall, it gave the ticket prices.

Leporello took my ticket out of his pocket and handed it to me.

“Forgive me if I don’t go with you, but I have things I must do. Go through that door and then go out to the patio and cross over it. There you will see another door that is posted like this one. That’s where it is. And don’t be surprised by the modesty of the movie theater. All the important theaters in Paris are in locations like this.

He saluted with his hat and a smile, and returned to the coach. I entered the door, walked across the patio, and stopped in front of the poster. There was a small door, and, next to it was a man with a grey countenance, and a bracelet. I showed him my ticket. He took it and looked it, then he gave it back to me.

“Can I enter?”

“Yes,”

Another aisle, that was quite gloomy and run down. At the end, a young woman dressed in blue, also wearing a bracelet. She asked to see my ticket, took me to my seat, and waited for a gratuity. I sat down. The theater was one of many where they showed works of Ionesco or Becket. Looking at the audience, I could see hardly any women. I looked at the nearby faces and, for the moment, found them quite common. After a second examination, I thought they were rather antiquated: as though men portrayed by Rembrandt, Boucher, Delacroix, and Manet had jumped out of their paintings and dressed in modern suits, in which they felt uncomfortable. It was a fleeting sensation, quickly changed by the fact that those guys were smoking cigarettes and were reading “France-Soir.” But still, they were not the usual type of people you see in avant-garde theaters.

The girl dressed in blue came and went. Each time she entered the audience grew, two at a time. The theater, half-full when I came in, was filling up. There wasn’t much light, although enough to see that the stain of humidity on the walls stood out from the rest of the old-fashioned surrealist decorations. On the curtain they had painted a mask of the tragedy, from whose mouth the characters of the classical comedy came out dancing. But there must have been some trick, because when I looked again I saw that the characters that came out of the mask were wearing buskins and they threatened with daggers, or were wearing blood-stained clothes. The third time it was a skull, and the dancers were skeletons. I turned around, feeling rather upset. This class of tricks made one feel provincial.

I looked at the time. Only a few minutes until it began. The light of the theater was diminishing, and after that changed color. Those present seem to be enveloped in a green light, a light that emerged from them like an emanation. I lit a cigarette and looked up at the ceiling which was completely dark, but was crossed from time to time with flashes like yellow bursts. I thought that Leporello should have warned me, but then it occurred to me that hiding it was one of his jokes. Perhaps in some corner he was spying on my expressions and laughing at my restlessness.

Someone sat down by my side. I immediately noticed a familiar perfume. I turned cautiously and found Sonya, who was lighting a cigarette without looking at me. I said hello. She turned her head and, without smiling, said:

“You too?”

“You should have expected it.”

“That’s true, but I never thought you would be sitting by my side.”

“Are you angry at me?”

“No, but I didn’t want to see you again.”

She blew out a mouthful of smoke and sunk in her seat. She was looking straight ahead. I felt snubbed, and out of place. I would have changed my seat, but by now the theater was full.

“Is there something you’re planning to do?”

“No.”

The curtness of her response made me even more ill-at-ease. I didn’t dare look at her. The man sitting on my right was reading a newspaper. I turned toward him and could see that he was reading something about the Congo. Until the three ritual blows with a hammer were heard. Then the lights went out and, with them, the green halo of the spectators.

The curtain rose. The scene was dark. Some floodlights inside the theater began to illuminate it; little by little, and with various colors of light, as if they were trying them out. With the red light, it looked like the entrance to hell. With the green light, a cemetery. The white light revealed four white walls of a room with doors, and baroque furniture, and grand golden mirror in the middle of the upstage area. The white light stabilized, and there were some knocks on the left side door. On the other side, a servant entered and walked around the room. He was wearing French clothes from the seventeenth century.

“It’s Leporello!” I told Sonya, without being able to stop myself.

“Yes. I’ve already seen that.”

Leporello, simulating concern, said:

“Watch out! A bit of calm, man. Watch out, I said!”

He open the shutter on the window, and added:

“The devil!”

He exited through the left side. The scene was now empty, and the lights trembled. Leporello returned, followed by an old woman who insisted on embracing him.

“My precious child! Child, again, and always my child. What happiness it is to see you! Because it has been at least fifteen years since you left your dear Seville. Let me see you!”

Leporello was able to separate himself.

“Okay, old lady, that’s fine. A little less noise, and fewer hugs. What can I do for you?”

“Let me touch you, you rascal! Boy, how attractive you are! The things you must have done in those lands! With that master you have...! I learned of your return by accident. I was passing by and saw the balcony door partly open, and I said to myself: who but the master would dare to open it? And now I can see you. But, what a nice tone you have, naughty boy! And what firm-bodied flesh! Where is Don Juan?”

“He’s not here.”

“I would also like to see him and give him a squeeze. What a shock it was this morning when he was known to be in Seville!”

“When did they find out?”

“Like one hears... A rumor spreads, and people swear it’s true. And what a rumor! Nervous shudders of married couples, dizzy spells of virgins, worries of husbands, and reinforcing the locks of houses that are still in Seville and still haven’t been sold.

With his back to the spectators, Leporello’s arms were akimbo; a red light shined on his back and spread his shadow, long and wobbly, on the curtain in the rear.

“All right. And you, who are you, and what do want from us? Because no one has asked you to come, as far as I know.

The old woman stepped forward a few steps and spoke confidentially.

She seemed excessively *made-up*, with *make-up* in strips, or spread out like painters used to paint some years ago. When the light covered her face, it gave the impression of a mask.

I go wherever I'm needed. And here I have felt that I am very much in need. For that reason, this morning, before deciding whether or not to come, I took a stroll to an important house where a maiden is suffering from love... A gorgeous woman, lad, a real gift!"

"Maidens here, not on your life."

"When I tell your master about her charms and her troubles, he will be dying to meet her."

"You won't have any opportunity to talk to him. He has forbidden me to do that."

"He won't mind."

"Don Juan is now incognito."

"Can't you tell me anyway?"

"I already said I can't."

"Well then, little good that is going to accomplish! And what a disillusion for the people of Seville! And the reputation of your master..."

"Nothing but slanders. So you know what to do; forget the whole business, and get out of here."

He shoved her toward the door. The old woman was reluctant and grabbed hold of Leporello. They struggled for a moment, but without violence.

"Wait, man, don't be in such a hurry! Or is it that you don't know how to treat respectable women? Because you must know that I..."

The old woman began to act like she was a lady. She grabbed her walking stick like it was a sword, and, as she waved it, a shadow spread over the scene like a cloud. "You must know that I..." she repeated with false dignity.

Leporello moved over to the old woman and began to whisper in her ear.

"Who told you that?"

"Someone I know."

"It's the slander they cast on poor helpless women! By the cross of Saint Andres..."

"Leave the saints alone, and listen to me. Here's a silver coin for you, if you give me news of a certain woman... I have disregarded it a little, and I have not found out what I should have."

"I know everything about women. Hand over the dough."

"First, the story."

"Who is it about?"

"When my master left Seville, more that fifteen years ago, he had gotten married."

"Are you referring to his wife?"

"What has become of her?"

The old woman raised the index finger of her right hand to her head.

"Crazy as a goat."

"Did they lock her up?"

"No, because she is a peaceful prostitute; but it was now about more than ten years ago... No, about twelve years ago, and she had her ups and downs."

"That's what I want to find out. Her ups and downs."

"Would you let me sit down?"

"There are the chairs."

"And a drink of water? Would you do me the kindness of some refreshment? This spring is hot and humid."

"There in that pitcher you'll find one."

The old woman sat down, making a great fuss. In front of her, Leporello oscillated like a rocking chair.

"Go on, love, bring me something. I am out of sorts with all this heat!"

While Leporello served her, the old woman continued:

"So, you'll see. That lady got it into her head to turn against the women of my trade. Why did it occur to her to go to the brothels and rescue those girls from sin? Since she was rich and lived very comfortably in this house, the girls followed after her, and the day arrived when the brothels, the hideouts, the taverns, and all the places of entertainment in Seville were empty, except for maybe a few old whores who no longer even believed in God. While here in this house they came to praise God, and do charitable things! I don't want to exaggerate things, but more than three hundred got together. They were everywhere."

Leporello had come over to the table and sat down on the corner. He rocked his leg up and down, following the rhythm of the old woman's words.

"That seems very few for a place like Seville."

"I told you I didn't want to exaggerate. But the thing is that you wouldn't find one of them, even to make a choice. Because, the lady also went with the penitents to doors of the city, and when a nice looking girl came in from the country, they catechized her and brought her here. And at night they went out in the streets, gathering loose women. And they watched for the kept women of the lords and converted them... Look, boy, I can tell you that in Seville the only way to sin was by yourself. And how the high-and-mighty carried on! It made you afraid to bump into them in the street, because wherever you see skirts, they fall on them like vultures. Even I had work in those days!"

"You mean you were unemployed sometimes?" "That's right. As a young girl I worked. The men slogged away with whatever they had, and for us, it was Indian Summer. And that wasn't the bad part, but then scandals began, and the girls from good families were embarrassed, and the sodomites... what do I know? There were attacks on honorable homes, kidnapping of nuns, rapes, and violations. You go out in the street and you see the men lurking, like a pack of wolves. So even the preachers intervened in these matters, and the woman was taken to testify in a competent court. They defended themselves with charity, and with what they could do with their own money, so that their work was Christian and strongly recommended by the saints. Until the mothers formed a junta and agreed to go and see the Lord Magistrate... So the result was that one day the tumult emerged, and they assaulted this house, destroyed everything, and removed the penitents and returned them to their place of origin... And how they fornicated that night in Seville!"

"Did they also carry away the Don Juan's wife?"

"They didn't dare take that lady, because she said that her husband would kill anyone who put a hand on her. And since Don Juan already had that reputation..."

Leporello jumped off the table, he raised his hand above his head, and then let it fall decisively.

"My master would have set fire to Seville."

"God help us!"

"So what happened to Don Juan's wife?"

"She's still there. She dresses as a penitent, devotes herself to charity, and has the reputation of a saint. If you want to find her, she is on a piece of land that used to belong to her husband. There she had the Commander of Ulloa buried after he was killed by Don Juan, and now she lives there. During the day she travels around Seville, pestering people with the idea of loving your neighbor; but at night she goes home."

Leporello went to the left side of the stage and opened the door.

"Thanks for the information."

"And the currency?"

"When you leave."

The old woman hobbled over to the door. She put out her hand.

"I am not going to thank you, because it's not money for me."

"Give it back to me then."

"The thing is that money that enters my hand..."

The old woman walked out the door. Leporello closed it carefully. The stage darkened. A man dressed in blue came in from the right side...

I trembled when I saw him. Unconsciously, I grabbed Sonya's arm.

"It's Don Juan!"

Sonya jumped up suddenly. She looked at the scene, hypnotized.

"It's Don Juan!" I repeated.

She paid no attention to me. She breathed nervously. Her breasts shook under her blouse, up and down, up and down.

Don Juan was carrying a bunch of letters in his hand. Leporello bowed to him, and remained by the door.

"Leporello!"

"Lord!"

"Who were you talking to?"

"With an old woman who talks about virtues, who came with the odor of a good reputation."

"You have to take these letters."

"Right now?"

"Immediately. Tonight I'm giving supper and a dance in costumes, and these are invitations."

Leporello took the envelopes and started to read.

“Chief Magistrate of Seville, Chief Grand Justice, Chief Chairman of the Maestanza Bullring... All important people?”

“There are also some scoundrels, but with the invitations it doesn’t matter.”

Don Juan spoke with a voice that was pasty, arrogant, and virile. He moved with calm elegance, as if he was restraining himself.

“You think they will come?”

“It’s up to them! If they don’t come, I’ll open my house to the beggars. So get going.”

“I’m going, lord.”

“Yes, but you’re not moving.”

“It’s just that, I’m asking myself... I see an envelope here addressed to Elvira de Ulloa. Hasn’t she died?”

“She didn’t have any reason to.”

Leporello began to laugh noisily. Don Juan crossed the stage and grabbed him by the arm. The light began to change again.

“Forgive me, sir. I laughed because... do you know all those are living, except the Commander?”

“All who?”

“All those from then. Because that old woman who just left, was telling me about Marianne...”

“Marianne?”

“Yes, that prostitute that the lord had the idea of marrying. It turns out...”

“I’m aware of all that, but I had forgotten the name of the character. Since in Seville they call her the lady...!”

“That never ceases to amuse me, right? A prostitute yet!”

“The wife of Don Juan Tenorio, don’t forget. I not only ennobled her, I made her a saint. Since they must have already told you that.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Take these letters, and when you are referring to Marianne, call her the lady.”

The voice of Leporello had trembled. Don Juan started to leave on the right side, but he hesitated when he reached the door.

“Marianne...! How could I have forgotten her name?”

He left. Leporello began to whistle and look at the envelopes. Off screen, the sound of a door knocker was heard. Leporello continued to look at the letters.

“Well now! The Chief Magistrate of Seville, the Higher Chief of Justice...”

“He read the name of the addressees and, as he was reading, he tossed the letter into the air. All that seemed like a game of prestidigitation, and I can’t ever understand how they had been able to do that on screen, since they floated in the air and spun around Leporello’s head, each time more rapidly. Off screen, the noise of the door knocker was still heard. Leporello said “Well now!” and tossed another letter into the air. When the last one flew out of his hand, the speed increased, there was a noise like a propeller, and the cloud of letters flew out of the window. Then people began to applaud, and Leporello waved from the stage box. One could see his face shining with satisfaction, and *makeup*.

Don Juan appeared again.

“You’re back already?”

“Yes, lord.”

“Did you deliver the letters?”

“One by one.”

“Did you hear they were knocking?”

“Yes, lord.”

“Why didn’t you open the door?”

“It was probably some practical joker; on Shrove Thursday they might do anything.”

“My house is open to the jokers.”

“And if it was a troublemaker? They’re all over the place, often with a mask on.”

“Give me the sword and open it.”

“And if it turns out to be... the police? Don’t forget, lord, that the royal pardon might not have arrived to Seville.”

“I didn’t ask for pardon from the King. And as for the police, bring me the money and open up.”

“You’re in the mood to start a fight? Whatever it is, it’ll be a nuisance. When will the lord begin to settle down?”

Leporello had started to approach the side of the stage. He opened the door and went out. The light of the scene changed again, and the suit of Don Juan looked purple. Then, after Leporello, a new person came in. The rounded hips revealed it was a woman. She was masked, with a sword and a fancy hat. She remained next to the entrance door, standing very straight. However, it didn't seem like the men's suit gave her much comfort, because it looked like she was looking for something more suitable. Or perhaps it was that the costume was too thin for the actress.

"Have Leporello leave."

Don Juan turned to his servant.

"You heard what she said."

"Of course, and I already know who it is, and more or less what she is going to say..."

He made a gesture with his hand, and the hat of the new arrival flew off her head and landed on a coat rack. The audience was very amused. The actress had beautiful dark hair, with some strips of grey.

Don Juan made a bow.

"We're alone now. Do I listen, or take out my sword?"

She moved forward a bit, and her posture and her voice trembled.

"Are you afraid of me?"

"You don't give me the slightest concern, but either you come to get revenge, or to lecture me. If it's vengeance, I feel sorry for you, because I'll kill you and tomorrow they will say it was murder. But you see, that death would increase the admiration people have for me. However, it would be a mistaken admiration. Because I am not a killer."

"What about the Commander?"

"He started it, and he deserved it. I killed him because of that, without the slightest scruple."

"You are a cynic."

"Don't you believe it. My evil is not so perfect that I could boast about it."

"It scares me to listen to you."

"Stop doing it then."

The voice of the girl seemed to falter, as well as she herself. She relaxed her muscles, dropped her arms, and spoke quietly.

"And Elvira? Have you forgotten her?"

"That name is at the top of the list of what we might call my failures. How could I forget her? The Commander was a scoundrel, but in the heart of his daughter the birds were singing the most beautiful songs of passion. In spite of what I would have desired, I was not able to seduce her. People never believe that, and they consider me the cause of her dishonor. My word of honor, that I have never touched a strand of her clothing!"

The girl raised her head, saddened.

"You give me pity."

Don Juan responded sharply:

"Good gracious! I'm used to having people hate me, or despise me, but not that they pity me."

"For once in your life you were a coward, and in order not to admit it, you prefer to call it a failure, rather than admitting you ran away. You had Elvira in your arms. She would have given you honor and happiness. Why did you abandon her?"

"That night my departure was for a decisive reason. I was risking my freedom."

"You have a reputation for disguising the strongest feelings of the heart with fake words."

"And you. Elvira..."

The girl stepped back, and Don Juan held her with his arms. She tried to break away.

"...still have your beautiful moving voice, a voice that, until now, I only heard you say my name. No, don't take off your blindfold. Don't take it off because the past few years you have disregarded your beauty; but, if you can still look at yourself calmly in the mirror, take it off then."

The girl took off the blindfold and let it fall on the floor. Seen from the front, with the harsh light above her eyes, she was not beautiful.

"You are still lovely," Don Juan continued, "even more lovely than before. In your face there is a sad maturity that is very attractive. And that masculine suit suits you perfectly."

"Flattery will get you nowhere."

"God, get away from me! Pardon, I meant to say devil."

She fell into a seat and began to sob. Don Juan looked at her from a distance. He reached out and caressed her head. She turned around with a final attempt at arrogance. "Don't touch me!" But she weakened again, and hugged Don Juan's waist.

"Don Juan, it's time now...!"

"Time, for what?"

"To save yourself. you are bad and mendacious, but your heart is gigantic. Stay away from sin. The path to God is easy and beautiful."

"And, especially if it leads directly to your arms that are Paradise regained, right? It's strange. In fact, all women are convinced that you are God. And, who knows? You may just be right. For me, at least, God has been always been waiting for me, sitting in your lap. But the Lord and I have some differences... I still have so many things to do that displease Him! One of them has brought me to Seville, and I have tried so hard to accomplish it, that not even my own salvation offered by your hands on a platter would distract me from that purpose."

Elvira rose up quickly and approached Don Juan. She offered him her mouth.

"And what about me?" she asked with a much sharper voice, as if the passionate birds in her heart were now singing in her throat.

"What do you mean?"

She grabbed hold of Don Juan fiercely.

"Suppose that these years haven't passed, that you haven't already killed my father, or at least that I don't know that. Forget the maturity of my face, and the sadness of my voice. Suppose you have climbed up to my window, and hope trembles in my lips. Look at me. I have just offered you all the love of my soul, and all the happiness that my body can give you. And you... have not yet rejected me."

"That's strange," he responded with a cold voice. "I usually am very quick with my important decisions."

She started to sob again. Her voice broke, and she covered her face with her hands.

"Coward! Coward now, coward always! You only feel arrogance for party girls! But love frightens you and takes away your color, like the fear of death."

"More, Elvira, much more. Death doesn't worry me or heat me up. I have carried it inside me ever since the day I raised my sword against your father. Come with me and sleep in my heart and I know that at any moment you will have me. But love is something I am ignorant of. If you want to listen to me, I can give you a satisfactory explanation.

"For me, after it has consumed me for so many years? For me, who waits for you every night in the same place, forgetting about honor, anger, and the way you insulted my passionate young life? I will only want to listen to you, if you carry me with you, or if you remain by my side forever."

"You see, how am I not going to reject you, if you ask me to sacrifice myself?"

"By my side you would find happiness, and salvation."

"At that price, neither happiness or salvation matters to me."

Elvira took hold of his neck and spoke to him, biting his lips.

"Though you leave, and never see me again, at least give me the memory of a love fulfilled."

"And have you forgotten about God and sin?"

"That night He had forgotten us, and today I feel like I did that night."

"Well, those are things that cannot be forgotten, little girl; you must think of them constantly. I also do nothing else... since that night."

Don Juan had spoken like a teacher who threatens a student. Elvira gave him a shove and pushed him away from her.

"I hate you!"

"That means you are now coming to reason. Now we understand each other better."

"I will raise the people of Seville against you. They will drag you away."

"Don't do them any harm... and they are afraid of me."

"I'll kill you myself!"

"It could be that is not necessary, but I agree that you have right."

Elvira had moved to the door. Don Juan picked up his hat and offered it to her.

"Put it on. It would look nice on you. And, if you want, the blindfold. He bent over to pick it up, and while he did that, he asked: "And that Jewish woman Doña Sol, what has become of her?" Elvira reached out her hand to take the blindfold.

"She died with the death that you deserve. They burned her at the stake."

"What bad taste!"

They heard Elvira's door slam. Through the other door Leporello appeared.

"These women and impossible to understand!"

"Don't say stupid things."

"That maxim forms part of my personal philosophy. I believe that women are like the waves of the ocean. Is anyone aware, by chance, of the cause of it's movement? Has anyone figured out why the sea is so immense, and mysterious? Still, we bathe in it, and sometimes we able to sail on it. The same thing is true of women; they are immense, mysterious, and mobile. Remember Doña Ximena. There is no way to know what's going on inside of them, nor where they're going to end up; but, then they let themselves navigate so successfully. The secret is in not questioning them too much."

"Are you trying to teach me lessons?"

Leporello laughed a little and raised his hands to his chest.

"I know a lot about that, lord."

"But not more than I do."

"Who knows? Until now we have never measured our science. I haven't done more than bring air to the lord and respond like a servant who is more or less clever. But today is an important time for both of us! The consequences of what you do will affect me too. For that reason..."

Don Juan approached him calmly.

"Are you trying to insinuate me something, or is it, simply, that I have understood you wrong?"

"The first thing, my lord. How could you not understand me?"

"Then make yourself clear."

"That's what I like, Don Juan!" Leporello responded with enthusiasm. "Making everything clear, even if you have to play a game with the devil. I'm going to make myself clear now. Today many things can happen. In fact, thinking clearly, probably everything can."

"Everything?"

"Yes, my lord. Inclusive and definitive. And, with this possibility, I must take care of my future."

"Don Juan patted him on the pack, laughing.

"I will give you a sufficient bequest... because of your fidelity."

"The lord has not understood me. I meant to say that if the lord dies, I will have to follow him to the other world."

"Don't get carried away. Death is a private question, and in the other world they don't need assistance. In hell or in heaven the servitude is complete."

"The lord lacks experience of the other world."

"And you?"

Leporello stepped back.

"Is the lord asking me to reveal my story?"

"Of course."

"Then perhaps it will be enough, if you look me in the eye."

Don Juan grabbed Leporello by his shoulders and gazed at him fixedly. Then he gave him a push.

"In your eyes there is an abyss, and in its depths eternity glows. Are you an angel or a devil?"

"A devil, sir, at your service. There should also be an angel somewhere around here, but in the almost twenty years I have been here, I haven't been able to identify it."

"Hell has done me a great honor. What should I call you then?"

"What do names matter? You have always called this body I inhabit Leporello."

"Why have you come here? Now I have to admit that I always thought that my personal work was the same as yours. Have I escaped God only to fall into a devil's trap?"

"Don't worry lord. I have always behaved properly. And besides, although I have helped you at times, my real task is to serve as a witness. Those were the orders. Hell has given the lord special considerations, although it was for reasons that now aren't important, and I have been by your side with the greatest respect for your freedom. I would have remained incognito until the end, even if the end took a long time to arrive. But now the lord would not accomplish what was planned without my collaboration."

"I don't know what I should do. Haven't you figured that out? I have come to Seville, led by a blind hope; I don't know why, but I am now losing hope."

"Let's go out and find it. Isn't that what we have done many times?"

"Go out... Where?"

"It isn't where that matters, but which way. And that's why I'm here, to show you the way."

Leporello quickly went over to the golden mirror and opened it. Inside the frame there was an empty darkness, and outside the scene there was a sound of thunder. Don Juan began to move back, but suddenly stopped and rose up.

"Is that the door to hell?"



"Hell is only just part of the mystery, and that door opens to its totality. Only by entering there will our adventure come to a good end. But I warn you that it is also the door to heaven."

"That's my door."

Don Juan approached the emptiness. The thunderclaps repeated, this time accompanied by greenish flashes of lightning. Leporello extended his hand.

"Do you really want to go to heaven?"

"I want to cross that threshold, no matter what the risk is. Come on, let's enter!"

"You first, lord."

"Even if you're a devil, you're still my servant, and I am the one who gives orders. That is the condition of our relationship. Go on, enter."

Leporello bowed.

"As you like, lord."

He crossed the threshold. Don Juan followed him. The mirror closed over them and the curtain dropped right after that.

4. The theater remained in darkness, and in the air—perhaps to entertain the wait—the fluttering of will-o'-the-wisps resumed. I looked at Sonya out of the corner of my eye; she had her hands crossed and her head bent over her chest. I didn't dare interrupt her, nor did I have anything new to tell her, because at that moment my mind was filled with critical objections against what I had just seen. To me its structure seemed too primitive—scenes of two characters, one after the other, although reasonably joined—and, unintelligible for anyone who wasn't familiar with the origin of the story; childish with the circus tricks of Leporello, and with the scene of the mirror which was hardly original since it had already been seen in a work of Cocteau. For me, the drama had ceased to have the slightest esthetic attraction, although, I admit, I still found the development interesting, and especially, its ending, but in the grotesque way that porters were interested in the saga they were reading.

The wait was short. The scenery of a garden appeared, all of which was green, with a row of cypresses in the background, and a large white statue in the middle. The statue was evidently the most important part of the scene. They had set it so its back was to the spectators, and it seemed like a marble llama in the way it agitated and twisted. On top of a contorted pedestal was a body that was enveloped in a cloak on which a strong wind was blowing. The man had a hat in one hand, with the other holding the hilt of a sword, as if he was ready to draw it. The body contorted, the legs opened, the knees bent half way, I don't know if ready to jump, or flee, and above all that, an enormous head of hair.

On the back of the pedestal, from where we could see, a dark square door opened. The only tranquil thing in that earthquake.

There was nobody on scene. Behind the scenery a violin was playing. A white spotlight was added to the green light, illuminating the statue, and making it even whiter.

But that didn't last more than an instant. The spotlight shut off, and the scene was once again bathed in the green light of before. The cypresses in the background darkened, and it seemed like they were moving. Behind the blue surface of the cyclorama, white clouds were moving.

Leporello entered first, like an advance party. He spied the place and, after that, moved to the side and called:

"Don Juan. Come. Here it is!"

He moved to the center of the scene, and waited. Don Juan came in, and looked around.

"This is where my house was, right?"

"Yes, my lord. Remember, on the top of a hill.

Don Juan turned toward the audience and pointed toward the back of the theater.

"And there is the Guadalquivir river.

"Very beautiful, isn't it? A ribbon of silver..."

"Don't be prudish. The beauty of a river does not fit in the metaphor of a devil."

"I know that my literary knowledge is not as perfect as the lord's. Nevertheless, I wanted to say in some way that the river is very beautiful."

"You've already said it."

"Is it enough?"

"For me, it's more than enough. Don't you know that words disturb? It would have disturbed me too that afternoon when everything started in this very place. A word would have broken the spell, and brought me back to the world; but God and the Universe have become silent. Let's

suppose that that afternoon when I uncovered my arm and put it in the water, the Commander had shouted my name to tell me that in the hall he had found some candelabras of a certain value. When the charm was broken my soul, without its revelation, would have turned to vulgar things. Don't you think that at that moment Don Juan was born, and an infinite number of possible men died at my hand?"

"Exactly all that were not Don Juan."

"Are you sure?"

"Living, my lord, is leaving your path lined with dead bodies. Sometimes, the body of oneself. Most were mere caricatures, or perhaps lucky approximations. Usually, the strong survive that struggle, and there is no need to cry for the dead. Just think, if the Commander had called for you, perhaps you would have married Elvira and been the father of six children, and maybe you would have been a mediocrity like your father-in-law, but not as stupid. So let the dead bury the dead."

"But what if they are not that completely? At any moment one of them might be resurrected. That afternoon and that night, for example, I closed my heart to sentiments. Who can say that I won't still be able to love?"

"Do you feel nostalgia?"

"I feel doubts that I might have been mistaken."

"Didn't you tell me, a few days ago, that heaven had abandoned you? Has heaven now come back to pay attention to you?"

"Heaven remains silent, and my heart is calm. My doubts are an intellectual thing; I have to reckon with them as a matter of dialectic integrity. And since you say you have been a witness of my life, you know that I never rule out the possibility I have been mistaken, and that the day may come when I will have to resurrect one of my corpses, perhaps that of the saint. Today I'll find out."

"Are you hoping that heaven will speak to you tonight?"

"That is why you have brought me here."

"But it is you who will have to call at their doors. They will never open for me."

The sound of tearful voices was heard behind the curtain, and a town woman with a baby in her arms entered.

"My baby is dying! For heaven's sake, save him for me! Let me die instead!"

"Isn't he already dead?"

"Who is it you're looking for?" Leporello asked her.

"For the saint. Because my baby's dying! Where is Marianne?"

Leporello pointed at the door of the pedestal.

"She lives there!"

The woman ran to the gate that led to the pedestal.

"Holy Mary, full of grace, for heaven's sake, save my baby, Marianne! Save my baby!"

She opened the door. It revealed a white wall with a crude cross. Inside, the flame of a candle sparkled. Next to the light was the shadow of a person dressed in the habit of a hooded monkish cloak. The woman kneeled.

"Marianne, blessed servant of the Lord! Put your hands on my son who is dying!"

Marianne came out of the cubbyhole and approached the gate. She stretched out her arms to the pleading woman.

"Why have you come to me? Only the Lord is master of life and death!"

"You have the virtue of the Lord! Don't deny me the life of my son!"

"Listen to me. We will both pray to God. Give me your son. And now, say with me: "Lord, who saved the daughter of Jairus..."

"Lord, who saved the daughter of Jairus..."

"Take pity on this innocent child..."

"Take pity on this innocent child..."

"and for him may your will be done..."

"and for him may your will be done..."

"For ever and ever."

"For ever and ever."

"Amen."

"Amen."

Marianne returned the baby to his mother.

"Now go home and wait for the mercy of the Lord."

"God bless you!"

"Only God must be blessed. Go in peace."

The woman left shouting with joy, and Marianne remained standing next to the gate. Then she kneeled and began to sing:

*"Benedicite omnia Domina, Domino..."*

Leporello and Don Juan had remained at the side of the stage. Leporello turned his back to Marianne.

"I am suffering, my lord. The Power and the Glory of the Other, as you can expect, have made me sick to my stomach."

"They fill me with pride. He is my enemy and in His greatness I find my own. May all the work of the Lord bless the Lord! With music, it is almost as great as what the Lord deserves. In my way, I am also a prayer, and I bless the Lord. Let me listen to Marianne."

"Don't you feel like talking to her?"

"Well, I shouldn't interrupt her."

"Doesn't it give you pride to be married to a saint?"

"Anyway, I don't usually become conceited about my own works."

"Nevertheless, no one can keep on talking forever."

"Not even a devil."

"Down there, lord, we are modest and, above all, cautious. We never have illusions. In this case we are involved with now, I don't know if my client would be saved or lost. I mean, for hell."

"I understand. I also don't know that."

"It's what most annoys me with the Other: that He knows it all beforehand. It's an intolerable privilege against which hell has made successive protests."

"Be quiet. It looks like Marianne has finished."

"Do you want me to speak with her?"

"I'll do it."

Marianne had raised up and was returning to her cell. Don Juan hurried over to the gate.

"Marianne!"

She stopped and Don Juan was going to jump over the iron fence.

"Stay there. Don't enter. My husband will kill you."

"Don't you recognize me?"

"There's hardly any light."

Don Juan turned back to Leporello.

"Did you hear?"

"Yes, my lord! I also have my powers, and it will give me satisfaction to manifest it. Now look..."

A ray of moonlight illuminated Don Juan's face. Marianne came over to look at him.

"Forgive me, sir. I don't remember you."

Leporello laughed in the shadows.

"Should I put it out, my lord?"

Don Juan had stepped back. Marianne rested her hands on the gate and asked:

"What do you want of me?"

"I wanted..." Don Juan's voice hesitated. "Don't you recognize your husband?"

"Don Juan! How could I not recognize him? I have prayed for so many years! Hour after hour, day after day, year after year. You left a long time ago, he will come back. He promised me, remember, and he doesn't lie. He could come any night."

"But his face, don't you remember it?"

"Yes, of course! How am I not going to remember it? Very handsome. Like two eyes that shine in the depths of a cloud. That's how I see it. In the morning when the moon goes down, I look at the sky, and there he is."

"I know your husband."

"Is he going to return soon? Tell me, I beg you! I am afraid of dying before he comes. I must be old now."

"Maybe he'll come back."

"Is he happy far from me?"

"He never has been."

"If you see him again, tell him I love him."

"I won't see him, but in Seville there is a man who will see him very soon. I have come on his part. He has a message for you."

"From my husband? What does he tell me? Is he going to take me with him?"

"Perhaps, but I'm not sure. That man wants to see you."

"Why didn't he come himself?"

"He sent me to tell you that tonight he would send someone to look for you. He is gathering all the friends of Don Juan and he wants you to be there."

"That makes me feel ashamed, sir. I only have these clothes and I am barefooted."

"He will send you the most beautiful dress in Seville."

"That can't be. The most beautiful dress is the one Don Juan gave me when he married me."

"Then he will send you that same dress."

"How happy I am! I will give thanks to the Lord, if he does not disappoint my hope. Do you want to pray with me?"

"No, your happiness belongs to you. My words would keep yours from reaching heaven. Go back to your cell and wait some more. Within an hour..."

"I will pray until then. May God bless you."

"I need that."

Marianne ran back to her cell and closed the door. The ray of moonlight created by Leporello disappeared. Don Juan was still standing next to the gate. Leporello went back to him...

"I realize, sir, that this is a hard blow, but there is an explanation: Years have passed, and that is evident in your face. And I'm not trying to say that you've grown old; but something has changed, there is no doubt."

"Even if my face looked the same, she wouldn't recognize me. She has her Don Juan in her soul, and since she has thought about it so much, she has transformed him very much."

"Will you take her to the celebration tonight?"

"It's natural that I should greet my guests in the company of my wife."

"Only for that?"

"She can also be my witness of defense."

"Are you sure they will try you today?"

"You have made me understand that."

"And you accept it?"

"I accept things the way they are, if it is not in my hand to change them."

"You didn't come to die."

"I came to make an outrage, and I don't see the way to do that. Until now, your magic door has disappointed me. To come here, an ordinary door would have served. Let's go home."

"Before that, don't you want to see an old friend?"

"Friends are boring."

"We are so close to this one that it would be discourteous not to greet him. Look."

Without moving, the light of the white spotlight fell over a monument as well as the statue, spinning over the pedestal, like the clay on a potter's wheel. Don Juan, surprised at first, began to laugh loudly.

"Don Gonzalo, my dear Don Gonzalo! The sculptor who made this statue was a genius! Can you see that, Leporello?"

"I'm looking at it, and, in fact, it astonishes me. It's the live portrait of the Commander."

"It's the portrait of his soul! Colossal, devious, and vacuous! It's no more than gesture and movement! Good evening, friend!"

"My lord, don't joke, because he might respond."

"What more could I want...! I would, at least, have someone for whom I could send a message to the other world."

"Is that why you wanted to come here?"

"It could be, although the lack of a suitable messenger impeded me. Because you..."

"Until the case is resolved, my return is prohibited, my lord. But if the Commander could take charge of the message, I would be free. All of these things are important..."

"Take a good look at him. He looks like an Ambassador offended by an error of protocol. As if a fabric merchant had entered before he did."

"And what message would you send, lord?"

Don Juan looked uncertain.

"Well, you know that at the moment, I'm not sure. Because those who want to know about the other world only want to know if God exists, or if we are immortal. But I have never doubted that."

"Well then, my lord, all questions are superfluous."

"I could, however, ask the Lord why, in my heart, I do not love Him. The response would be valuable for all men who don't love Him."

"You yourself could respond to that."

"And to almost everything, Leporello, almost everything. The secrets of God are so secret that men don't even know about His existence, and can't stop worrying about it. And for the things that God doesn't keep to Himself, we find the answer little by little."

"So then, Don Gonzalo will be of no help for us."

Don Juan was thoughtful for a moment.

"That depends. Because what really matters about asking God a question, is not what is asked, but that the question is asked. About whether it is a blasphemy, especially when the heart of the person who asks the question is not anxious, but who, like me, only asks just to prove he can ask."

"And there you have a way to pass through the doors to heaven."

"Yes, but, what am I going to ask? Because it's one thing to be impertinent like I always am ready to be, and another to do it out of stupidity, which horrifies me. So even if what the Commander asked was for mere formality, to look good, the question would need to be something appropriate, for example, when am I going to die?"

"And do you think that heaven would answer that?"

"Nor would I expect it to. I already told you that it would be a mere formality. Something to take advantage of the occasion."

"So, take advantage of it."

"What do you mean?"

"Call the Commander."

Don Juan turned to Leporello and grabbed his arms.

"Are you trying to mock me?"

"No way, my lord! Call the Commander. Or are you afraid of him?"

Don Juan kept looking at him; then he stepped away disgustedly.

"Don't you have to make some spell? Don't you have to draw circles and invoke devils?"

"I invoke myself, and that's enough."

"That's true."

"So make up your mind..."

Don Juan took off his hat and made a bow to the statue.

"Good evening, Don Gonzalo."

Then the marble turned around, and from inside it came a deep masculine voice. The cypress trees shuddered, and the white clouds darkened.

"Who is the fool who dares...? Who is the impious person who knocks on the doors of the other world?"

"Don Juan Tenorio?"

The statue was paralyzed. If it were able, it would have stepped back fearfully. It dropped the sword and let the hat fall, and it struck the ground with the noise of a stone that breaks.

"I am Don Juan. Do you remember me? The son of Don Pedro. The rich child that you wanted to fleece."

"Who murdered me treacherously!"

"Don't exaggerate, Commander. You had a sword in your hand, like you do now. If you didn't know how to use it..."

"My sword was invincible! You had to stab me in the back!"

"That's not the way it was, so just forget about it. And, I beg you, please use a more restrained tone of voice. In the peace of the night, your voice sounds like the braying of donkey."

"I'll speak like I want to! And if God Himself doesn't prevent me, who are you to try and do that? My voice is considered one of the best voices in heaven, and when they have to sing a solo, they ask me for help."

"Don't lie, Commander. You are not in heaven."

"Why not? Where else do you think Don Gonzalo de Ulloa would go? To the highest heavens, right next to God, as is appropriate for my status and my qualifications!"

Don Juan gave a new salute.

"I regret that, then. Because I would like to talk to you for a long time. In hell I ought to have friends, and I wanted to ask you about them. And it's possible I would ask you for advice, since hell is one of my possibilities. But if you are in heaven..."

He turned to Leporello.

"We have wasted our time." he said with ironic resignation. "The Commander has been saved."

"Ask him why he is up there."

Once more Don Juan turned to the statue.

"This friend, who is an expert in extraterrestrial life, has suggested to me that I should ask why you are up there."

"As a privilege. In heaven they permit me to come from time to time, so I can hear the praises they give to the living in memory of me."

"And does that please you?"

"It is part of my happiness."

"Leporello whispered in Don Juan's ear:

"Death hasn't changed him, my lord. He is ready to lie until the Day of Judgement."

"Perhaps it's part of his punishment, and, in that case..."

"We have to accept it."

The statue was shaking up there.

"Okay, why have you called me? Only in order to tell me my voice is not beautiful?"

"I always like to greet old friends, and especially in places full of shared memories. However, that was not my motive this time. I came to ask you to have supper together. But if you insist on lying, I will leave without doing that."

"I am truth itself."

"But this is not heaven."

"For me, heaven is this solemn statue in which I feel perfectly portrayed."

"But it is under the jurisdiction of hell."

"Admitted, but with preferential treatment. And the reason I am here is not clear. There was a mistake. When I wanted to enter heaven, they stopped me, because, according to them, I was in disguise. Imagine that! I, who never has dressed myself other than as myself!"

"And are you doing all right up there?"

"I am bored a lot. They have stationed me at this place since it was constructed, and here there is no amusement. Besides, the swallows dirty my nose, and the kids laugh at my posture. Also, this marble is so cold! I have acute rheumatism."

"And would you like to have a brief relief?"

"Even if it was nothing more than a chance to stretch my legs...!"

"Then go to my house tonight. I am having a supper for friends, and you have been one of them. And, if the permission gives you time, we can arrange a departure at seven thirty, which is what you like."

"A departure at seven thirty...! And what would we gamble? Because, I don't have anything..."

"I, on the other hand, have life. Imagine that I would arrive at hell with my soul in my pocket. Don't you think they would be glad?"

"Perhaps, but I'm not sure. You can't trust the people in hell..."

"Then you are in a place that suits you. Let's say at ten o'clock. But with one condition. That you ask heaven for me, when am I going to die."

The Commander shuddered.

"Do you know what you are asking of me boy? It's an offense to God.!"

"I'm not a boy, and I know perfectly well that it's an offense. But I don't believe that would bother you, since you spend your whole life offending Him."

"I did it in a different way, with dissimulation. I kept appearances."

"Well, continue keeping them, and release yourself of all solemnity in order to ask the Lord for me, about life and death."

The Commander leaned toward Don Juan.

"But, what is the importance of knowing that? Don't you realize you will spend the rest of your life regretting that? Life is bearable because we don't know when it is going to end, and because we get used to forgetting that we are going to die!"

"I have never forgotten that."

"Suppose that heaven refuses to give me an answer."

"I expect that, but it doesn't matter."

The statue raised a hand to the head and scratched it.

"You know, I don't understand you."

"If you had understood me earlier, you wouldn't be where you are now. Go on. Go and start the procedure, and don't forget the order. And don't forget: in my house at ten."

Little by little the statue recovered its posture, threatening and still. Then, quickly, it said:  
“I feel like I am lacking something.”

Leporello answered:

“Your hat. Don’t worry. I’ll toss it up to you.”

“But, didn’t it break when it fell?”

Leporello tossed the hat in the air, and the Commander caught it.

“Like that, it’s something else. A gentleman without a cocked hat is less like a gentleman.”

After that he remained completely silent. Don Juan and Leporello laughed. The curtain fell over the laughter.

5. And I was irritated. My love for good theatrical performances kept me from approving that slapstick. I would have liked to climb onto the stage and shouted at the spectators that such a lack of respect for the sublime moments of the theater was intolerable. I would have repeated the fifth act of Zorilla, which, from the start, seemed to be a parody of what I had just seen.

“Beautiful night...! Alas!  
How many, so pure like this,  
did I waste on odious  
adventures!  
On how many, with the same  
beautiful glow of this moon,  
did I steal the existence, or the honor  
from some innocent soul...!”

I might have done it, perhaps, if I wasn’t afraid of Leporello. But I feared him; I feared that with some impulsive, or thoughtless act, he would be able to make me an object of mockery, in public. And, so, while the theater was still dark, I remained quiet in my seat. I didn’t even dare to look at Sonya. Maybe I didn’t even think about her proximity. New, and more serious, critical objections swarmed in my mind. I used them as a reason to make me feel superior to the dramatist who had written that play, maybe Leporello, or perhaps even Don Juan.

The scenery of the first act reappeared, with light from bulbs, the stage empty. Outside, the clock on the tower sounded nine, and almost immediately the sound of violins filled the inside of the theater. At the same time, knocks on the door were heard. An unknown servant crossed the stage and opened it. One by one, the musicians entered. They wore masks and continued to play. There were five: first a violin, then a cello, a viola, and a base. After them a sixth character entered, also masked, with sheets of music and music stands.

With a signal from the first violinist, they stopped playing.

“Does Don Juan Tenorio live here?” a high pitched metallic voice said.

“Yes!!” the servant yelled.

“Well tell him the musicians have arrived.”

“He was waiting for them. They can come and eat, until the guests come.”

“You’re saying we can come in and eat?”

“Yes, that’s what I said.”

“Ah, good.”

“You heard what he said, boys! The first thing is to have a good meal, and then the art. Put the instruments all together there in the corner, so no one will meddle with them.”

“I’ll stay here and look after them,” said the one who brought the music stands; and by the voice, and the movement of the hips, one could tell that it was Elvira.

One by one they entered the interior of the house, and the servant stayed behind. When she was alone, Elvira moved over to the side, as though she was spying on them. Then, in the middle of the stage, she sang an aria that seemed to be a melancholy Portuguese folksong.

“Why is fate dragging me? What devil pulled my heart toward the house of my enemy? And now that I am in it, why are my legs trembling, why does fear intimidate my steadfast spirit? I want to get revenge, and my soul shivers; I want to die, and my spirit is terrified. Do I love? Do I hate? I love and hate, at the same time. I want to kiss his mouth and bite his lips, but also with my kisses capture his final sigh. Then die in his arms; so his death will be like mine. The two of us dead, and his soul mine. And then they burry us together, so that my decomposed body is joined with his in the same pile of muck. Oh Lord! After the horror of my sin, I beg you to help me! But, how are

You going to help me, You, if what I think is a sin? Calling to you is another contradiction. It's hell to which my impassioned heart should appeal. Help me Satan! Take my soul, and let me get revenge! But before that, give me a chance to love him, even if it is only once..."

She remained with her arms held up, like a Maenad, and the light of the scene reddened slightly. The door of the mirror opened violently, and the statue of the Commander appeared. The light spread rosy reflections on the white marble. Elvira moved back a few steps, and raised her hands to her cheeks, exclaiming:

"Oh, my god!"

The Commander dropped onto the stage, and the door of the mirror closed slowly. Don Gonzalo made several cumbersome steps; he made a visor with his hand and stared at the audience. Then he discovered Elvira, approached her, and said with a low voice:

"Nobody must inform God about my presence here! We are not on good terms. Is this where Don Juan Tenorio lives?"

"It's his house, Commander."

"You recognize me? How grateful I am! I didn't expect that, after such a long absence. Sixteen years, at least; or perhaps seventeen. That's a long time for a forgetful world to remember a man like me. Are you the servant of Don Juan? Were you here to wait for me?"

Elvira moved forward a few steps.

"I'm Elvira de Ulloa, your daughter."

The white cape of Don Gonzalo made a heavy swirl in the air. He moved one leg back, and raised his arms.

"Why? My daughter Elvira? Hell has placed you on my path! I have no other remedy than to kill you; I can't postpone your death one day longer. You have trampled on my honor, you have muddied my name. Prepare to die!

"Why is that, lord? Your honor, as far as I am concerned, is the same as you left it."

"Don't lie to me! I can still hear the words of that shameless fool. "Tonight I will sleep with your daughter," he shouted at me, or something like that. And in the same way that he killed me, he must have slept with you. He's a man who does what he says."

"You are mistaken, father" Elvira responded with a sad voice. "He killed you, but he didn't sleep with me."

The Commander rectified his posture and contemplated Elvira with respect.

"Were you able to resist him? Did you show that traitor how an Ulloa is able to protect the honor of her father? In that case, come here; let me embrace you!"

"No. I was waiting for him. He came to my arms and kissed me, and then ran away."

"You say he kissed you?"

"Yes, on my lips."

"With your consent?"

"With my soul joined to his."

"Then, he hasn't been more than a kiss. But a consented kiss, although it's not enough to cause death, it is indisputably a confinement. You will have to close yourself off in a convent, and spend the rest of your life there,"

"Why is that, father? Nobody knows that except us. And besides, so much time has passed!"

"What does time matter? I no longer know what it is. But it's necessary to protect appearances. You know that honor is related to appearances. How you do something either dishonors or exalts."

"Then, father, tell me how I ought to kill Don Juan so I am not dishonored."

"Kill him, you say?"

"That's why I have come to his house. I must kill him if I wish to keep on living, and after I kill him, I will want to die."

"That's nonsense. If he hasn't dishonored you, why do you want to kill him? A single kiss, all things considered, does not constitute dishonor. With a good slap..."

"I love him and he scorns me."

"That could be a cause, but never a reason. Honor asks for reasons, it lives off reasons, and without them it perishes. Honor is a sentiment that is completely rational, which only those who have their head straight experience. So we must examine your situation with reason: if he had run away after violating you—let's suppose—and you lacked a father or a brother to get revenge, then you would be correct to kill him. But now I could kill Don Juan so that his death cleanses your life, but not mine. But, since that is not your case..."

"My case is that of an abandoned woman with honey on her lips, with the cruelest mocking by



a mocker without a soul. Isn't that a reason to kill him? Then, I deny your reasons and retain my causes. I will kill him, because the crime has grown in my heart, and I am ready to stop it. I will kill him because, then, my whole being will be a crime: my words and the air of my lungs. I will kill him, because if I don't do it, I will shatter."

Don Gonzalo had listened with amazement and rolled his head. When Elvira finished, he moved forward to the proscenium and also sang an aria.

"As a father, my heart, even in cold marble, is moved; but my status as a gentleman is without a blemish... That is, without a blemish, even if it is rubble!, and finds itself in a difficult predicament of stifling tenderness in this lullaby. However I can't help but admire the heroism of my daughter, and give thanks to heaven that the virtues of our class are still in her blood. She is an Ulloa! One only has to see her face. But, after this sentimental relief, it is necessary to judge her present situation coolly. Elvira kills, or she doesn't kill. If she kills, they take her prisoner, because judges have never pardon a crime of passion, and even if the bad reputation of her victim serves as a mitigating circumstance, nothing could save her from some years of incarceration. And if she does not kill? If she doesn't kill, her figure will be broken, because a crime enlarges, while the threat of a crime leaves one in ridicule. So, a woman in her circumstances should kill, or be ridiculed. And besides, the way things are, they seem to demand someone's death... They don't take someone out of hell just to have supper with some friends. My presence in this house guaranties a tragic outcome, which at the same time is a logical outcome, because a fellow like Don Juan cannot end his days calmly in bed. He who lives by the sword, dies by the sword. And I can say, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, that I am his first victim in this chronological order. So now we accept the inevitable outcome of his death, and we must make the best possible use of it."

He took a few steps, looking thoughtful, and stopped on the other side of the stage. Elvira followed him with her eyes and listened to his words.

"Don Juan gave me a task that I was not able to fulfill. For a half an hour I have called out to the interstellar space of heaven, and heaven hasn't answered. I will have to confess that they have not paid attention to me, that my words were lost in the ethereal deserts and, as a result, my good reputation will end up looking badly. Because a man like me, who comes from the other world, ought to have terrible words come from his lips, words like burning lightning flashes. For example, "Heaven has ordered me to tell you that you will die tomorrow inexorably, Don Juan. Or something tremendous like that."

He quickly lifted his hands to his forehead.

"I have an idea!"

And his marble finger pointed at Elvira.

"Do you still want to kill him?"

"Haven't I told you?"

"This very night?"

"This very instant!"

"Well, that's that! I will announce his death on behalf of heaven, on this very night, and I will remain the way I am. Oh! And before Don Juan, I will appear like a man to whom heaven entrusts future secrets, a man who knows the heavenly statistics. Listen, Elvira! Do you give me your word that your hand will not tremble?"

"I don't know, father. Perhaps, when I bury the dagger, I will tremble a little."

"Then, do you give me your word that, trembling or not, you will bury the dagger anyway?"

"Unless Don Juan changes his ideas..."

The Commander wrung his hands.

"You women are hopeless! A smile from Don Juan will make everything all right? I needed a more concrete answer to count on."

"That's my answer, father. If Don Juan does not sleep with me, I will kill him."

"Let's agree that Don Juan is a man of firm decisions. All right. In that case, you won't stab him with your dagger until I announce his death."

"Okay."

"Consider that a good lawyer could then defend you in court by pointing out that you are an instrument of divine vengeance."

"I trust my disguise to help me escape. On Carnival, a mask would allow a murder with less risk."

"Murder...! Don't use that word. The death you give to Don Juan Tenorio will not be a murder, but an act of justice. For having killed your father."

Elvira shook her head.

"I have forgotten about your death, and it doesn't give me much pain. Don't you recall, father, that I never loved you? The way you had to always caress my arms disgusted me."

Don Gonzalo bellowed, and his bellows were so loud that they made the scenery tremble. But he quickly calmed down and, like someone who doesn't want something, he asked:

"Did you notice?"

"Everybody noticed. I thought that if another man caressed me like that, I would like it."

The Commander spoke into his daughter's ear:

"I was in love with you, and that's why they sent me to hell. Don't tell anyone, but that was the real reason. They would have forgiven me for the other things. And, my child, you don't know how many old men like me were condemned for the same thing! Incest is more common than what they think. There are old guys who were sent to hell because they kissed their daughters behind their ears; and others, for looking at them through a keyhole, and for the innocent pinch they gave to their buttocks. But, more than anything, they are in hell after killing the lover of their daughter under the pretext of honor, when in reality it was because of jealousy. In hell, my child, you can see things so clearly!"

He put his hand on top of Elvira's shoulder and pulled her to his marble chest.

"I liked to caress your cleavage...!"

"Stop!"

"Don't be afraid now! My hands are of stone now, and they no longer feel... And your cleavage is covered... But your face is still beautiful! In hell, when you die, I could love you with impunity. In hell, there is indulgence for all sins."

"In hell, I will still keep loving Don Juan."

"Okay. That happens to everyone, but they keep whoever they can. Of course, if Don Juan also goes to hell... Would I have to be punished even more by the spectacle of your love? I'm confident that Don Juan would also not love you in hell. And now, let's get out of here. It's only a half hour until supper."

"I will hide somewhere."

"Then why not come with your father? During that half hour we could take a walk through the stars. It's very entertaining. Will you come?"

He opened the mirror and showed Elvira the empty path. She hesitated

"I would rather find out what happens."

"This the best place to hide," the Commander continued. "We could watch without being seen."

Elvira shrugged her shoulders and, with slow steps, she crossed over the threshold of the mirror. Don Gonzalo followed her and closed the mirror after himself.

There was a pause. The clock on the tower struck four o'clock.

The scenery recovered its natural light.

The left side door opened and Leporello appeared. He waited with it open, and he bowed over deeply.

Marianne also entered. She came wearing a black hooded cape.

"We're here."

Marianne looked around.

"This is the house of Don Juan!"

"This is the house you abandoned to do penance, but it's still yours."

"Those devils threw me out of here. Did you know that?"

"Yes."

"Why did you bring me here? I don't feel comfortable. I swore that I would never return to this house until my husband was in it. I see it filled with the fury of the honorable women who came to take away the poor prostitutes that I saved for the Lord. If my husband isn't here, there is no one who will defend me."

"There is the best friend of your husband, and he will defend you too. Do you want to take off your cape? In the mirror you can see how well your dress suits you."

"That doesn't matter to me. I only want to be beautiful when my husband comes. But if he waits too long, I will grow old, right?"

Leporello gently took off her cape. Marianne was wearing a splendid looking golden dress, and her hair fell over her shoulders.

"Look in the mirror. Don't you remember that dress? It's the same one you were married in."

Marianne cover her eyes with her hands.

"It frightens me!"

“Don’t be afraid. You’re even more beautiful. Wait here. I am going to tell them you’re here.”

Marianne remained alone, and she moved over to the left proscenium to sing her aria.

“Dear God!” she exclaimed. “Why do these old fears wake up in my soul? Why do I sing a song riven by anxiety?”

But the aria was only those words. Don Juan had just entered. Marianne heard his footsteps. She crossed her arms behind her head.

“Wife!”

Don Juan stretched out his hand. Timidly Marianne stretched out hers, and Don Juan kissed her.

“Where is my husband?: What message does he bring for me?”

Don Juan took Marianne’s hand and looked her in the eyes.

“Your husband is far away, and he loves you.”

“Why doesn’t he come?”

“Because the sea impedes him. Every time he is ready to embark, it’s filled with hair-raising monsters.”

“The sea? My God!” Marianne sobbed. “If the sea impedes him, he will never come. Monsters are relentless, and they never die. I need him to come!”

“He gave me a lock of his hair to give you.”

With his free hand, Don Juan offered Marianne a lock. She didn’t dare to take it.

“A lock of his hair? A blonde lock? Was Don Juan’s hair blonde? I no longer remember. So much time has passed.”

Reluctantly, Marianne let go of him and took the lock of hair.

“His hair! He sends me his hair! As though he was sending me his heart!”

“Yes, but why did you let go of my hand? Why did you stop looking me in the eyes? Or is it that you don’t find in them the eyes of Don Juan?”

Marianne offered him her hand again and stopped looking at the lock of hair.

“No. Take my hand again. And your eyes... Why do you look at me like that? They don’t remind me of Don Juan. They don’t remind me of anything. But... why do you look at me like that?”

“I’m simply looking at you.”

“I like it when you do that. Your eyes are like stars; two stars I have seen some time... Yes, yes... Sometime they have looked at me like they do now. Do you remember when?”

“No.”

“Me either... It’s probably an illusion. Don’t stop looking at me. That’s so nice, looked at by the stars...! It’s like a light was born inside of me.”

“And my arms? Would you like it if they were rapped around you?”

“Your arms?”

Don Juan embraced her and pressed her against him.

“Your arms...! Yes, I also like it when you hug me. Why?”

“Come closer. Your mouth...”

“My mouth...!”

Don Juan kissed her. Marianne, weakened, remained wrapped in his arms, without taking her mouth away from his lips. Through the half-opened mirror, the hairy face of Don Gonzalo looked out.

The curtain dropped rapidly.

6. Scarcely a minute later, it rose again. On the stage, there was a multi-colored group of characters: the Archbishop, the Chief Magistrate, the Grande Master, the Captain of the regiments, the Prior of the Carthusian Order, and the Chairman of the Court. All were decked out, but were wearing masks.

In front of them, but with his back to the audience, the Commander was expounding. By his side, and also with a mask, Elvira was waiting.

The six masks were split, with three on both sides of the mirror.

“I saw him enter,” the Commander declared, “and after that, I followed him. He carried her in his arms to the bedroom, he took off her clothes, and got in bed with her. Marianne is his wife, but she doesn’t know that her husband is the man she has in her arms. So Don Juan is putting the horns on himself.”

“In a way, that’s doing justice,” the Chief Magistrate said.

“But I ask myself: is it right that we sit down at the table with a cuckold?”

“That depends,” The Archbishop said. “Psychologically, Don Juan is sticking his own horns into

himself; but considered morally, he is doing nothing more than his marital duty to his wife. The moment and the place are not very appropriate, but one has to take into account the number of years that they have not seen each other.”

“I disagree,” The Court Chairman intervened. “If the case were to come to my tribunal, I would condemn the wife for adultery.”

“I wasn’t referring to her, but to him. The case of the wife is clear; she has let herself be seduced by a stranger.”

“Well,” said the Captain of the Regiments, “I will throw my glove at that Don Juan the first time I lay eyes on him. If what the Commander has told us is accurate, the wife is irresponsible, because Don Juan has hypnotized her.”

“He fascinated her,” Elvira said from her corner.

“Is there a difference?” the Captain asked with arrogance.

“I don’t know. But I know the effects of that look. I have carried them in my heart for almost twenty years...”

The Captain jumped away from the group and planted himself next to Elvira.

“Explain yourself, man! Because, if what I think is true, one of you has no place in this house. I am a person who drinks from a suitable glass,” he said with pride.

Elvira took off her mask with a strained gesture.

“I am a woman.”

The Captain swept the ground with the plume of his sombrero.

“Madam... I beg your forgiveness. The male costume confused me.”

Then, turning to the others, he asked:

“Now what do we do?”

The Chief Magistrate pointed to the Commander:

“We could form a tribunal that would investigate the cause and judge her. We are those who are needed for that. And the Carthusian would take charge of her defense.”

“Aren’t you going to say something, father?”

The Carthusian raised his finger to his mouth, and the Archbishop, ready to help, insisted:

“He’s Carthusian and he can’t speak. If it is necessary, I will do it for him.”

“Where is the apparent culprit? Because we’re not going to be able to judge him in default, if he’s in the room next to us.”

“We’ll have to call him.”

Placed in the middle of the stage, with his cape hanging from his shoulder and his sword behind him, Don Gonzalo raised his arms.

“A moment, gentlemen, a moment. Because, before forming a Tribunal, we have to resolve an important previous matter. Who is going to preside?”

The Archbishop and the Chairman of the Court answered at the same time:

“I will! Who doubts that?”

They looked at each other and pretended to summarize the eternal rivalry between the Church and the State.

“Mr. Archbishop, I am Chairman of the Court, and it corresponds to me because of the nature of my position.”

“Mr. Chairman, I am the Archbishop, and I preside wherever I am.”

Laughing, the Commander stood in the middle.

“You see? I already knew that! We’ve gotten ourselves in an endless argument. And in the meantime, Don Juan is out there doing what he wants.”

“I won’t give in,” the Magistrate said, “the Court is unyielding in questions of protocol.”

“How would I be able to give in, if when I die I will continue being Archbishop? They could condemn me for that.”

“Neither of you should give in,” Don Gonzalo insisted. Each one of you, in your place, with me in the middle. I am the only dead person here; killed, also, by the hand of Don Juan, and that gives me a certain status, and some rights. But, besides, my status as a Statue, that is, being inert and, at the same time, significant, lets me occupy this rocking chair in the center without offending the dignity of anyone; after all, everywhere there is a statue that presides. Lastly, this whiteness of my marble, located in the center, balances the colors so lacking in harmony that all of you are wearing. I don’t think anyone doubts my opinion. For reasons that are esthetic, as well as physical and also metaphysical, I ought to sit here.”

“But with me on the right,” the Archbishop insisted, emphatically.

"The purple of your mantel looks nice in that place, on condition that the Chairman sits on the left side. The rest of you can sit wherever you want."

They took their places in the least time that it takes a rooster to crow.

"And what part do I play in this Tribunal?" Elvira asked. "Or does it also include crimes of love?"

"A witness of the accusation," her father answered. "And, in the absence of another person, you can also serve as beadle. Let the accused appear in court!"

Elvira ran to the door on the right side of the stage.

"Don Juan!" she called, with a broken voice.

And Leporello appeared.

"My lord asks you for a few moments of patience. A special guest for whom he has been waiting is still with him, but he'll be here in a moment. If you want, I will tell the musicians to go, and the gentlemen can start eating the appetizer."

"What music, and appetizer, my foot! We are not guests of Don Juan; we are his judges."

Leporello bowed.

"In that case, my lord will come in a tick. He has always felt respect for justice."

"Have him come, even if he is in shirtsleeves."

"Oh, no, Commander. My lord is very fastidious. He will come as suits his person; he will be dressed to the nines."

"A tribunal of justice doesn't allow him to wait!"

"My lord is capable of everything, Commander. You already know him."

Leporello left, after making another bow, and the Commander, who had risen up to talk to him, remained on his feet.

"Gentlemen, we can use this short pause to come to an agreement."

"We already agree," the Captain of the regiments of Flanders shouted. "For you and for me, Don Juan is a man without honor; for the Chief Magistrate, a criminal, for the clergymen, a sinner."

"And for the very distinguished Council of Seville, a person who disturbs the peace," the Chief Magistrate sharply added.

"Then, there is nothing more to discuss."

"Discuss is exactly what we need to do, while he doesn't come. Because we are not going to be quiet like statues."

"Judging by ours, they speak for seven," the Carthusian father intervened unexpectedly; and at that moment, Don Juan entered.

He was dressed in a black suit, and behind him, Leporello was carrying a cloak and a sombrero.

"Gentlemen..."

"Judges, you mean," the Commander corrected him.

"I accept them as friends in my house, and I greet them. As judges, I reject them. Because, who are you to judge me?"

"We are the powers of this world; we are the authority and the strength."

Don Juan turned his back to the Archbishop.

"I don't believe in abstract entities..."

The Captain rose up with a jump.

"How dare you..."

"How am I not going to dare, if daring is my job?"

"My sword will make you obey."

"Ask the Commander how I deal with swordsmen."

"You will at least have respect for the King's Justice," said the Magistrate solemnly.

"The King pardoned me, and, in that case, what can his bailiffs have against me?"

"And the Church? Do you also lack respect for our jurisdiction?"

Don Juan turned to Leporello.

"Give the Archbishop the Bull of His Holiness. With that, Your Eminence will see that I am completely pardoned, and that I have indulgence to give and take."

"There has to be a catch!" the Commander protested. "Don Juan murdered me, and that death is unpunished!"

"The crime has expired."

"Then, why have we come together in a Tribunal?"

"To play for a while, until it's supper time."

"This man is pulling our leg!"

"Nothing is further from my intention. I recognize the ingenuity of a joke, and I congratulate you

for the way you thought it was done. But now it's getting late, and I beg you to go to the dining room. The supper is served. Leporello, would you call the lady?"

Leporello left, and Elvira made it to the middle of the stage.

"Don't let yourselves be deceived! Don Juan speaks with the devil on his tongue. Adjudicate him before he escapes!

Don Juan stretched out his arms.

"Elvira! You were here? Forgive me, if I didn't greet you first. I expected you at dinner, and at the table there is a seat reserved for you on my right. I hope your father does not object. I am trying to be respectful for his legs."

Don Gonzalo twitched in his seat.

"Miserable wretch!"

"Don't be upset, Commander. Elvira and I have our own particular relations. By the way... do you not have a message for me? Or is it that heaven didn't take you seriously?"

The Commander pounded the table with his stone fist.

"Heaven listened to me! Why wouldn't they listen to me? And I bring their final word."

"Tell me."

"Like this? Without proper solemnity? Do you think the word of heaven can be said going from the living room to the dining room? In other times, the Jews listened to them, accompanied by thunder claps!"

"I am not opposed to their being accompanied by the trumpet call of Jericho."

The Commander abandoned the area of the Tribunal and walked to center stage. The other judges rose to their feet. Leporello's face looked through an open door.

"Gentlemen, imagine a huge quadrilateral, and heaven crossed at an angle by a magnificent cloud. My imploring soul wanders through this measureless space, lost in the blue. From time to time, I cup my hands and ask about the Mystery: "When will Don Juan die?" And the mystery remains in silence. The silence of heaven, gentlemen, is fearful. It's not like any other silence. It is silence par excellence. And what is my voice in this naked immensity? Nothing, less than nothing. I begin to fear I do not exist, and my words are the dream of a phantom that dreams about itself. "When is Don Juan Tenorio going to die?" I ask the four wind-roses again, without the slightest hope. And the winds are silent. My clamor insists, without any conviction, and I am hopeless when the heavens open, and the top of a cloud lights up with heavenly light. Flashes of lightning and powerful thunders issue from that summit, and the sphere of the stars is shaken by a frightening earthquake. Boom! I fall on my knees and hide my face. "Holy, Holy, Holy!" my heart exclaims. And a voice like a thousand waters answers me from above. "Don Juan will die this very night!"

He had accompanied his narrative with violent gestures, with rapid, decisive hand claps, then contortions of his body, bends of his legs, fist punches in the air, and resounding kicks. His cloak had fallen, retrieved immediately by Leporello, and the collar had fallen apart. (The actor recited very well. The audience applauded the speech written in impeccable French. Don Gonzalo gave thanks for the applause.

"This very night?" the velvet voice of Don Juan Tenorio asked.

"That's what heaven said, and heaven never lies! It will be tonight, Don Juan!"

"In that case, gentlemen, we have to move quickly, so that my death doesn't happen before the official reception. Leporello, have you informed the lady?"

"She is waiting. Since the Commander was speaking, I didn't dare interrupt him."

Everyone watched as the door opened. Leporello gave a bow, and Marianne appeared.

She was barefoot, in a shirt, and disheveled. She remained leaning against the framework, with her head bowed, and her arms crossed over her chest.

The Archbishop lost his composure.

"Is that another joke, Don Juan? Who is that woman?"

He pointed at Marianne with his purple glove, on which the archiepiscopal stone was shining. Marianne raised her head.

"I am a prostitute." She shook her head, and it revealed her pale, somber face.

"I was for many years, I no longer know how many, but one day I met my husband, and with his love he led me to God. After that, my husband left, and I did penance. Surely you all will have seen me requesting charity for the poor, on the streets of Seville. But an hour ago, they dressed me in gold and brought to this house. There a man kissed me, and I gave my body to him. Why did I do that? I can't say, but I left his arms, having returned to my old status. Now all the men of Seville will be able to enjoy me, and I will be immersed in sin once again.

She moved her head from one side to the other.

"Don't look at me like that. Is it that you haven't ever seen a prostitute up close? It's a sad thing, and for me it meant that I would never enjoy my youth. Every hour I have aged twenty years. I am an old whore."

She straightened up and began to walk across the stage, and the others moved aside for her.

"Don't tell anyone, for God's sake. My husband can never know that. I hope that God takes me, before he returns." She stopped for a moment. "Because he will return, you know? He'll return when there are no more monsters in the sea. And the day he comes, he will kill the men who have enjoyed me..."

She turned quickly to Don Juan.

"And you, the first, because you broke up what he had done." She took a few uncertain step and finally she returned to her husband. You are the first, but you must go and hide yourself... Promise me? I don't want you to die." She took a deep breath. "I was also happy in your arms, very happy, just like in the arms of Don Juan. Because of that he will not be able to forgive us."

She grabbed his neck and gave him a kiss. After that, she ran off. Everyone turned their eyes on her, and everyone kept looking at the door where she left. In the silence behind the scenery, the music of the cello sounded pathetic. The harsh light of the spotlight illuminated the masks, took away all the strength of the spots of vermillion and white lead. The Commander and the other guests had stopped in the middle of a movement. Arms pointed at the door, or at Don Juan; raised in the air, challenging or threatening; and also were legs raised, or about to raise. From the stalls, a photographer took a snapshot, and right away the suspended movements were completed. Don Juan moved to the center.

"And now, is heaven still silent?" Don Juan shouted. "Isn't there a bit of gratitude that is left over from the angles, so that Don Juan will repent?"

"But, what is this man saying?" the Commander asked. "What is he talking about? What is this all about now?"

"He seems to talk nonsense," murmured the Chief Magistrate.

"That is just part of the farce." The Captain put his hand on his sword.

Elvira had remained at the side. In the middle of the stage, Don Juan had his arms raised toward the sky, and began to close his fists. Elvira went over to him.

"Juan, I'm still here... If you need consolation, you can find it in my lips. And if forgetfulness is what you want, I will close your eyes to the memory. Come with me. God's judgement is far away. Until death comes, let us enjoy life together. Come with me, Juan! The flowers in my garden are filling the air with their aroma! Lets go breath it together, and get drunk on love!"

"Love? What is that?"

"What my body can give you! And what yours desires!"

"Love is not important for me, Elvira. What is most important for me is that God respond to me somehow; that he shows me his anger, or his mercy, that he fills my heart with pain, then shouts at me: "You are right if front of me, Juan! I have not forgotten you!" What you are proposing to me is intoxication and blindness, and I want to stay awake."

Elvira to out her dagger. "And what if I were the responde from God?"

Don Juan raised his hands to his back and crossed them.

"Respond, then, over my breast. That doesn't frighten me. I even find it justified. The seductor of Marianne who destroyed her sanctity ought to die. And then, why not, the one who put the horns on me?"

"Let him die!" the Commander yelled.

"Let him die!" the others shouted.

Rising to their feet, the spectators also clamored:

"Let him die!" then they sat down again.

"Do you hear that, Elvira?" Don Juan said calmly. "They all want me dead."

Elvira's arm wavered. She opened her hand and let the dagger fall. Don Juan bent over to pick it up and offered it to Elvira, and also his chest. Elvira looked at the weapon. "No!" she sobbed. The Commander came over to her.

"If you're going to end up killing him, save us a scene."

"I won't kill him," Elvira said. "I couldn't." Then she gave a loud shout and plunged the dagger into her chest.

"This is a mistake," the Don Gonzalo shouted. The scene doesn't go that way. It's Don Juan who has to die, not my daughter."

He pulled the dagger from the delicate body. The chest of Don Juan was still open to him. Don Gonzalo looked at the dagger, and turned to the audience. "Someone has to do it!" he shouted; and without waiting, he pushed the dagger. Don Juan's legs wobbled and he fell to the floor at the feet of the Commander.

"Neither in heaven or on earth, can they question my right!" Don Gonzalo uttered.

And, very solemnly, he moved away. He waited, as if he expected the scene to continue, but the drama seemed to have ended.

Again the light on the scene changed. And, without saying anything, as if it was the natural thing to do, the six guests removed their suits and their masks, and hung them on the nails in the wall, with a mask on top of each suit. Three were still dressed in black, the other three in red, and they sat in the chairs of the Tribunal, leaving the Chairman's seat empty.

Leporello had kneeled next to his lord. The Commander looked at the body and the others, and seeing them seated, he exclaimed:

"Man! That makes it clear! I have been a fool, thinking you were real guests... You are devils, aren't you. You show that right away."

"If you want to preside over us, you can sit there," said one in black, pointing at the empty chair.

"It's all the same to us, and if you want..."

"I will sit down on the condition that we judge Don Juan for my murder."

"In a moment. There is something else we want to clear up. After that, if you want, we will judge him."

Leporello stood up.

"What's going on here?"

"You are the last person who ought to ask that."

"For me it's useless. It's evident that Don Juan has been condemned. Judging him now is just making an act."

"But, was he free, or wasn't he free? That is what we need to clarify."

"He was free!" those in black shouted.

"He was not free," those in red shouted.

Leporello went to the table and rested his hands on it. He looked at the tribunal scornfully.

"Why don't you ask him about it? After all, he is the one it matters to."

"To ask is not enough. We must examine him with scrupulousness. His belief that he was free doesn't mean that he actually was. For one thing, at the end he wanted to repent and was not able to. Why? Did we perhaps impede him? It is clear that, at no time have we agreed about his condemnation. If the Other has denied him His Grace..."

"I don't understand what's going on, and all you have said seems like a gibberish to me," said Don Gonzalo. But if he can wake up Don Juan, he should go ahead and do that. As a matter of fact, I have something I want to tell him."

With measured steps, Leporello came to the place where Don Juan was sprawled out.

"Get up, my lord."

"But, you're still calling him lord?" the Commander asked as he laughed. "Because, if I am not mistaken, you are also one of those."

Leporello stood with his arms akimbo.

"I call him what I have always called him, what I will call him forever. Don Juan, get up! Do you want me to give you a hand?"

He helped Don Juan to stand. Don Juan passed his hand over his eyes and looked from one side to the other. He saw the new tribunal and pointed at it with his finger.

"What is this, another judgement?"

"That's what it seems, my lord."

"Tell them to go away. I already know the path to hell, and if I must be condemned, I can do it myself."

One of those in red stood up.

"It's just that, if you are predestined, we'll call things off, and leave it to heaven."

By now Don Juan was on his feet. The dagger was still stuck in his chest. He pulled it out and looked at it, and then handed it to Leporello.

"Take it. Keep it as a memento. As for you," he said to the devils on one side, "I don't need to have you judge me. I died as Don Juan, and I will be him forever. The place I am, who cares? I am hell myself."

The man in red insisted:



“Just the same, we need to interrogate you. You have been—how should I say it?—the guinea pig of a transcendental experience. The dispute between them and us will not be resolved until the result of that experience is clarified.

“May I refuse?”

“We hadn’t counted on that, but I suppose so.”

“I refuse then.”

Leporello intervened: “Does this reveal something?”

“It would show that he is devilishly free.”

“I not only refuse, but also, at the same time, I reject the idea of staying in your hell. Don’t you know that the Tenorios have our own private hell? Amazed by our loftiness and our pride, God has granted us that privilege! ‘With people like that, I must keep them apart, so that they don’t rouse my hells to a revolt!’”

“An unjust privilege!” the Commander shouted. “The nobility of the Ulloa clan is more ancient than yours! If I had my own private hell, I would feel honored to be in it, instead of this statue.”

Don Juan took his cloak and his sombrero from Leporello’s hands.

“My family is about to reclaim me. And to remain with them properly, my sword and the plume of my sombrero are indispensable. The Tenorios are very concerned about protocol. They pardon a mortal sin more easily than a lack of etiquette.”

At that moment a skillful display of lights and the movement of curtains transformed the scene. In the foreground was Don Juan, with his sword girded and his hat in his hand; a white light isolated his figure. Behind him were the six devils of the Tribunal, rather astonished, but keeping their composure. Don Gonzalo had already sat down between them. And in the background, above the mirror in a dark space that seemed infinite, a cloud of black light and false perspectives seen from an enormous distance, was a group of shadows in a semicircle. Outside the group was Leporello, huddled in the darkness on one side.

“There you have them!” Don Juan said jubilantly. They are the Tenorios, the clan that gave me my blood, and my moral. What does it matter if heaven and hell reject me, if they accept me? Here I am, ancestors!”

One of the shadows moved out of the circle and advanced toward us. It seemed to come from far away, and its steps were very slow. It was dressed in black, of course, and the glove of the right hand was hanging loosely from the left hand. Don Juan waved his sombrero.

“Good evening, Don Pedro!”

Don Pedro took a few more steps. He seemed to surpass the upper edge of the wall, and remain in the air above the scenery.

“Good evening Don Juan.”

“Finally we see each other again, this time forever.”

“You are mistaken,” Don Pedro responded with a solemn voice that was rather hollow. We will not see each other again. The Tenorio clan has commissioned me to let you know that”

Don Juan fell back.

“How? Aren’t I dead? Aren’t you my father? Isn’t there a place for me by your side?”

“There is, actually; but it will stay empty for eternity. We have decided unanimously to exclude you from our company.”

“Very good, very good indeed!” Don Gonzalo interrupted. “That’s the way families that are truly noble behave.”

“I have followed your law and haven’t betrayed it for a single instant. I am here, because I killed Don Gonzalo.”

“I know that, and I can assure you that it gave us great satisfaction.”

“Then what is the cause?”

“Not cause, but causes, small causes. Especially, what they will say. That you don’t have proper respect for God could be forgiven, and in fact we have forgiven you for that. Many of us here also have done that, and they are here next to me, quite satisfied. But you failed us with your respect for the world, and that is unpardonable. Have you thought of the scandal that will create for us, the Tenorios, the most respectable people of Seville? It would be seen as an act of solidarity, and we cannot show solidarity with you as a rogue. Yes, it is not surprising you are seen as a rogue, even as a grandiose rogue. Who hasn’t seduced virgins? Who hasn’t deceived husbands? Ah! But always respecting the principles. And you know what the principles are in this case: the passionate seducer recognizes the right of the father and the husband to punish the daughter and the wife, respectively. But as a seducer you were never passionate, but cold; and in relating God with your

seductions, you made them so sublime that the rights of the father and the were husband denied, and stripped them of the power they should have had. It wasn't with them you contested, but with the Lord. It wasn't the offense of them you disputed, but with God! It wasn't them you intended to offend, but God! And then, tell me, what part was left for the fathers and the husbands? How were they going to punish the one who seduced, if nothing was done against them? Juan, I have no choice but to stand for the rights of those whose rights were denied. The mistreatment of those people is dangerous for the public order. In the name of the fathers and the husbands, I reject you. So leave."

He had been speaking with all possible seriousness, and while he did that, the clan of Tenorios were joining him, so that when Don Pedro was finished and stretched his hand out, a swarm of pale hands came out of the shadow, and also greeted him in the rear of the theater.

Don Juan seemed confused. He did not respond. He remained motionless, with his head raised and his face illuminated by the spotlight.

Then, taking control of himself, he raised his hands on either side, and broke out laughing. Then some kind of surge shook the clan of Tenorios.

"And out of respect for those imbeciles, have I alienated myself from God forever?" Don Juan asked.

He raised his sword and stabbed it into the shadows.

"Get our of here! Go to your hell, and leave me with mine, which is all I need. I disown you! I am not called Tenorio, I am only Don Juan!"

The shadows pulsed. Shouts of astonishment and condemnation came out of the tumult. Their backs turned, and they fled into the darkness. The three red devils and the three black devils huddled together in front of the door of the mirror, covering it with their bodies. Only Don Gonzalo remained in the Tribunal, and he didn't know what to do; he looked for the bell in order to restore order to the room.

Don Juan scolded them.

"Don't get upset. You don't go to my hell through that door. Give me my cape, Leporello."

Leporello jumped out of the corner where he had waited, with the cape in his hand.

"Here it is, my lord."

Don Juan hung it over his arm. He put on his sombrero. He looked from one side to the other. Don Gonzalo, on foot, seemed ready to pronounce the sentence.

"And now, Commander, to be myself forever."

He gave a jump and fell into an aisle of the stalls that was suddenly lit up. With strong steps he headed toward the door in the rear, which also lit up.

In center state, Leporello, shouted:

"Wait, my lord! Don't leave me! Take me with you! If you are your own hell, a nonconformist devil like me can accompany you for eternity!"

He also jumped down and ran down the aisle. As he passed by me, I saw his sweaty, made up face, his eyes shining with eye drops; his wrinkled fake suit, his wig that had twisted. And at that moment, only at that moment, I realized that he and Don Juan were nothing more than actors.

I turned to Sonya to tell her that, and found the seat was empty. Looking at the door, I saw her figure running after Don Juan.

"Well! She must be an actress too, I suppose."

Several other performers reappeared on the scene. Marianne in a shirt, Elvira dressed as a man. The Commander had them to remain in center stage, so they could be more visible than the others.

7. That night, I didn't dare go back home. I had supper in some cheap restaurant, I wandered through the small streets of the Rive Gauche and, by morning, I entered a hotel where they made me pay in advance. It took me a while to fall asleep, and I slept with the fear of having nightmares. I don't remember, though, of having any dreams. When I woke up the sunlight reached the edges of the quilt, and out in the street a tumult of horns was protesting against a traffic jam. I had to get a shave in a barber's shop.

After that I went to the Embassy where someone loaned me money for a return trip. I asked for it with shame, and explaining with lies the reason for my lack of money; the friend who loaned it to me must have thought that I had been fleeced by some woman. "Don't explain any more, man! In Paris that happens to everyone. How much money do you need?"

With the francs in my pocket I hurried to buy a ticket. It was already afternoon, and I stopped to eat in a cheap restaurant near to the L'Etoile. I still spent an hour buying a few things.

I returned to the house at the right time. As I was packing my suitcase, I feared the appearance of Leporello, and my heart was beating rapidly. I did not enter the living room or the kitchen; some handkerchiefs left to dry in the bathroom stayed there, and my pajamas stayed under the quilt, in case someone had left a goodbye note there.

I only began to feel calm when, after I entered a taxi with my suitcase at my side, heading towards the station of Austerlitz. We were traveling along the banks of the Seine. A tepid golden sun lit the tops of the trees, and the ripples of the river were creating a blue mist. It was only a few minutes before I would leave. I moved the suitcase and looked out the window. Not many people were traveling, and the platform was almost empty.

The train started to move. I don't know why, but I felt sad. I would have been nice if someone—perhaps a woman from the Norte with short eyelashes and a little taller than I—were running at that moment beside the train, holding onto my hand. And if the noise of the train was less loud.

My car was the next to last. The train hadn't started to speed up yet. I could have gotten out without risk, and remained in Paris. I thought about it, I desired it, and it made me ashamed for wanting it.

By the time my car reached the center of the platform the people were more numerous, and above them some head scarfs were showing. There was a round black object that was also moving. Then I suddenly knew what it was. When it was near to me, I could see it was Leporello's derby hat that was waving frantically; the other hand of the Italian was also waving.

"Adios, adios!" he shouted to me in Spanish. "Let's see if you come back soon!"

Then I saw Don Juan by his side. He had his sombrero on, and, as always, his eyes were hidden by dark glasses. He was looking in my direction. Don Juan raised his gloved hand to the tip of his sombrero, and smiled at me.

Then, my eyes searched through the crowd. Sonya was not there.

*Madrid, spring-summer of 1962.*