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THE MEXICAN REVOLUTIONARY NOVEL

(With an English translation of
VAQUEROS CON PANCHO VILLA
by Rafael Muños)

by

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Approved:

[Signatures]

Chairman of Board of Examiners

Chairman of Committee on Graduate Study
THE MEXICAN REVOLUTIONARY NOVEL

"Viva la Revolución! Viva México!"

That cry of more than three million Mexicans in arms rang from onora to Yucatan in 1910, when the seemingly inert mass of slave Indians rose to shoot out a place for themselves in national government.

President Porfirio Díaz, self-made dictator, for thirty-five years had been building a country whose international credit was unimpeachable, whose business was flourishing, whose city streets were clean and police-protected, whose haciendas were world-famous—had been building it on the backs of nineteen million Indians with no civil rights whatever.

In 1910 the Indian in sarape and sombrero grabbed his carbine, if he had one, and went barefooted to war, to the Revolution! He fought kindly, often unwisely, but he fought.

From the south came ragged Emiliano Zapata, who could not even write his own name, but who led the men of Morelos straight to the heart of the capital. Pachuco Villa, Aztec from Atila, and his Tigers of the north raged and clawed their way through Chihuahua and Durango. There appeared the round of other famous chiefs: Madero, Huerta, Carranza, brough. Great battles, victories, defeats, loyalties, and hates. A thousand prisoners assassinated in a day; houses burned; crops ruined; cities ravaged. And the Indian with fever in his heart and eyes followed the leader through the maze of days. Little by little he found roice in another word, a more definite word even than Revolution—Tierra! Land! That was it, that was what he wanted—Land!1

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1 Herring, Hubert, Good Neighbors (New Haven: Yale University press, 1941), pp. 310-312.

The Indians' desire for land, and the complexity of problems that went with it, are detailed in this chapter.
The Revolutionary spirit had been bred in the very bones of the race. The Indian had resisted the Spaniards and the Church, and now he prepared to resist the "casiques" and "hacendados", those overlords who allowed him twenty-five centavos per day to work as a slave on land which his fathers had owned. Now he demanded his rights: "a piece of ground, a house and bed, a little happiness, and independence."  

His wife and children weep to see him go, will they put on new faces when he rides back on a good horse, with his carbine under his leg, with much dinero in his pocket? And, who knows? Perhaps he will come back a colonel, or even a general? Why not?  

The magic formula of Díaz which produced such catastrophic results was: "No politics and much administration". There was to be no judgment but his own passed upon the conditions of his country. If it looked all right, it was all right. And to make sure that sufficient money flowed in to keep the surface machinery running, he opened all gates to foreign, especially American and English, capital, to come in and buy up what it wanted. Public utilities, mines, oil fields, and ranches functioned under foreign money. The socially elite and the wealthy rode in cream-colored Hudsons through beautiful Mexico City, where an Indian was forbidden by law to appear in native garb in certain fastidious sections. His was the servants' alley and back way.

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2. Torres, Arturo, Novelistas Contemporaneos de America (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Nascentamento, 1939), p. 11.


This chapter further explains the Díaz regime, and gives a characterization (in Spanish) of the man himself, as seen by his contemporaries.
Before the Díaz regime, most of the Indians lived in communal villages, called ejidos, surrounded by lands which they all worked and all shared together. This might include as much as four square leagues of land. There were hundreds upon hundreds of ejidos all over Mexico. The communal land-sharing custom was centuries old.4

Díaz turned them into haciendas, or hereditary estates. He gave control of twenty-six and a half million acres to private interests. By 1910, the nation was so sliced up into haciendas, that only one per cent of the people held eighty-five per cent of the land. One family, the Terrazas, held twelve million acres in Chihuahua. Three brothers owned the whole state of Hidalgo. Twelve million Indians worked as slaves on lands formerly theirs, for a pittance of twenty-five to thirty centavos per day. Because this was dismally insufficient for the bare necessities of life, the Indian families were kept in debt through generations to their hacendados, and were often paid in local script good only within a radius of a few miles.5

They could not appeal to law, for the Indians had no civil representation. Díaz openly scorned them, and each landowner had the right of life and death over his workers. Not only that, but he had the right to their women, and to anything else he fancied.

In 1910 the Indians rose. They began a campaign of violence which burned haciendas and murdered hacendados. Each man tried at first to re-


pay his personal wrongs. The wrongs were as many as there were men in
the Revolution. Max heard them coming, gathered what loot he could,
and took the first boat to Europe. In his ears rang the cry, "Tierra
y Libertad!" Land and Liberty!

Next to the demand for land, the demand for education was the most
insistent cry in the Revolution. "Tierra y Libros"—"Land and Books"
seemed a fitting combination.6 Even wild Pancho Villa became so ob-
sest to the idea that education could benefit him, he laboriously
set himself to learn to read and write two years before he began his
terrible career as a guerrilla.7 There were no schools in Mexico in
1910 to which a common man might go. The priest was his only teacher.
Because he could neither read nor write, had no means to easy communi-
cation, he was isolated by his ignorance. Isolated, but not unmindful
of it.

Although it has sometimes been erroneously connected with the
Russian Revolution, actually the Mexican Revolution predated the former
by eight years. Turkey, China, and Russia all had their own brands,
quite unlike Mexico's.8 Even Mexico's manner of fighting has been dis-
tinctly her own. The best method by which untrained, generally inade-
quately equipped men can combat their enemies is a Mexican product of
her Revolution, and the term "guerrilla war" has become internationally

6 Herring, op. cit., p. 320.

7 Reed, John, Insurgent Mexico (New York and London: D. Appleton

8 Inman, op. cit., p. 375.
understood. It involves sporadic, surprise attacks from ambush or un-
expected quarters. It delights in pinching off fragments of a larger
army—beware, the vanguard or rearguard of a traveling column! And
that most deadly weapon first introduced in Mexico, which struck terror
in the enemy—Pancho Villa's night attack.9

Rules of organized war meant nothing to the fierce rebel leaders.
The only similarity to European tactics was in Villa's sometimes start-
ling resemblance to Napoleon's methods. His secrecy, rapidity, and mar-
velous adaptation of plans to the country and situation in which he
found himself were like those of the other leader. Villa's plans were
always a mystery to his men, and may have been spur-of-the-moment de-
cisions at times. At any rate, he kept everybody, friend and foe alike,
guessing. His own personal movements were veiled in secrecy, and not
even his most trusted dared to spy upon him when he rode off alone to
sleep only God knew where at night.10

Fanaticism of the men who followed their "jefes" through hardship
and every sort of danger, experiencing disappointment in what they had
hoped to accomplish, might be a source of wonder to anyone with no un-
derstanding of the Mexican character. When a merciless leader like
Villa could command the very souls of his men, deprive them of all com-
fort and love, the fact that his men still clung to him, still gave
homage to "mi general", is powerful testimony to the fortitude of the
race.

9 Reed, op. cit., pp. 140-145.
10 Núñez, Rafael, Vamos con Pancho Villa (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe,
The novel of the Mexican Revolution was born during the revolutionary period between 1910 and 1917. It was, like its era, a complete departure from what had gone before.\footnote{Crow, op. cit., p. 205.}

During the time of Díaz, the Mexican novel had been modeled after the realistic novel of France (Emile Zola) and Spain (Pérez Galdós).\footnote{Crow, op. cit., p. 208.} The realistic Mexican novel was very long, of some four hundred to five hundred pages, and contained wordy descriptions, romantic episodes, and moralizations. It did not concern itself with the fundamental problems of Mexico, nor did it pick up the color of the country. Those novels were written for the higher classes, whose tastes were not nourished by their own land. The Indian, if he entered in at all, served merely to lend a picturesque touch.

The Revolutionary novel is a violent protest against life under the dictatorship. The author neither expresses his own opinions nor invents artificial characters.\footnote{Rioscco, op. cit., pp. 11-44.} Heroes do not stand out as such, only insofar as they are a part of the Revolution itself, and as circumstances force greatness or meanness of deed. The action is rapid and constant, often abrupt. Descriptions waste no time nor page space, and are used solely to give feeling and reality to action. The pages generally number around two hundred. In some of the novels various characters are not even named. The author might be likened to the operator of a movie camera, who takes in the whole panorama, and then projects it later in...
a film on which he himself does not figure. True, the characters might be called stock characters, as they are often types rather than individuals, patterns of the time in which they lived—the Indian and the mestizo, the soldier, the jefe, the always-included horses who galloped from prairie to sierra, down railroad tracks, through rocky ravines, and sometimes into houses themselves.

The novel is yet too new to be considered as a part of universal literature, but it is sufficiently strong to indicate vigorous Mexican thought. It is considered one of the best products of Hispanic-American culture.

For Americans, in particular, the Mexican novel is an eye-opener into the hearts and minds of a people to whom they have, with exceptions, always considered themselves superior. The popular prevailing notions of what a Mexican is—mostly musical-comedy ideas—are sharply opposed in the native novel.

Contemporary Mexican novelists may be artificially grouped into three classifications: novelists of the Revolution, the proletarian school, and the Indianista group. They all use the basic material of their country, but each writer's approach is his own. In style, and to a large degree, in language, they differ greatly. However, while

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14 Native Mexican, of mixed Indian and Spanish blood.
15 Chief, leader, military commander.
16 Crow, op. cit., p. 209.
17 Herring, op. cit., p. 306. In this chapter the author gives a very amusing account of the average American's conception of Mexico.
differing from each other, all their diction is of the New World: they employ certain epanthecesses and animal similes which are distinctly the product of their country.

The best-known of these novelists is Mariano Azuela, a doctor whose work had deeply identified him with the people whom he has treated. His masterpiece, "Los de Abajo" ("The Under-Dogs"), a story of the Revolution and its men, has been translated into every major living language. This novel, and his prolific other works, form a vast picture of Mexico during a quarter of a century. There is a universal quality about his characters that is understood by all readers. The translations attest the fact that, in spite of the birth of the novels in Mexico, his work has been appreciated by peoples of greater and lesser refinement, of cultural differences, of cosmopolitan tastes. Azuela paints human color.

"Los de Abajo" might be the one great title of all his work. There are people oppressed by crime, misery, ignorance, vice, and lack of moral sense. There are rogues, imbecile men, and, in the same scene, good and kindly characters. He does not maintain that oppression necessarily always breeds corruption. He conceals his indignations and enthusiasm. The reader only occasionally sees a fleeting glimpse in a line or two which reveals the author's attitude toward one or another of his characters.

Another Mexican novelist of importance is Gregorio López y Puentes, who is the youngest and, according to some critics, the most promising of the later novelists. He writes in a stirring personal style, and

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19 Kosco, op. cit., p. 12.
20 Anglekirk, op. cit., p. 143.
belongs, for the most part, to the Indianista group. His best-known novels are "Mi General" and "El Indio", whose titles adequately advise the reader.

In Azuela's footsteps is many another aspiring writer. Some of them are obviously influenced by the master's style, but they also raise their own voices in the common fraternal outburst of the Revolution.

A man whose experience as a newspaper reporter during the revolutionary days was later in a remarkable position to write life as he saw it with the formidable Villa. This man was Rafael Muñoz, whose first novel, "Vamos con Pancho Villa" ("Let's Go with Pancho Villa"), has all the characteristics of the Revolution in its pages. Because every incident in his book has been declared true, his work may well serve to introduce to readers the terrifying but sincere exploits of an epoch of violence, disorder, and blood.21

In translating this novel, "Vamonos con Pancho Villa", from the Spanish, it has been my purpose to retain the flavor of the original. Naturally, certain expressions lose color and shade when taken out of their original language, but I have given the best English equivalents in such cases, and I have tried to render idiomatic Spanish into idiomatic English.

Because this novel is Mexican, much of its vocabulary is not pure Castilian Spanish, but Mexican, which means that many regional Indian and mestizo terms have been employed. Some of these words have no fitting English counterparts, and it has seemed best to leave such words in their original form, underlined to indicate they should be italicized for emphasis. They should cause no trouble to the reader, as their meaning is clarified by the context of the story.

Certain other Spanish words which have become familiar through repeated use in the United States have been left as a part of ordinary vocabulary in this translation. They will be easily recognized by any intelligent reader.

The main problem which this work has presented is to put a strong earthy story, framed in primitive backgrounds and emotions, into English form which will not weaken the original. I have constantly checked myself against Anglicizing the thought, which is more dangerous than Anglicizing the language.

It is my belief that a translator should use the style of the author wherever possible, and not applique his own characteristics upon the work any more than he can help. Because of this, I have kept as close to the style of Rafael Múñoz, the author, as was compatible with smooth English story telling.
Born in Chihuahua, Mexico, the state that served as scene for the life of Pancho Villa, Rafael Muñoz was thirteen years old when he met the rebel, who was beginning to climb the first steps of fame. He saw him, spoke with him, and followed him. At seventeen, he commenced his life as a newspaperman in the city of Chihuahua, and became acquainted with the acts of Villa as few writers know them.

Nevertheless, it was not until 1927 that Muñoz began to write short accounts of "Villismo" and stories, in which his reportorial style accentuated the interest of each happening, without omitting the description of the scene or sketches of the actors. For some time his works have occupied a place of honor in the Sunday editions of "El Universal" ("The Universal"), the great Mexican daily, and they have made him known and sought-after. His first books—compilations of those accounts and stories—have been circulated only in the Mexican Republic, because of limited edition.

This is his first extensive work. More than a novel, it is a series of episodes, each true, that have joined in a single story. The story that was produced after the assault on the city of Columbus, New Mexico, U. S. A., by the rebels under the command of Pancho Villa, was the first that was published. The entrance of the American Punitive Expedition under the command of John J. Pershing into the state of Chihuahua, to run down Pancho Villa; Villa's wound; his hiding in a cave for more than a month; these, like the incidents that refer to the battles of Torreón and Zacatecas, are all true episodes, among those that have been woven into this work. Never before has the famous guer-
rillero, Pancho Villa, appeared so faithfully drawn and in so many phases of his chills-and-fever life as in this book.
LET'S GO WITH PANCHO VILLA!

By Rafael Múñoz

The events here told are all true.
The author attributes all to the same group
of men, in order to write a novel of audacity,
heroism, pride, sacrifice, cruelty, and blood,
around the imposing figure of Francisco Villa.
"Captain Medina's eagle-eye didn't do him any good last night," said the telegrapher, swallowing a chunk of boiled meat. "From the time it got dark and they played taps, he couldn't catch a glimpse of any suspicious move. He spent the night without a wink of sleep; he went over that bridge from one end to the other time after time. He even went down that rocky incline, hiding for a long time somewhere, so he could watch the sentinel, and at daybreak when he heard the shot, he drew his pistol and ran where he thought it could have come from, but he found nobody."

"And the sentinel---dead?"

"Like the ones before him, with a 30-30 hole in his head. And with this one it makes fourteen in two weeks exactly."

"Not one more nor one less," said the man in charge of the water tank, between bites into his ear of corn.

"Poor things---they weren't to blame for what's going on!" Approaching with more breakfast stew, a third person broke into the conversation: Tía Lola, an old woman who, in her shack of boards and rusted sheet-iron, served daily meals to the telegrapher, the mechanic-watchman of the railroad pump, and Captain Medina, chief of the Federal Guard. The latter was guarding the nearby bridge, two hundred meters long, which seemed to hug the dry banks of the river with its steel arches; below boiled the water, dark and turbulent like the town.

The telegrapher and mechanic were eating breakfast, surprised that the audacious rebel had not been discovered who, day after day, when the stars were beginning to fade out in the morning, fired his infallible carbine from some hidden point of the rocky slope on the bank
of the river, and with a single shot left the sentinel posted at the
entrance of the bridge dead; afterwards, not a sound, not a shadow that
slipped among the shadows; only the murmur of the waters and the sil-
houette of the trees, coming out of the dawn.

That bridge was considered of great strategic importance by the
military staff, because at the same time it separated and united the
zone dominated by the rebels and that occupied by the government; it
was the most delicate point of railroad communication between the on-
rolling revolution and the troops that were being organised to combat
it. A strong detailment protected it to keep the enemies from succeed-
ing in dynamiting it, as once already they had tried to do without suc-
cess.

To the north of the river, the bare and dusty prairie; to the
south, the water-tank for the locomotives, a small station in which
there was no other employee but the telegrapher, twelve or fifteen tents
for the troops, the board shack, and the immense plain.

Mia Lola was a woman who seemed as old as cold, with gray hair
that she covered with a handkerchief knotted at the nape of her neck.
Her skin, dark and corrugated as the bark of a pine, unfolded to let
glisten two little eyes between gray and blue, that became animated
each time she saw Miguel Angel, a boy whom she had taken in years be-
fore without knowing where he came from, and whom everybody called
Miguel Diablo, because of the rascal that he had always been. He was
strong and agile, a great swimmer, a good rider, and a sharpshooter
with pistol and rifle. To help the old woman he wrung the necks of
chickens destined for the stew-pot, picked them, cut up goat meat,
robbed cornfields, and gathered such fresh eggs that he used to say on presenting them that the hens had laid them in his own hands.

"Fourteen stiffs lined up there, two meters from the rails."

"They aren't 'stiffs', but soldiers; and not another one will fall; that one last night was the last!"

Everybody turned toward the door, recognizing the artificially hoarse voice of Captain Medina, who was standing on the threshold, twisting his German mustaches, which badly squared his natural face. He was dressed in a heavy lead-blue coat, over which he wore his trappings and arms, the regulation pistol and long, straight sabre.

"It will be the last," he added, "because now I know who the outlaw is."

"What do you want for breakfast, Captain?"

"Nothing, yet, old woman. Where's that Miguel Diablo?"

"Out there in back, in the corral; he's splitting kindling for me." Through a gap where a door should have been came the sound of measured blows of an axe on tree trunks. Flicking his whip, the captain crossed the small room toward the corral, finding the boy stripped to the waist, in front of a stack of stovewood; with his foot he arranged the trunks against a log sawed in half, raised the axe gently, and struck blow after blow until he divided the trunk into eight or ten triangular chunks. In spite of being back to the door, Miguel Angel seemed to notice the presence of something strange; he interrupted his work without turning his face, took out his handkerchief, and while he pretended to wipe from his forehead a sweat that was not there, he shot a rapid glance at the pile of wood, under which showed the butt-end of
his rifle, which he had tried to hide. It lay like a watching snake, ready to strike.

"Muchacho!"

"Buenos dias..."

"Listen to me! You know that every night somebody has been killing my sentinel on the bridge. With one single shot!"

"Some of the dead men I have seen; others, I haven't." He turned back to splitting wood with rhythmical movements; the corral was so small that the sweep of the axe cut it in two; the chunks that he had chopped went on mounting up with precision over the butt of the rifle, and soon nothing was seen but the yellow reflection of the brass butt-plate, like a furtive glance among the pieces of wood.

"Where were you last night?"

"There was a dance in San Pablo..."

"And what time did you come home?"

"A little while ago. It must have been about seven, because I left town when it was already getting light." He turned to cutting branches of mesquite, without hurrying, splitting a stick in two halves with each stroke, and throwing them onto the pile.

"Where is your rifle?"

"I already told you the other day that I sold it—to Rodrigo Perza, and I even showed you the money that he gave me for it." Two more blows of the axe, four sticks on the pile, and the glitter of the brass was put out like a flame.

"I'm speaking to you, fool! Stop splitting wood and look me in the face!" He lashed his riding-crop over the dark, muscular back of the
boy, leaving a pale strip which rapidly turned scarlet. Miguel threw
down the axe, indifferent to the lash, and straightened up smiling and
pressing his chin against his neck in an insolent gesture.

"Look for it if you wish, Captain—and take it away from Rodrigo
Perea, if you can."

"So, ungrateful dog! Perea went to join the rebels armed with your
rifle, that you sold him knowing what he wanted it for..." Pale with
rage, the muscles of his arms became tense, and he whipped the boy across
the face and body, while the old woman clung to his legs, moaning.

"Captain, Captain...I'll answer for Miguel...He hasn't done anything,
I swear to you he hasn't done anything bad..."

"We'll see tomorrow. Military trains will arrive from the south,
and we shall have a council of war. Tonight we're going to have him
matched by a prisoners' guard, to see if anybody tumbles the sentinel off
the bridge. Put on your dirk, muchacho, and follow me!"

Miguel Angel, without answering, went slowly toward the border of
stones which fended in the corral, where his blue shirt was spread out,
put one arm into a sleeve, very slowly, then the other, and suddenly,
with one agile jump bounded over the wall, ran down the stony slope,
dived headfirst into the river and swam under water with long armstrokes.
Without taking aim the captain fired his pistol several times from the
corral; everybody saw how Miguel Angel reached the opposite bank, shook
himself off as happily as a dog, and began to run between the mesquites.

All day long the soldiers looked for him, with drawn guns, as if to
smell him out, and with orders to shoot whenever they sighted him; but
not one shot rang out. The white plain continued to be silent and de-
sorted under the gray sky of autumn.

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In the station Captain Medina, with his elbows on the telegrapher's table, was watching the other transcribe the crackling of a receiving apparatus; with the earphones fastened on by a spring band, he was marking down letter after letter on paper, forming words that Medina read in reverse.

"Military trains, Captain."

"Go on, go on!"

"Here's something for you: 'Captain Medina, commanding officer of the Bridge Detachment. Advise me if we can pass immediately to the north, as the rebels are attacking the capital of the state, which will not be able to hold out longer than tomorrow. Chief of the Division...'

"Answer the following: 'Civil Chief of the Division. I am honored to inform you that we have been able to hold out in Puente, after several open skirmishes with the rebels, that have cost us fourteen casualties. The military trains will be able to pass immediately. Respectfully, Chief of Detachment, Captain Medina.'"

"'The—Chief—of the—Detachment—Captain—Medina,'" repeated the operator, transmitting.

Then the apparatus stopped clicking, the telegrapher dropped his earphones on the table, and left the station with the captain. In the cold afternoon the wind swept along the plain, murmuring confused omens.

"Now those ragamuffins will see!" shouted the captain, waving his gloved right hand in the air. "Ten thousand men are coming, and they'll be sure to bring El Nino, the biggest cannon in the army. You'll see how
it comes along on a platform at the end of the first train. And in two
weeks the insurrection will be suppressed."

They were approaching the bridge, walking with uneven steps over
the wooden cross-ties. The soldiers, wrapped in their ample coats, hid
face and rifle from the wind, and in order to warm themselves, stamped
their feet on the ground, as if they were dancing a monotonous, inter-
mingle dance. There was a sentinel at the entrance to the bridge, also
bundled in his lead-blue military coat, and letting show the long barrel
of his bayonet-equipped gun.

On the other side of the river the desert, crossed by the endless
straight parallels of the rails which seemed to converge in the distant
mountains, maintained its calm, in which, at times, was hidden a fever-
ish activity of the revolutionists, anxious to cut the railroad line and
leave the state capital isolated and dependent upon its limited garrison.
The guerrillas had never dared to draw near the river, and only once in
a while a puff of dust that rose up on the horizon indicated the gallo-
ping of their horses. Then the bugle sounded, the soldiers crossed the
river, got into their trenches, and waited uselessly, because the revo-
lutionists, feeling themselves weak, turned back to the mystery of the
plain, in spite of their desires to overpower the bridge and destroy it.

"Now they'll have less chance than ever!" shouted Medina, swagger-
ing and raising his voice. "Inside of two hours the column will be
here, and we'll go and pay that trash back! Already I want to kill as
many as..."

A tremendous explosion cut short the words on his lips, throwing
all the men to the ground. In the middle of the iron frame of the
bridge, where the heavy column which supported the two largest arches used to be, was rising a column of smoke which seemed a flag waving vertically against the cloudy background of the sky. The earth itself had shaken at the exploding of the dynamite; through the air flew splinters of ties and twisted steel, to fall like hail into the muddy rapid water of the river. The moment of surprise past, Medina, the telegrapher, and two dozen soldiers ran toward the bridge, still trembling and full of clatter. The slowly scattering smoke was letting the magnitude of the disaster be seen: the two central arches, lacking support upon the smashing of the column, had fallen to rest in the bed of the river, as if cut by a gigantic axe, and leaving empty a stretch of twenty to twenty-five meters. The water went on running precipitately, as if more free, more happy, carrying on the crest of its waves pieces of shattered ties.

"Look, Captain Medina, look!"

The soldiers aimed their rifles down-river, and fired a few shots. The bullets struck the water and rose up to fall farther on, but all were lost in the depths. On a curve that the river made more than half a kilometer from the bridge, Miguel Angel climbed out of the water, waving his right hand in the air in a mocking gesture of farewell, and disappeared in the first shadows of the night.

In the distance echoed the whistle of an oncoming locomotive.

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In front of the station stood a military train, drawn up by a platform on which a cannon with a long nose seemed to be smelling the air. Farther back, two red-painted boxcars, the engine and several coaches
decorated in black and white, with fantastic splotches of contrasting colors. Then other trains kept on arriving, more and more, the engine of one touching the caboose of another.

In her shack the old woman lay flung on the floor, drawn up like a sleeping bird, fainting and bloody; Modina had beaten her with his sword until he was tired, making her pay for the audacity of Miguel Diablo.

And on the following morning, before a division of ten thousand men in battle formation, Captain Medina, chief of the detachment at Fuentearia, was shot on the bank of the river, according to the sentence of a court-martial which condemned him to death.

* * *

When the column was able to pass toward the north two weeks later, snow covered the extensive plain, and in the state capital, the rebels, who had taken possession of it, were fortifying themselves, assembling implements of war, money, uniforms, arms, and growing in number daily. "There'll be millions of us!" said the latest-comers.

And the Federal soldiers could not triumph; now was no time to suppress a revolution growing by seconds, enrolling, and which had been augmented everywhere upon learning of the first victories of the movement.

Three months later, on the approach of spring, the military trains returned from north to the south, passing slowly over the temporary structure of ties which had been substituted for the two steel spans torn down by the dynamite. The artillery did not return, as it had been abandoned to the enemy, and the trains seemed to be uttering wounded
The train of the chief of the division passed first, at full speed. Of the brilliant column there returned about three or four thousand men, overcome by the Revolution and the winter.

The trains of the defeated troops lost themselves in the curves that traced their interminable parallel toward the south, and one night the first revolutionary escorts passed the river.

The old woman had gone to the trough for water, and stopped on the station platform when one of those trains passed in front of her for one turn of the wheels, halting its course a moment to fill up at the water tank. Tía Lola saw a passenger car go by, splendidly lighted, squandering brilliance through its wide open windows; inside, facing long tables covered with bottles, men dressed in yellow, and sporting fine wide-brimmed hats were drinking and chatting happily amid the dense smoke of their cigarettes. At the end of one of these tables, Miguel Angel, standing up, was speaking, gesturing rapidly with his arms. He was the same, but dressed now in expensive clothes, a Texan hat tilted back, and a red silk handkerchief enfoldling his neck like a flame. He must have been referring to something very interesting, because the attention of all was concentrated on him, and cries of "Bravo!" and applause frequently interrupted him.

The old woman stood there astonished, with her bucket of water swinging at the end of her frail arm, until the train resumed its way, lighting up the country in great squares, and soon losing itself in darkness.

She started back to her shack, dragging her tired feet in the dust. The telegrapher and the mechanic were finishing their supper, commenting
for the third time that day on the events that were developing.

"And, by the way, Tia Lola, what could have happened to Miguel Di-
ablo?"

"Well—only God knows if he has been killed," answered the old
woman, gathering up the dishes, without the least alteration of her
tired voice.

Far off to the south, the whistle of the locomotive that was draw-
ing still farther away flung back its farewell.
"Let's go with Pancho Villa!" Tiburcio Maya, a rancher from San Pablo, had said to Miguel Angel. He was a man in whom many around there had found certain natural gifts as a rebel ringleader, and declared him their guide in their intention to join the Revolution.

"Pancho Villa?"

"Yes, he's the chief: very daring and very brave. He came from the United States in March with eight men, and now he has more than a thousand, well armed and well mounted." Tiburcio explained to him how the soldiers of the government had been routed in several encounters, told him what it was the revolutionaries were fighting for, and advised him to dynamite the bridge.

When Miguel Angel climbed out of the river, still foaming from the blast, five mounted men were waiting for him, holding a saddled horse. And leaving behind the smoke of the explosion, clouding the afternoon, they went in search of Francisco Villa until they found him. He was thirty-four years old, weighed two hundred twenty pounds, and had a muscular body like a statue. His glance seemed to bare the soul: without asking, he found out, and understood. He was cruel to the point of brutality, domineering to absolute possession. His personality was like the prow of a ship, dividing the waves of passions: either one hated him, or surrendered the will to him, never to recover it.

They presented themselves before him, expressing their desire to join the Revolution. Why? For the vague idea that they were going to fight for a cause that would benefit them. They themselves did not know to an exact point what the Revolution wanted, but each had his own causes for resentment and his longing for a better standing. Their
own hatreds, their wishes for revenge, their eagerness for economic improvement—they believed they could settle them all. "The Revolution!" The ring of the cry convinces rebellious spirits! Men accustomed to the armed life of the country, where one defends a cornfield by arms against roasting-ear thieves, by arms fights for a wild horse if more than one rider is after him, by arms one lives and by arms one dies—those ranchers went at once to fight in the Revolution, not for an ear of corn nor a colt, but for the right to a higher life. They themselves had never been peons, and did not go as peons to the Revolution, with the sole desire for a piece of land to call their own. "At the same time, we'll help them!" To arms!

"Well, then, consider yourselves sworn in. Do you know how to read?"

"Certainly."

"Then you start in as lieutenants..."

"That's fine. We agree."

"Where do you come from?"

"San Pablo."

"What kind of men are you?"

"This Maximo, here, when he drinks, goes around shouting, 'When I drink wine, it's like drinking lions!' So they call us the Lions of San Pablo."

"It's settled, then, that you are lions. Let's see how you can roar and bite. What are your names?"

"Tiburcio Maya, at your orders."

"Maximo Perea."
"Rodrigo Perea."
"Milton Botello."
"Martin Espinosa."
"And you, muchachito?"
"Miguel Angel del Toro..."
"Toro? Bull? You're too young for that name. We'll call you Becerrillo, the Calf..."

From there on they fought among themselves for the honor of going ahead of the irregular Villa cavalry in the brushes with the Federals or their auxiliaries, the colorados of Pascual Orozco. Many times they went as spies even to the cities commanded by the enemy, they silenced sentinels, penetrated trenches, coming back with detailed information and the field-caps of their victims perched on the crowns of their palm sombreros.

They were in the battle of San Andres, where Pancho Villa captured eleven Federal railroad trains, and it was they who, axe in hand, helped him split wood to set fire to a railroad bridge, when they saw the train coming bringing reinforcements to the enemy. They were engaged at Chihuahua, at Tierra Blanca, at Ojinaga—and who knows where else.

***

Miguel Angel had a belt with a cartridge-pouch and pistol-case, all embroidered, that were the wonder of some and the envy of other revolutionaries in the Northern Division, because the embroidery was not only a design worked in white or gold threads, like those of the other Villistas, but in heavy colored threads. There stood out on the belt a railway train with a locomotive giving off smoke in blue rings,
roses with heavy petals; interwoven horseshoes; four-leaf clovers to
bring good luck; deer with intricate horns; a silver river with a little
sailboat and a tricolor flag on the mast; gold fish; rabbits with long,
upright ears; little houses with red roofs. On the sheath of the enor-
mous Colt was a rancher mounted on a horse with round dark haunches,
galloping after a steer, throwing a silver lasso that circled around his
horns like a butterfly. And all this in the center of a wide border of
laurel leaves.

Miguel Angel showed it off proudly, turning slowly on his heels
and raising his elbows to shoulder height, so that admirers could appre-
ciate all the details of the extraordinary embroidery.

"How much do you want for your playthings?" several officers said to
Beserrillo, taking big-bellied rolls of bills from their pocketbooks.

"It's not for sale—not even if you paid me in gold."

"Then, someday we'll take it away from you at cards."

"Prove it—when do you want to try?"

Time passed, and the Northern Division, which had been held ready
but inactive, had now grown powerful with fifteen thousand men, and ad-
vanced to Torreon. One night when the Lions were resting in the big
house of a cotton rancher after twenty hours of galloping after the
pirates, some rebels of the troop set about together to take Miguel
Angel's cartridge-belt and holster away from him. But the boy was a
light sleeper, and started to deal out blows. With the help of Tibur-
cio and the rest he cracked the heads of the foiled pickpockets, threw
them out, and again stretched out on his blanket, to sleep with the
belt cinched around his middle.

***
More Villa trains were arriving, and the men who had squeezed into them flung themselves to ground. Long yellow columns crawled along between the dust and the sun in the last days of March, and went on taking their positions around the hills in which the Federal soldiers had fortified themselves. Short exchanges of crossfire burst out before time off in the direction of Sacramento. The _rurales_ that formed the advance guard retired toward Torreon, and in order to prepare the assault on Gomez Palacio, General Angeles commanded a battery of seventy-five men to be stationed in a dry gorge, so that they could open fire at an opportune moment, flanking the positions of the defenders. The noise of the distant combat had calmed down, as if the heat of the day had put it to sleep, when a party of five _rurales_, seemingly unaware of the proximity of the Villistas, advanced scouting through the cotton fields that the horses had trampled down, and trotted in the direction of the dry channel, where the cannons raised their noses to the hot midday wind.

The situation was critical, because if the _rurales_ reached the trench, noticed the presence of the artillery, and if they wavered, the Federal officers, who were following the scouting movements with telemeters from their distant forts, would know that something was being hatched along the bare borders of the drain. Then, Becerrillo put his horse to a gallop up the steep side of the ravine, and from there, within ten or fifteen meters' distance, he began insulting his enemies.

"What do you want here? This is no place for mules. Right-about face, or I'll twist your tails!" And the five mounted men, after a moment of uncertainty, turned around and retreated at full speed, without having discovered the existence of the artillery.

* * *
On the following day the battle commenced. From dawn, when the spirited reveilles of the revolutionaries began to agitate the air with their fanfare, the artillery assembled on the plain facing Estación Vergel commenced firing at the hills of white stone, destroying the weak intrenchments of the defenders. It was a day toward the last of March, when the cotton groves were just starting to show in the square fields that enclosed the dusty cities of La Laguna. It was hot, and the men of the attacking columns were given thick canteens filled with cool water mixed with alcohol. Sweat and dust set a livid mask on the combatants. From the hills that were defending the cities, the Federal machine-guns began to mow down crops and men.

At noon, along the sides of the railroad track, where there was a better road than in the fields and on the wooded edges, the Villa cavalry advanced in groups of men dressed in yellow and carrying their short carbines ready for action. It was at that moment that the cannons placed the evening before in the dry creek opened fire on the machine-gun nests, and, on silencing them, the cavalry advanced at a gallop toward Gómez Palacio, raising a column of heavy, high dust which floated over the field of battle like dirty smoke. The assaulters went forward yelling and firing into the air, without meeting the enemy face to face, and a little later penetrated the deserted streets at a gallop, reining up at the corners, watching, suspicious of the easy objective, fearing a surprise.

As the first men of the attacking column dismounted in a small plaza which appeared abandoned, the six Lions of San Pablo, who were in the vanguard, caracolled their horses with rein movements, and just as
they gave long shouts of triumph, there sounded a uniform volley. Behind some open earth trenches in the streets, several rapid-fire cannons began to operate. They poured out a stream like silver earthquakes which sounded like a woman's discordant screams.

Simultaneously, with drawn bayonets, the dragoons of General Reyna appeared at full gallop. The Villistas had a moment of confusion; now their artillery was not thundering, for fear of throwing shells among their own lines. Feeling themselves without support against an enemy coming at them so forcefully, seeing the cloud of reflections dancing off the swords that the Federal horsemen were waving around their heads, the Revolutionaries shot off their rifles, emptied their pistols, and retreated at full speed where they had come from.

In the hot afternoon, brilliant with sun that reflected in the breaks between the sown fields, an hour in which the wind had died down in the mountains so that the tempest might pass by which men made with their arms, their horses, their shouts, their charges; when the tall, green branches of the lindens and the ash trees, motionless with no breeze to shake them, fell shattered by the grape-shot over the thirsty road on the dry bottom of the gorge; when the birds flew screeching out from the foliage, rising in the clear blue and returning to fly around the demolished limbs in search of their nests; in the waning afternoon, cut off from the sound of the savage sea of shots, a small group remained immovable in the bottom of the drain: men on foot, silent, somber, with sweaty, dust-covered horses snorting and pawing the loose dirt.
In the midst of all, seated on the ground and jammed against the slope, with his head thrown back, and clutching his face with a hand drenched in blood as red as the small rag with which he was trying to stanch it, was Becerrillo, wounded by a cannon shot. His eyes ran over the angry, violent, fearful faces of the other five Villistas. One of the shells that the light artillery had fired from the trenches in the plaza had reached him, wounding him on the point of the lower jawbone, slicing it off as if it had been cut with the blade of a guillotine. Of his tongue there remained only a spongy pulp leveling the roof of his mouth.

The boy was bleeding to death from a horrible wound for which there was no remedy, and from which his life was draining out. The Lions knew nothing of surgery, nor did they know how to stop the hemorrhage. Stunned, they saw how the eyes of Becerrillo ran over them all, asking death, a rapid death that would precede that which, by all means, must inevitably come in the midst of the terrible agony of one who understands his end without wanting it.

The five mute spectators exchanged glances; someone had to kill him, so he need suffer no longer. But, which of them? The glances of four centered on Tiburcio, the oldest of all. Nobody said a word to him, but the old man understood, as did Miguel Angel. Slowly he approached the wounded boy, and laying a hand on his shoulder, sobbed, "Becerrillo..."

Miguel Angel gave him one glance, a glance of intense sadness, of gratitude, of farewell, and then lowering his right hand, which was trying hopelessly to block the hemorrhage, loosened his embroidered belt,
loaded with cartridges impatient for firing, heavy with the pistol that he could hardly replace in its holster after having made it spit out all its lead. And with his hand soaked in blood that stained the elegant embroidery, he held it out to Tiberio, making a gesture for him to keep it; a frightful rumble burst from his mutilated mouth, spattering clots of blood. The old man began to shed heavy tears that ran down upon his ragged gray mustache.

At a distance the noise of the machine-guns diminished, became intermittent, and over the gorge there passed from time to time flights of cannon shot, agitating the air with the trail of their roar. The wind began to stir gently, overflowing from the distant ridge of dark mountains behind which the sun was going down, throwing out its last red rays. The branches of the poplars, lindens, and ash trees that grew along the edge of the canyon began to quiver, and in the heavenly, serene, and immaculate blue, the herons passed very high, flying in V-formation. There came wearily and slowly, almost creeping, the distant whistle of a locomotive, and in a little while there began to come out in the east, on the upper horizon, the starry mourning of the night.
At daybreak a short train had already left the long combat line of La Laguna many kilometers behind, and was rolling rapidly toward the north, through the wastelands of Balsón de Hipí. The engine was pulling only one coach, running light, and snorting rhythmically against the wind that scattered its sparks and black switch of smoke-hair far and wide. From the speed which it was traveling, the train ran roughly over the uneven rails, and the wheels produced a continu-ous earsplitting screech, to which responded the breaking of the walls of the coach, loose and dry. The zinc plates on the roof jarred, now beginning to get hot with the rays of the sun. When the train passed over them, the ties complained like quarreling children.

In the coach the five Villistas were squatting with crossed legs around a long, narrow box, painted bleak, that looked like a case for a violin the size of a man. The old man with the gray mustache was smoking a leaf of tobacco rolled up like a cigar, which he pressed carefully between thumb and forefinger. The other four let their glances wander out over the immense plain. A ray of sunshine licked silently at the end of the black box, and, at times, a gust of wind blew a streak of smoke through the open window. The old man coughed, and the rest broke off their vacant staring over the desert, to rub their swollen and reddened eyelids with the backs of their hands.

"What time do we get there, Tiburcio?" asked one of the men, who had his left arm cut off flush with the shoulder.

"In just a little while, Espinosa," answered the old man, between puffs of his crude smoke. "I can't see the peaks any longer, so I know we have about an hour left."
Again they became silent. The Lions of San Pablo, who had obtained a two-day furlough to bury the body of Boserrillo, left the Northern Division in bloody fighting on the whole front of La Laguna. Aguirre Bonavides and Paul Madero, with their Zaragoza Brigade, and old Rosalío Hernández, with his six hundred men, were fighting from garden to garden, from house to house, for the possession of Sacramento, while Maclovio Herrera was taking Lerdo City by cavalry assaults, almost always flanked by enemy fire from the hills of La Pila. The forces from Durango had come up to ask for more munitions, as they had exhausted their own in the battle, and Rancho Villa himself had been compelled to enter the attack with his derrados, at full gallop, in order to avoid defeat in the siege on Gómez Palacio.

At Bermejillo they left fifteen trains on the multiple tracks; and the locomotive pulling its single coach threw kilometers behind like handfuls of dirt thrown over its shoulder. It was running full speed ahead, because "we must get back tomorrow, for sure!" Yermo—Ceballos—Sáenz—Sillano—desert, desert, desert. The stations were all burned, the distant ranches abandoned; the war had passed there and nobody stayed behind to tell about it. The steel road bed, with insufficient anchor, moved about like a snake's hide, and at the train's passing the dust rose as if caught up by a whirlwind.

It takes on water at Jiménez, where a few wounded Revolutionists are recuperating, with their legs stretched out on the portico of the station, asking how the battle goes. Not one locomotive moves, as all of them have rolled away to the south, nor one man, as all the useful ones have gone to war. The telegraph crackles, and from the depth of
his smoky corner, the telegrapher, pencil over his ear and chewing a
wad of gum in his open mouth, says, "Road's clear..."

The train rolls between the long wall of the office and a line of
poplars covered with dust. Then the desert, and a mirage of mountains
that lengthen toward the south. Lands that had remained fallow, and in
which nobody had put seed; empty corraled, ith the earth trampled and
freshly bruised, encircled by the four walls of spiny mosquite. Nuts
the height of one railroad tie, with sheet-iron for a roof; and out-
side, emty troughs and embers of some night-guard; skeletons of ani-
mals killed by the drouth; ghost dogs—not a soul. war——war.

At times, near some small culvert, rails twisted by flames; stacks
of ties; an overturned oar with wheels in the air; and closely, a pile
of stones with a little cross of crooked, unequal arms that looked like
the skeleton of an abandoned scarecrow.

At last, the bridge. Now there is an extensive encampment of the
workers who are repairing the work of the dynamite; in the middle of
the river, at flood stage from spring thaws, the column which had been
destroyed is being raised again over the raging water, to fill in the
gap which had disjoined the enormous steel bridge. Great stone blocks
are balanced on the ends of cranes, ready to finish off the column with
one final layer of stone. There the Lions wished to leave the body of
Bocorillo, in the belly of the pillar that he himself had torn down,
and by doing so had slowed up ten thousand enemy soldiers. One of the
cranes let down its cube of stone, gently took up the long black box,
and carried it through the air in a sweeping arc to place it in the
center of the circle of rock.
Tiburcio and the one-armed Espinosa, the two Poreas, and fat Boteillo walked halfway across the bridge improvised on beams, and placed themselves in front of the pillar to watch the coffin go down. And each one unloaded his hates, telling the motives for which he had gone to war: the old vaquero, the countrymen, the railroad worker, and the farmer who saw his poor wine-house burned by order of the hated cacique.

"Becerrillo, we'll finish the political bosses..."

"We'll fight till we get our own land."

"We'll never work again for landowners."

"We'll avenge Don Abraham."

"And we'll shoot that dog, Victoriano, who had my arm cut off..."

Then the crane deposited a stone cap, closing the urn in which the coffin remained, and the five men went back to their coach. The last gusts of March wind were blowing, scattering icy breaths from the high peaks of the sierra, and the Lions shut the doors. The locomotive pulled out from the station triangle with its trunk toward the south, snorting sparks through its hot lifted nose, and the wheels went whirling to pick up the kilometers that they had flung behind.

* * *

The Federal batteries from the hill of La Pila kept up a great artillery duel all morning and afternoon with the Villistas located south of the Vergel station. The Federals had constructed five small forts and long lines of trenches protected by barbed wire on La Pila, a hill formed of great chunks of white quarried stone, with scant vegetation that reached hardly as high as a man's knee. All day the Villistas went on cannonading them, and from a distance, with telescopes,
they saw great gaps opened by the grenades hurled at the the cement
walls of the forts. A guard came up to Field Headquarters, announcing
that the Durango men proposed to take Lerdo City that night, cost what
it might; and they left again with orders for an assault on La Pila, to
commence at 8:45 that night. The columns made ready, the cavalry in
single file, and the infantry advanced protected by the first shadows
of night. From Chihuahua arrived two trains of ammunition and recently
manufactured dynamite bombs, which were all distributed.

The five Lions were at the front of one of the groups of the Villa
Brigade; Espinosa, the one-armed, carried only a long canvas bag sus-
pended around his neck, and heavy with dynamite bombs; the others car-
rried both their 30-30's and large pistols.

The Villa columns smmed along through the night; the noise of
battle was heard far off, because on the bank of the river the rebels
were attacking Lerdo City, and the defenders on the hill were display-
ing luminous beacon-flares, and their volleys of grape shot sprayed the
zones of attack with death. The lights and shots from the five forms of
La Pila converged toward Lerdo, and taking advantage of this circumstance,
the Villa Brigade moved up rapidly, without firing, without the sound of
bugles, to open fire as close as possible to the Federal trenches.

Suddenly the hill was crowned with little lights, and a wave of
noise overflowed and flooded its slopes. The notes of a bugle were dis-
tinguished above the incessant singing of bullets. By the light of a
well-placed flare in the middle, diverted momentarily from the battle
field on the river bank, the Federals took account of the advance of the
other column and commenced rapid-fire cannon, machine-guns, and unequal
and ineffectual musketry. The whole hill had been lit up as if a holiday complete with skyrackets and music were being celebrated upon it; over the plain the grenades were bursting like falling stars, and toward that fiesta of light and death the Villistas advanced shooting, with a great din of shouts and violent voices. A veritable torrent rushed to the flanks of the hill: two thousand four hundred men in the open, against five hundred in the fort, both sides determined to fight till death.

The Villistas, only a few meters away, began firing their small-arms and throwing dynamite bombs which produced a short and heavy report and buried themselves, raising columns of dust and erupting chunks of stone. The cannons had left off roaring, and the whole battle was resolving itself into the firing of machine-guns, rifles, and dynamite projectiles. The assaulting surge continued: one wave receded, worn down by the enemy fire on the first steps of the slope, and another came, passing swiftly over the bodies of the first, to break into pieces a few meters on. In this way, one wave after another reached the trenches and occupied them. The soldiers took refuge in the five forts, and through the loopholes, illuminated in white clarity, stuck the ends of guns about to go off; some of them, now fighting hand to hand, had fitted long flashing bayonets to their mausers. The lights of the flares shone intermittently, revealing the tragic faces of the besiegers, the shattered bodies, the scattered arms, the broken trenches. And in the half-light the interminable wave continued, went on climbing...

From a distance the hill seemed to burn; it resembled a drunken volcano spitting fire. The great masses of men advanced in darkness
toward the five forts, never blinking at the yellow flashes of the flares.

Two forts fell, and a hundred weary assaulters installed themselves there to rest a moment, sweaty and stained with bloody mire. The surge of the waves stopped a moment after midnight.

Until then, when the first attackers were worn out, the attack of the left wing commenced: Aguirre, Benavides, and Rosalío Hernández had arrived after three hours of delay.

On the side of the hill, among the wire entanglements of the trenches and surrounding the forts, two hundred dead and five hundred wounded bore evidence that the struggle had been hard. In front of a fort the finger of light of a flare pointed out for an instant the body of a man who, fallen on his back, had his breast run through with a bayonet, and the gun aloft balancing itself slowly like a fan: it was Rodrigo Perea, who, having dashed passionately and violently to the very wall of the fort, put his hands through an embrasure and caught hold of the gun of one of the defenders, attempting to wrench it away from him. He and his enemy struggled for a long while, and when Perea pulled himself free with a violent tug, he stabbed the bayonet through his breast; he fell on his back, throwing out a jet of blood and a perpendicular glance at the stars. That was his vengeance for Don Abraham, the good man whom the Federals had killed.

Near a third fort which they had not yet conquered, among the rocks that made an obtuse angle, the maimed Espinosa whom Victoriano Huerta had robbed of an arm, was seated on the ground. The fire of a machine-gun that had shot him from three meters away had seared off both legs.
He was smoking a long cigar, in whose fire the fuses of the bombs were burning, and with his one arm he was throwing them to rebound on the walls of the fort teeming with shots, preceding each one of them with a loud yell that pierced the darkness.

"Greetings to the jackals!" A bomb exploded destroying the outer edges of an embrasure.

"Death to the monkeys!" Another explosion of dynamite widened the gap.

"You're done for, you hungry wolves!" The violence of a third hand-grenade raised a shower of stones.

"Take that, for the Lions of San Pablo!" The bomb rose, hurled through the sheet roof of the fort, and destroyed the fort's peak, decorated with a red and white flag. In those moments the assault had ceased, and the Villistas took shelter behind the conquered redoubts, awaiting the arrival of delayed reinforcements. Only Espinosa, with his cigar between his teeth, went on throwing dynamite. In the fort they had not yet ascertained where those deadly accurate bombs were coming from, until an officer supplied with a flashlight put his arm through a loophole and began to look around.

"Here comes one for Rodrigo Peréz!" The bomb burst at the foot of the wall, cracking and shaking the entire fort. Suddenly, a ray of light from the torch showed half a man lodged between two rocks, distorted and bloody, with sweaty locks of hair plastered on his forehead, one-armed, with his legs twisted backwards, a cigar in his mouth and a sack of bombs slung around his neck, lighting on the end of his smoke the gray fuse of an enormous grenade, bigger than his fist.
"At him...Fire!"

"For Decerrillo!"

Simultaneously there resounded a tremendous explosion within the fort, and one last volley of arms. Espinosa did not move, crammed in the angle of the rocks. Little by little, the light of the cigar went out in jaws clenched forever.
Unexpectedly, fire was suspended in all the Revolutionary positions. The long line of trenches parallel to the Nazas river, the borders of the canals where the infantry was protected, and the crests of La Pila, now occupied by the Villista artillery, remained in silence.

It was the fifth day of combat, and the defenders had retreated to their last line before the incessant pressure and unerring fire. "I take off my hat to the defense of General Velasco," Pancho Villa, chief of the Northern Division, had said to war correspondents when he came back from the night assault on La Pila, still dusty and wiping the sweat from his face with an enormous red handkerchief. The maddened constitutionalists, possessed with that gun-fever that puts a red pall before the eyes, heats the blood and swells the veins, had traced on the slope of the hill with the blood of three hundred valiant men the poem of their great victory, announcing having acquired supremacy in the battle for possession of La Laguna.

Why did the attackers suspend fire simultaneously all along the line? From the hills to the trenches the Federal trumpets went unrolling a long chain of notes: "Hold fire!" And the soldiers, wearied by the noon sun beating on their heads, took time to light a cigarette and ease their thirst with smoke. In a few instants the banks of the Nazas, which for five days had been the hole through which all the noise of hell escaped, rested in a silence of sewn fields and virgin mountains, the calm of the desert and of a cemetery.

Along the road of Gomez Palacio, on the bank of the river, appeared a group of six riders with a white flag, advancing first at a walk, until their signal of truce could be seen, and then at a trot,
coming up to the dry and rocky river bed. The silence of the Federal
carabines seemed to give them permission to advance, confirmed by the
expectant curiosity of the lead-blue cannon. The truce bearers walked
along a path marked with wheel tracks, where perhaps hours before the
Federal artillery passed in retreat, and approached the skirts of the
hill, from which came a bugle call, like a quivering arrow.

"Halt!"

The party of constitutionalists halted, and an old man with un-
kempt white mustache dismounted and advanced a few steps to receive an
officer, who, pistol in hand, came out from the trenches, crossed the
labyrinth of barbed wire enclosures in a complicated zig-zag, and on
reaching a distance of fifteen or twenty meters from the enemy envoys,
shouted, "What do you want?"

"We've come with a commission."

"For whom?"

"For General Velasco."

"Are you armed?"

"No."

"Advance in single file."

The old man moved forward leading his horse; his long spurs raised
puffs of dust like the smoke of a cigarette, and the buckles of his
puttees jingled. He was not wearing the crossed bandoliers hanging
from his squared shoulders, and his blouse stained with sweat doubled
itself in a big crease over his hips, free from the weight of a pistol.

"Search me, if you

want to."
The officer, without lowering his pistol, touched the old man's belt, inspected the trappings of his horse, saw that the rifle sheath was empty.

"Another one!"

The six passed before the officer, and then, in a line, went up to the trenches, crossed the line of sharpshooters amid a murmur of protest, and before the chief of the sector, a pale colonel with his head wrapped in a dirty bandage, restated their purpose of informing the chief of the defense of the wishes of those who sent them. They left their horses, took off their spurs which they hung from their belts, and escorted by a guard entered the besieged city, crossing the patio of the station among military trains occupied by the camp followers, then through deserted avenues, abandoned squares, until they reached the San Carlos hotel, where the Mazas Division had its General Headquarters.

In the vestibule, which had been improvised into an office, they stopped in front of a middle-aged man dressed in lead colored khaki, without any insignia on his sleeves, shoulders, or collar of his uniform. Only the blue cloth cap, on the front of which was an eagle with outstretched wings between two silver stars, and a double line of laurel leaves embroidered in gold all around the border, indicated that he was the division commander, José Refugio Velasco. He was a small man, with a graying beard and gold-rimmed glasses upon his curved nose, giving strange reflections to his keen, catlike glance. With his arms crossed and heels together in a steady posture, he asked, "What do you want?"

"We are truce bearers. General Oreste Pareyra has ordered us to
tell you that he engaged in a battle last night with General Villa, but he's getting tired of having his troops put in the most dangerous positions, while the Villistas from Chihuahua rest up in the trains."

The oldest one of the rebels was the one who spoke, spinning his felt hat in his horny hands. The other five, taking uneasy glances at the assembly of officers and soldiers, had remained in line a step behind. Velasco drew his eyebrows together, smiling incredulously; he nodded his head forward so much that it seemed as if his glance scraped the polished visor of his cap. Little by little the emissary, who had commenced stammering, recovered his self-possession.

"The wounded Villistas are being taken to Chihuahua; they leave ours flung on the fields. All the ammunition is for them, and they send us into the attack with forty cartridges. If a food train arrives, the Northern Division fills up first, and we have gone for days on cracked corn and dirty water..."

"That's what they've eaten all their lives..." interrupted a young officer with the staff insignia. Velasco silenced him with a gesture, and the old rebel, apparently not having heard, went on talking.

"All the Durango chiefs got together and agreed to tell you that they are ready to separate from General Villa, if you will admit them to Torreon and give food to all the troops. They are ready to defend any position that is indicated to them."

"Who are those Durango chiefs, and how many men do they command?"

The messenger recited a memorized list: "Contreras Brigade, one thousand eight hundred men; Arrieta Brigade, one thousand five hundred men; Pereyra Brigade, one thousand two hundred men..."
Without changing his smile, Velasco was adding a mental total.

"Soldiers who are coming with us from Zacatecas, one thousand seven hundred men..."

"Total, six thousand two hundred..."

"A few less, who weren't able to come, as they're up there by Lerdó, facing La Mina."

"All right—wait for me a moment."

"We want your answer just as soon as you can give it to us."

"You'll have it."

The Federal officer retired to a corner of the vestibule, followed by a group of petty officers, and they all whispered together for a long while. The murmur of their voices was mixed with the whir of the swiftly spinning ventilator fan. Cavalry patrols conducting prisoners captured on the outskirts arrived at the front of the hotel; aids came and went; telephones rang telling the latest news from the battle front; and along the avenue deserted by pedestrians, automobiles improvised into ambulances ran at full speed, with the banderolas of the Red Cross waving in the wind.

The six emissaries had drawn back to the wall, and at ease were smoking long cigarettes rolled in corn shucks. At first glance the rebels could be divided into two groups: one, three men from the lake region, short-statured, lean, with angular faces almost burned black by the sun, long ears like the handles of a vase doubled over by the weight of enormous sombreros, dressed in homespun, with a white strip of underwear showing below blue trousers; oblique, suspicious glances, and broad, flattened, sensual noses. And the other group, of three tall northern-
ers, broad-shouldered, dark ruddy color, clear eyes, feet shod in heelless seguas, and long puttees with big nickel-plated buckles; khaki blouses with red handkerchiefs tied at the neck; a pair of spurs hanging from the cartridge belt, and a rawhide quirt of braided strips fastened to the right wrist.

Of these three, one was old Tiburcio Maya, another Maximo Perea, and the third, with an enormous stomach that bulged his blouse with a pronounced curve in front, Botello. The last three Lions of San Pablo.

The group of Federal militia broke up, and from the center came General Velasoo, with his same pose of crossed arms and penetrating rodent's glance piercing through the delicate gold-rimmed glasses. His incredulous smile had contracted, became mocking, and through locked teeth he let fall the words of his reply.

"The Mazas Division accepts the surrender of the rebels offended by the chief Francisco Villa, but advises them that they will be treated as prisoners of war; they must come to our positions in groups of one hundred, and will be immediately disarmed; they will not be entrusted with the defense of any position whatsoever; the chiefs will remain prisoners in this General Headquarters, and, within the limits of the city, will be free under observation. Subsequently, the ones who surrender will be put into our lines to replace casualties there."

"It seems that you are very distrustful."

"It seems that way, but I'm not. The circumstances on which the defense of Torreón depends oblige me to impose these conditions; before an enemy superior in number, desertion or treason at any point of the line of fire would be of disastrous consequences. We are even obliged
to adopt a vigorous attitude with the inhabitants of the city... are you acquainted with this notice from Military Headquarters?" Velasco handed Tiburcio a printed paper, and the rebel painfully read it aloud: "In the remote event of an attack of the rebel forces on this plaza, groups of more than three persons will not be permitted on the streets, nor on any pretext must anybody occupy the roofs. Violators of these orders will be severely punished. If, from any of the houses of this city, a single shot is fired, that house will be demolished along with the inhabitants that are found in it. Given in Torreón, March 21, 1914. Chief of Staff, General Agustín Valdés."

"I call that being awfully afraid..." finished Tiburcio between his teeth and folding the paper.

"Well, then," continued Velasco, "in case this is some trick, three of you will go to deliver the answer to your ringleader, Fereyra, whom I cannot bring myself to address as General. He will have twenty-four hours in which to reply; meanwhile, firing will be resumed against any group of rebels that are visible after the return of the three true bearers to the place from which they have come. The other three will remain as prisoners here, and in case that the proposed surrender is not accepted, they will be punished with the greatest vigor."

"This is treachery. We are ambassadors and cannot be taken prisoners..."

"I do not allow anyone to qualify my actions. I have the right to punish a trick."

"Perhaps the three who leave here will not come back because your terms are not acceptable, and not because it is a matter of a treacher-
"Enough! You yourself choose the ones to go and the ones to remain here."

The old man threw his cigarette on the floor and mashed it with his foot. His voice became stifled, an expression of rage restrained because of the compromising situation in which he found himself.

"Our prison will make sure nobody gets out! You'll see that we can't be treated like dogs... After all, dead men are always equal!"

"I forbid you to go on. Pick out the three that are to go and the three that are to stay."

"I alone will stay. I will answer..."

"I have said three."

"I am the only one responsible for this commission."

"Three!"

Perea stepped forward. "Toribio, I, too, shall stay."

Big-bellied Botello, sweating copiously, stepped up on the other side; he laid his arm over the old man's shoulder, and without even interrupting his smoking, spat out his determination to remain.

"It's in God's hands... We three will stay!"

"You are prisoners of war."

"That's all right, since you've the upper hand... Fighting like men, we never would have been taken prisoners in our lives."

The three lakemen went out hastily. In a little while the silence was shattered into a thousand pieces by the shots of rifles and the rattling of machine-guns. Everybody felt a trembling; the battle had commenced again.
And in a corner of the wine cellar, watched by a prisoners' guard, the three prisoners had stretched out to rest upon some empty sacks, and seemed to be asleep. Soft as the flutter of a wasp's wings, Bontello spoke, "Listen, old man, we should have left those black fellows here..."

"It wasn't right, we three knew that this was a trick."
They slept heavily, making up for five nights of sleeplessness, in the wine cellar of the hotel, which was furnished with cans of oil, barrels, cases of wine, and sacks of seed hung on the walls like fat drunks not able to stand up. It was a cellar that received light and air through a little open window two meters from the floor, level with the street. The prisoners' guard retired at dusk, and the Villista truce-talkers settled themselves in the corners, arranging makeshift beds of straw and empty sacks.

Through the skylight the dizzy noises of the outside came in all night: the measured scrape of the sentinel's clumsy shoes on the cement sidewalk; the shouts of "Who goes there?", muffled, monotonous, tired; the rushing up and down of automobiles, that went snorting and blowing their horns, as if they were happy for having escaped with their lives from the line of fire, carrying officers, vomiting wounded men in death-rattles, and then leaving again, heavy with boxes of ammunition, through the dark and deserted streets. From a distance came the whistles of a locomotive, sharp and strident, and the noise of the wave of shots battling for the trenches.

The fat Botello woke first. He opened his mouth in a yawn squared like the little window in the cell, stretched his arms, and kneaded his aching back. He climbed onto an empty case, pressing his round stomach against the wall; he glued his face to the vertical iron bars of the skylight, and seeing the rigid legs of a sentinel near the butt of a gun rested on the ground, he shouted, "Hey, monkey! Is there anything new going on out there?"

"Well, what do you know! A prisoner shows up! What do you want?"
"I want to know when you're going to surrender, so we can get out of this hole."

"You'll get out of there soon enough without our leaving!"

"Like alfalfa!" He spat through the bars and got down, because the case was beginning to crack under the enormous weight, and as his companions went on sleeping, he moved them with his foot.

"Old man, do you see now how the ranchers' plan didn't succeed? Firing is still going on out there. It seems to me we're in for it."

Tiburcio sat up on his bed, stretching. "Up to now we weren't doing so bad."

"But you'll see at noon, when the black fellows don't come back. We'll be in hot water. I don't see how the devil it occurred to you for us to stay here. It doesn't suit me to die like this, like a dog, without being able to defend myself nor try to stop what's going on. With five or six monkeys that would throw me into the soup, so they could save their own hides...and expect me to be calm..."

"The object of this war isn't to kill soldiers, Botello. That is only a necessity of the struggle. The chiefs, like Muerta, are the ones that we should hate, and not the soldiers."

"Those are asses. The soldiers are the ones that kill so many of us, without imagining they shouldn't hate Pancho Villa any more."

"Anybody that gets mixed up in this should make up his mind to die."

"But not like this...Fighting, with a gun in your hand!" roared Botello. "That's a man's death...doing something that counts! Tiburcio, you know I have never complained, but I tell you that our coming
here to stick our noses into Velasco's business, so he can cut off our heads, was a piece of the greatest foolishness."

"It was an order, a commission of honor."

"They shouldn't have sent us, but those fancy pants who travel with the General. And now that I remember, you should have told old Velasco that the three lake men would stay here, and we would have been out there fighting. You were a fool, and you're to blame that we three are all going to get killed when noon comes around." Botello had become enraged, waving his arms and sticking his fist in Tiburcio's face, shouting at him. The third prisoner, Jáximo Pérez, had planted himself squarely behind Botello in order to seize him if he became even more threatening, and the gray-bearded leader, without raising himself from his bed, went on speaking in a monotonous, unyielding voice.

"Don't be a fool; if I had told Velasco to send us three, and leave the three black men here, then he would have insisted it was a trick, and would have shut us all up. The only way of convincing him that I was sure of the sincerity of the proposal was for me alone to remain here. If I had told him, 'I will go,' he would have stretched the necks of all six of us. I was going to choose two of them to stay with me and you could save yourselves, but first Jáximo and then you joined me."

"But how could we leave you here alone?"

Tiburcio stood up smiling, and walked over to his big-bellied companion, slapped him on the shoulder, and spoke to him affectionately.

"You are violent and fat, but you're soft-hearted. It's in God's hands if we three must die together today. And if we had not come, we
probably would have been killed when least expected last night." He shrugged his shoulders in a movement of infinite scorn of life. He had seen so many fall, brave men by all proof, men and boys, and even women and children. Benito Artalejo, the Portillos, Marquez—and the bosom friends of his native village, the other three Lions of San Pablo.

"The Lions are done for, Tiburcio."

"They are coming to an end, but they shouldn't die as you are doing now, complaining of bad luck."

"Don't worry about me," said Maximo, laying an arm over his shoulders.

"Nor me! What the devil! After all, the song the Sonora men sing expresses it pretty well:

'A passion has me in its sway,
And that's what brought me here today..."

The three began to sing, when they were interrupted by the slamming of a door; the cellar door was opened and a young officer came in, almost a boy, blonde and blue-eyed; his red-bordered cap was enormous, almost touching the back of his neck and the collar of his uniform. He must have been one of the cadets from military school, sent out hastily to towns threatened by the Revolutionaries. He was clasping a sword, and the chinstrap of his cap almost pushed up the point of his nose. In a childish voice, at times squeaky, he gave the order: "Prisoners, you are to be hanged by order of the Court-Martial. I am in charge of executing the sentence!"

Botello exploded in a guffaw. He had to hold his stomach in his two hands so it wouldn't collapse. His peals of laughter made the dug-out shake as if a piece of artillery were going off inside it.
"So you're going to hang us, senorita? It'll be a job for you to
get me off the ground, if you alone haul on the rope. And then don't
faint, because we're going to be worse off than Judas."

The three prisoners left the wine cellar escorted by a double file
of more than a score of soldiers with drawn guns. They passed through
the vestibule of the hotel, where the Chief of the Division was re-
ceiving information and giving orders, and when he saw them, they
raised their right hands in a gesture of farewell. "You won't be en-
joying yourself much longer..."

The group went out, marching along abandoned streets over which,
from time to time, whistled some stray bullet. Reports like dynamite
explosions were heard, and far off, the crash of artillery and rifles
in open action.

"To the river bank!"

Sword in hand, marching German-style with stiff legs, the little
officer took his place at the head of the escort and led the march.
The Villista prisoners again passed along the road by which they had
come, because the orders of the General-in-Chief were that they were
to be hanged on the selfsame spot where they had first presented them-
selves, hiding the perfidy of a treacherous offer of surrender under
a white flag.

The closer they got to the line of fire, the louder grew the
noise of combat; the Federals were reduced to their last line of
trenches, backed up almost to the walls of the first houses of the
city. The bombs of the rebel artillery passed screaming over the
lines and fell to burst in the houses, terrorizing noncombatants.
A grenade fell in the miserable hut of poor people just as the family were eating, and everybody was blown to pieces. Bullets began to fall in the wide street through which the party was marching, but the officer went on calmly in goose-step. They passed the railroad tracks, made a wide curve on the side of the hill crowned with thundering artillery, and left the wire entanglements behind.

"Permit me, Lieutenant," ventured the sergeant, "we're going to be under the enemy fire."

"It makes no difference. I have orders that the execution shall be as close as possible to the spot where the prisoners presented themselves, so that the ones who sent them can see them."

"They'll kill us!"

"Are you afraid?" This question, from the delicate lips of the boy, disconcerted everybody, as they had accorded him courage corresponding to his appearance. Botello himself, taking off his hat, made a ridiculous bow, trying to bend over to touch the ground with his hat, but his stomach stopped him at right angles. "We'll go wherever you take us, señorita."

"You shall be the first to die!"

"I can't stand so much honor!"

They came to a clump of sabine trees on the bank of the river. Bullets had pruned the trees, and the ground was covered with leaves and stripped branches. The enemy lines were visible from there, from which came incessant fire. The nervous soldiers put their arms on the ground and prepared the rope for the execution; one of them climbed like a monkey to the top of one of the trees, and put the rope over
the best fork he could find in the branches, letting the open noose hang, but too high for a man's neck.

"Lower it a little, quickly! They already see us, and it seems as if they're firing at us."

The soldier did not answer; he remained astride the branch, arms and legs dangling. Drops of a warm dark liquid spattered on the white earth. Several branches, shorn off by bullets, dropped; the rope went on balancing itself until they pulled it down with a gun, and put Botello's head through the noose.

Four soldiers commenced firing from the other side, and suddenly the Villista was raised from the ground; then the branches crashed and came down with their load. The man stayed with his knees on the ground and his arms in the air, held fast by the rope, and his face bloated, eyes popping, purple mouth hanging open, hair stuck to his forehead with cold sweat.

"Another man climb up and replace the rope, immediately!"

They did not take the noose off Botello. Then, while a second soldier skinned up the trunk of the tree, a grenade burst up high. Shell fragments showered down over the slope, a few meters from the group.

"Tiburcio, they're shooting at us!"

The leader was confused for a moment. How could it be that the Villistas themselves were bombarding them? A second report, closer and lower down, confirmed Márximo Perea's belief.

With his face growing even more purple, Botello shouted, "Make them let us alone, Tiburcio!"
The old man became terribly excited. It was frightful that their own companions were going to hunt them down. He moved forward several steps in the direction of the distant Villa line, waving his arms in a wide circle, with his hat in one hand. He shouted over and over, as if they might hear him in the din of the battle.

"Don't shoot! I tell you don't shoot! We don't want to be killed by our own cannons!" He ran up and down the bank of the river, making crazy signals for them to hold fire. It occurred to him to take out his handkerchief, but it was red. He shouted like a madman, putting his hands to the sides of his mouth, and his face growing red with the effort of the scream. "Don't shoot! We don't want it to be you who kills us!" He took off his khaki blouse, soaked with sweat, and naked from the waist up, waved the cloth furiously in the wind.

Another grenade passed over heavily, bursting when it struck the rocks on the hillside. And along the river bed a column of cavalry was coming at full gallop toward the sabines.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" Tiburcio's voice was lost in the storm of shots. The lieutenant, pretending not to notice that they were being cannonaded, and with a composure that surprised everybody, took Botello by one arm, commanding him to stand up, and gave orders to haul him up again.

A low tremor kept coming closer, and then a tremendous explosion was heard. The sabine was torn up by the roots from the force of the bomb, and all the men, soldiers and prisoners alike, were knocked down by the pressure of the air. Several of them got up while the dust was settling; Botello was wounded by a piece of shrapnel that had cut his
cheek like a razor; two or three soldiers were blown to bits, and the
officer, with his uniform torn, cap gone, hair free in the wind, was on
his knees with his arms opened in a cross, and his livid face toward
heaven.

A few moments later the Villista cavalry rode up like a hurricane.
The dragoons ran the soldiers through with their sabres, mashed the
little officer with the hooves of their horses, and came abreast to
check their panting animals on the first rise of the hillside. Tiburcio
and Fares went to lift Botello, who took off the rope that was about to
strangle him. And a big fellow with a silver star shining on the front
of a Texan hat, approaching the group of the three liberated prisoners,
spoke to them happily and satisfied with having reached them a minute
before death. "He saw that they were going to hang you, and we came as
fast as we could. I'm glad we got here in time to save you."

Tiburcio gave him a penetrating look. His mouth took on a hard ex-
pression of scorn, his voice trembled with rage, and he raised his fist
threateningly. "You should have stayed where you were, you young fool,
and tended to your own business. We prefer to have been hanged, rather
than owe our lives to anybody..."
THE CIRCLE OF DEATH

The troops of Pancho Villa occupied Torreón, abandoned by General Velasco, and while a few brigades of the Northern Division left for the battle of San Pedro de las Colonias, the officers of the Villa Brigade, among whom were Tiburcio and his companions, devoted themselves to rest and amusement, forgetting the tragic days of the struggle.

In an elegant room in the same hotel where they had been held prisoners, oppressed by the sultry weather of April, Tiburcio was dosing and Botello was snoring in all keys, as if his enormous belly were a bagpipe. In the middle of the afternoon came Maximo Perea, excited and perspiring, waking his comrades immediately and speaking to them in words that tumbled over each other. "Hey, Tiburcio! Do you know anything about this 'circle of death'?"

"Not a thing."

"And you, barrel?"

"Nothing."

"Then listen to something good..." He sat down on the side of the bed in which the old man had been taking his siesta, put his hat on the floor, and wiped the sweat from his forehead with the sleeve of his blouse. "A little while after we came back from Ojinaga, after joining up with Mersado and Pascual Orosco, one night in that restaurant in Chihuahua that they call Delmonico's, a bunch of boys came in together to eat. They were Encarnación Martínez, Uribe, Luis Salazar, and who knows who else, already very drunk, when one, that they called T. B. because his face was as yellow as a canary, and he was always coughing, noticed that there were thirteen at table. He became very sad, saying that it was bad luck, and that one of them who were there was going to die before
long. They made fun of him and went on getting drunker, but now T. B. didn't want to drink, and was going to get up from the table, but Encarnacion wouldn't let him, and grabbing him by one arm, made him sit down again. 'Nobody squawks about anything here,' he said, 'and if somebody has to die, it might as well be now as later.' Everybody thought he was going to fill T. B. full of lead, but he said, 'He's as much to blame as we for being thirteen, so let's see who it is that has the bad luck...'

Tiburcio and big Botello were half sitting up in bed, and were following their friend's story with interest, as he had been eating with other officers of the Division that day. Perea took off his cartridge belt, hung it on the head of his bed, and went on talking.

"What do you think happened? Then he called the waiter who was serving them their dinner and said to him, 'Get ready to put out the light when I tell you', and then takes out his pistol and cocks it. Nobody moves, and Encarnacion says to them, 'The one who is the most afraid is going to be the one who gets shot.' He made a sign to the servant to put out the light, and in the dark he threw his pistol in the air, and when it fell on the table, it went off. 'Now, put on the light,' said Encarnacion, and then they saw who it was that had the bad luck—T. B.—it certainly was. The pistol was on the table, a long way from Encarnacion's hand, and pointing to the body with a bullet hole below his nose. He wasn't sitting upright in his chair any longer, but was slumping from one side to the other. 'Now you see,' said Encarnacion, 'there is no question of luck, but the one that is the most afraid is the one who gets killed. And in order to find out who are the cowards, from
today one, every week thirteen of us will get together and throw a pistol up. The chickens will die off, and only the men will remain."

"That's a fool stunt," said Tiburcio. "Bullets don't choose anybody. I aim at somebody, and even though he may be very brave, I blow his head off."

"But here they didn't aim at anybody. The pistol alone turned toward the one who was afraid."

"And what if, instead of throwing the pistol up, he aimed at somebody in the dark?" Estello questioned.

"They didn't do that, because the one that throws it has it grasped by the barrel when they put out the light, and everybody hears it when it falls on the table or on the floor."

"I never did trust that outfit much."

"Well, Estello, what happens after that?"

"Now you'll see, Tiburcio. There always have to be thirteen who get together; they dine very well, get drunk, and when everybody gets well lit in when they tear the pistol up. If one gets killed, then the next Saturday they bring some friend that they call a man. Now you'll see; they went on their last drunk in Jimenes, in that old woman's house in front of the stadium. There was a death, and then they said there wouldn't be another until we entered Torreon, because it would be wasting men who might be missed. Now that we are here, they want to have another meeting, but it turns out that in the attack Benito and that bear, Estrada, were killed, and there are no more than three left in the gang."

"They're lacking three..."

"Exactly. And just now when we were eating with Encarnación, he
told me it was a good way to test us, to see if we really were lions, or some kind of hairy cats."

"I'm not going. I have a fat stomach, and it's easier for a shot to hit me than two thin men..."

"But, look, Botello, and you, too, Tiburcio. The big story has already gone around, and I told everybody that we three were going to join their so-called Circle of Death tonight, and the truth is, that if we don't go, they're going to call us cowards. If you don't go, I will, anyway, because I have already given my word as a man."

"Yes, we'll go, Maxima, and we would go just the same if, instead of there being one who was to die, there were twelve, and only one to walk out on his own feet, but I tell you that this is the worst fool game I ever heard of. It would be better to choose someone to go and get rid of a machine-gun nest, or lasso a prisoner from the saddle, or something else that would serve the purpose. But this business of getting killed like that, by drunkenness, is not for really brave men, but for fools. I tell you now, we'll go once or ten times, but if they hit me, I repeat to you that I am as much a man as any one of them that remain standing."

"They couldn't touch you, old Tiburcio, because in truth you really are a brave man."

"Then I'll go, too, and I hope they hit me, so they can see how a Lion of San Pablo dies! I'll even lay a bet they'll hit me, because I have a feeling I'm not going to get out of Torreón..."

"What an animal you are, Botello: there's no bad luck connected with this, nor do forebodings mean anything. Nobody knows when he'll
get hit, and there's no help for it when his time comes."

"That's right, old man. Sometimes I think you are going to see all of us San Pablo Lions die, and you'll stay behind to tell about it."

"Then, shall we go tonight?"

"He said anything about being afraid?"

"Sure, we'll go."

At dusk the three left the hotel. They wore new suits of olive-colored gabardine, yellow one-piece shoes like those of the Federal officers, and in the barber shop they had their mustaches trimmed, combed down their bushy hair, and took to the street smelling of jasmine. They all wore their silver-starred hats, and hatbands of black and white horse hair. To go to the place of appointment, which was a house in the direction of the Alameda, where Emancion Martines had taken rooms, they rode in a rickety old coach drawn by two unmatched horses, and arrived after everybody else was already there, drinking beer right from the bottles.

The host rose to receive his recently arrived guests, stretching out his heavy, sweaty hand to them. He was a big man, thirty-two years old, with a head too small for his wide body, narrow forehead crowned by rebellious hair that needed a plastering of vaseline to keep a stubborn streak smooth on the left side. His nostrils, small and pinched; and a little trimmed mustache sprouted from his upper lip, which was narrow and down-curved and gave him the appearance of a distrustful and malignant animal. Heavy eyebrows high over the eyes almost met the large lock of bristly hair that fell over his forehead at the slightest movement. He had been wounded in a recent battle, and was still pale.
It seemed that his khaki uniform was too big for him, and in the ample
pockets on both sides of his breast, two watched joined by a heavy gold
chain were outlined under the cloth.

"Come on in, friends; we're all glad to see you. We are honored
with three more brave men. Sit down and have some beer."

They passed some bottles, opened with the claw of an S. and W.
pistol. Some were already half drunk, and had started rioting when the
last three arrived. "Hey, old man, what do you think of our little game?"

"Speak up, Tiburcio..."

"Let him talk——let him talk!"

The old man poured down two drinks from the mouth of his bottle, and
smoothing his gray beard, said, "I believe that the men who are brave
come here to prove it: neither can cowards turn brave, no matter how much
they wish to, nor can brave men become afraid, even though they may be
lost. Nobody can be taught to be brave, but if he says he is, he must
prove it. For that reason I came here, to see if anybody's knees shake;
it's one thing to strut around in cafes making boasts, and another to
risk himself to a shot in the dark, without having anybody upon whom to
throw the blame. But I also came to maintain one thing: that it is not
certain that the one whom the shot hits is thereby pointed out to be a
coward. The one is afraid is he who trembles and not he who falls. There
are three of us, and ten of you; then it is more likely that one of you
will come out badly than any one of us, and I want to tell you that we
must not think the one who comes out wounded or dead is a coward, even
if it is one of you. And if it hits any one of us, the other two will
maintain that it was not because that one was afraid."
"Stop right there, Tiburcio! Everything has been an error of interpretation: one must be convinced that there are no cowards in the Division, and this thing that we're doing here is nothing more than to temper the nerves, and that each who thinks he may lose his life at any time may prove that he is ready to be killed when his turn comes. It isn't a school for brave men, as you say, but the one who acquits himself well here will be good for something else. Already you have seen how Benito and the bear, Estrada, fought."

"And you, too, Encarnacion: you were very steady."

"Baa—here we are all equal. Have some more beer."

In this way the hours passed until midnight. Almost all were drunk, and were carrying on a terrible uproar. They sang, they broke bottles on the floor, they shouted their exploits, and then, all together, they began to shout, "It's time now—it's time!"

They pulled the table to a corner; each one carried his own chair and formed a wide circle around the bare top, sitting so close together that there was no space between them where a bullet could pass. Encarnacion took out his pistol and cocked it.

"Are you always the one who throws it up?"

Martinez looked fixedly at Botello. "What is it you're thinking, barrel-belly?"

"If nothing. I only think that it's harder for a shot to hit the one who tosses it up."

"You do it, then."

"Then it would be my advantage, and I don't want it."

"Let the old man throw it..."
"Yes! Yes!"

"Give it to me, then, and I'll throw it."

"Wait a minute, till they put out the light."

"Ready?"

"Let her go!"

An assistant cut the electric current, and the room was plunged into darkness; the uneven breathing was heard of those thirteen men who were awaiting the call of death for one of them. They enlaced arms, leaning toward the center of the circle.

"Now, Tiburcio, up with the thing!"

The fall of a heavy object was heard upon the brick floor, followed immediately by a report; the flash of the shot appeared exactly in the center of the group.

"The light! The light!"

Impatient, someone struck a match a few seconds before the electric light could be turned on. Twelve men were shown standing, anxiously looking for the one hit by the bullet. Botello had remained seated in his chair, with his hands pressed over his stomach, leaning forward.

"Botello, what's the matter? Are you hit?"

"I told you it was easier—easier to hit me than two thin fellows."

"Where are you hit?"

"Here, in the stomach."

Two or three of the drunker ones got out of control. "A corpse—let's have a corpse!"

The wounded man raised his head to Tiburcio, who affectionately slapped his shoulder, and toward Perea, who was watching him with
frightened eyes and open mouth. "Listen, old man, is it true that it always hits the one who's afraid? You, who know me, tell them..."

"Of course not, little fat man. You are far braver than many, and this isn't the first time that you've looked death in the face. And you're still going to do a lot of fighting, because that hole will close up in two weeks."

Botello was livid, and was experiencing horrible pains in his stomach, because the bullet had torn his intestines. Through his chunky fingers, clasped tightly to his huge abdomen, blood was oozing.

"Again—again! Let's have a dead man!"

"No, no more—one's enough. And so you won't doubt what he old man says about me, watch how a man from San Pablo dies!" Botello grabbed the pistol, and before anyone could stop him, he pressed the muzzle to his right temple and pulled the trigger.

"Now, indeed, it was the reverse," Tiburcio said solemnly, placing his right hand on the butt of his pistol. "The bravest was the victim, and if anybody is offended by what I say, let him contradict me now..."
The trains wound slowly toward the south, plethoric with soldiers and horses, with cannons and machine-guns, with impediments of all kinds. There were cars painted white, with great red crosses which looked like open wounds in their sides, and in which were stretchers, boxes of medicine, cotton, bottles of iodine and bandages, and attendants in long white uniforms; other cars in which big fan heaters blew all day among mountains of potatoes and sacks of corn; sealed cars in which were stored hundreds of boxes of ammunition; paymaster cars that carried the coffers swelled with paper money that nobody wanted and everybody took; coaches of the chiefs and Military Staff, well provided with food and wine; and still others for the telegraphers and the purveyors. It seemed that an entire city was on the march. The trains were not big enough to hold so many men inside, and thousands of these had climbed to the roofs, improvising multi-colored tents with their blankets and branches.

There were twelve or fifteen trains moving from Torreón to Zacatecas, where the Federals of Medina Barron were trying to check the advance of the Northern Division, victorious in Torreón and San Pedro de las Colonias. On the horizon were seen the trails of smoke from the locomotives, like streams of ink thrown on the clouds that the wind was piling up. They looked like a great band of black sheep, soon put to flight by heavy streams of water.

What devils turn out this June weather? On leaving Torreón the heat was overpowering, the dust penetrated under the clothing and stuck to the flesh, matting the hair and irritating the eyes; perspiration streamed all day; fatigue, the nuisance of the sun's reflecting from every rock, and the smell of human bodies, sweet, damp leather spread
through the cars in warm heavy waves. The soldiers rode half naked on the roofs of the coaches, where the plates seemed to be on fire beneath them. And on the following day, after crossing the thirsty sands of Picardías, where the bed of a waterless river was traced, winds came up forming giant clouds in a few minutes, and suddenly let fall some enormous drops, like silver pesos. The soldiers got under their makeshift coverings on the coach tops, but those drops went through everything, branches and awnings alike. After it had rained a little while, the soldiers' clothing ran water, as if they had just climbed out of a lagoon; their shoes were as flexible as scales; their arms wet; and the inside of the roofs was slippery. Then the clouds went on their way toward the mountains of the east; they passed and disappeared, and the wind raised dust and more dust that covered everything with its ash-red crust. It seemed that both men and arms had been coated with mud.

At nightfall the trains stopped, and thousands of soldiers jumped to earth to stretch out on the soft sand, to light bonfires and heat coffee in great tin cans. Everybody left the cars, scattering, except two men alone in a box car.

On a bed of branches and leaves covered with a red quilt in a corner, Perea was sleeping. In front of him, seated some distance away on a box of ammunition, old Tiburcio looked at him in silence; once in a while he approached him, took a fistful of cotton and carefully cleaned his face, wiping away a dark greenish pus that oozed from hundreds of pustules on his livid skin.

"Are you feeling all right, Maximo?"
A groan was the only response. Perea was burning with fever, suddenly attacked with corrosive smallpox, on the march, far from the hospital cars, in which there was everything to cure a wound, but nothing to combat an epidemic, and from which they could send nothing but some rolls of cotton and a bottle of disinfectant.

Old Tiburcio bent over the sick man looking at him fixedly, as if he wished to count the purulent points and find out whether there were more or fewer. Two days and two nights he had spent caring for Máximo, alone in the car that the rest of the soldiers had abandoned for fear of contagion. From a distance one would know which car it was in which the pestilence had been exposed, because even the roof was deserted; only a few of the more audacious had stayed on it during the first hours of Perea’s sickness, until an order had come to isolate it. During the halts and at night when the chain of trains stopped, there was a circle of void and silence around car 7121.

When they stopped that night at Colorada, it was reddish twilight outside. A group of men came toward the quarantine car, halting many meters from the wide open doors; from that distance they called to the gray old man, “Tiburcio! Tiburcio!”

The old man appeared, filling the doorframe with his tall silhouette.

“Come down…”

With one jump he was on the ground, and came up to the group, saluting when he recognized Tomás Urbina, the general who was directing the operations against Zacatecas while Francisco Villa was on the way, detained momentarily in Torreón, because of strained relations with the
chief there.

"At your orders, General."

"The doctors tell me that you have a sick man here."

"Yes, sir; it's Mármino Perea."

"Smallpox?"

"I believe that it is smallpox."

Urbina shook his head from side to side, visibly unfavorable. He was the Durango chief, a mestizo with regular features and an abundant mustache that covered his mouth. He had acquired fame as a cruel and fit companion of Pancho Villa, of whom he had been the sole companion in past years devoted to cattle rustling. His arms and hands were benumbed by a strange ailment, undoubtedly the beginning of paralysis, attributed by his enemies to the deed of having dared to take during the sacking of the Durango churches some vases used in the most sacred ceremonies of worship, and from which he removed the contents with his own muscular fingers, greedy for the gold and gems of the chalices and drinking vessels. His red and deformed ears looked like two combs of a rooster fastened to his big round head, and in his robust body breathed a feline and unmerciful soul. That night he was wearing a yellow suit and white blouse with a very low neck, and appeared in company with two doctors of the Morelos Brigade and a numerous party of his officers.

"And what are you going to do with him?"

"Wait for him to get well."

"These fellows say that it's a long and contagious sickness."

"In fact, sir," arbitrated an individual dressed as a civilian, with big glasses over a flat nose, "smallpox can invade the army, favored by
the lack of means to combat it, the stifling heat, and polluted water.

I believe that, if the patient goes on here, many other cases will break out..."

"All right, well enough, all that is understood," interrupted Tibercio, "and what do you want me to do? Are we going to leave here in the middle of the desert, shot like a dog? Isn't he a man like us? Isn't he one of the best officers in the Division?"

"Calm yourself, Tibercio. The doctor is only indicating the danger that the other boys are running of catching smallpox."

"Why don't we cure him?"

"We have the elements of a field hospital, but not to combat those diseases."

"There is no remedy for him, Tibercio, but right now we're going to find a way..."

The old man stood looking at Urbina with an expression of impatience. Night had lengthened over the plain and the trains were prisoners of the half-dark, weakly illuminated by the bonfires of the bivouacs that formed a line of fires parallel to the railroad track, and in which crackled twisted branches of mesquite. The chief, meditating, passed his hand over his badly shaved cheek; then he rubbed the back of his neck as if he were trying to help his brain find a solution to such a serious problem. He buttoned his jacket, then unbuttoned it and stuck his thumbs in his cartridge belt. Everybody had a presentiment of a cruel order from him.

"Do you say there is danger of everybody's taking the smallpox?"

"Undoubtedly, General, since the disease is so infectious that..."
With a gesture of his heavy arm, Urbina indicated silence. At the same time the bugles sounded a faint taps, ordering the troops to rest. Around the ear where Máximo Perea raved there was a pit of silence and shadow. Tiburcio, dragging his feet, walked toward one of the doctors.

"There is no remedy?"

"With the supplies that we have here, there is no hope."

The old man pressed his right hand to his forehead, holding back a fierce internal struggle, stammered a moment, and turning to Urbina with a decided tone, said, "General, I understand that we are in a very difficult situation. In battle it is not the same as it is anywhere else. You are the chief, by order of General Villa; order, then, what must be done, and I myself will do it."

"Well, since you hear what the doctor says: Perea has no cure. The best that we can do is to make sure nobody else gets sick. Everything must disappear: his clothing, his blankets, his arms..."

"Disappear? I don't understand..."

The General indicated the solution at which he had arrived; it was necessary to cremate the body and all his belongings.

Tiburcio did not understand. "What did you say?"

"The body must be burned."

"Burn him up, man, burn him!"

"Like this? Alive?"

"He must be unconscious now, because of the high fever..."

"But, burn him alive? What, have you gone crazy?" Tiburcio's color of earth; he waved his arms as if he wanted flesh had turned the c:
to dispel those phrases that he still heard distinctly. From time to
time, the fire of a nightguard close by lit up his face; his white moustache looked like crystal, and his eyes shone like glowing charcoal.

"Is this the reward of a soldier of the Revolution? Is this an army of men or a band of dogs?" He raised his clenched fist, making the most terrible threats. Then Urbina confronted him, once more the master of men.

"Don't argue with me! The life of one man, whoever he may be, is worth nothing if the danger of an epidemic is saved. Don't you see that it makes everybody afraid? Above all, here I am in command, and if you oppose me, you haven't the authority. Do you hear? What are you thinking, that because old Villa grants you all kinds of privileges, we are all going to do the same? Here there is only one pair of pants, mine, and because of that I am half-way merciful. Drag him off—gawen! Salute, and carry out your orders!"

Tiburcio brought his feet together, straightened up, and raised his hand to his forehead. He locked his jaws against either a curse or a sob; looking at the ground, he breathed with his nostrils open and quivering. He lowered his hand and clenched his fists until the nails sank into his own flesh. He was trembling and moaning as if possessed by a devil.

"Right now, start in burning that pockmarked carcass! With all his trappings and blankets and whatever else is inside. It's a pity we can't burn the cair and everything, so that the train would be disinfected once and for all. And if you don't do it, somebody else will do it in five minutes."
Urbina made a half-turn and began to walk off, pulling his hat down with both hands. Officers and doctors followed him, and soon they were lost in the darkness. Tiburcio had remained fixed on the spot; two great tears, like drops of frozen rain, had stopped on the first hairs of his mustache; he wiped his face with the back of his hand, and went toward the damned coach. Inside it he heard a sound like boiling water; a continuous heavy moan. At first his eyes, dazzled by the bright red blaze of the bonfires, saw nothing, but soon they became accustomed to the dark, and he could distinguish Máximo, who, without a doubt, had wanted to get up in an access of delirium, stretched face downward with his arms crossed, in the middle of the car.

"Poor Perea, they're making me lay you out..." He leaned over him, turned him over, and gently raised him. He took him up like a child, pressing his cheek against the purulent face; his tears fell upon the skin peaked and damp as a sponge; he bent his head and kissed the brow that was nauseating from rot. With his frightful load he got down from the car and went toward the shadows. He himself did not know where to take him. He approached a bonfire and the soldiers who were resting near it, chanting a monotonous song to themselves, saw him coming and fled from him as from a ghost.

"Old Urbina is right," he thought. "Everybody is afraid."

He walked in the darkness without any definite direction. At times his legs buckled and it seemed as if he were going to fall, but he straightened up firmly, sinking his feet into the loose soil. He felt the body which he was carrying in his arms become rigid, and he spoke to him aloud, carrying on a disjointed conversation. He walked and
walked, stopping when he saw in front of him a kind of square, even
darker than the shadows themselves: it was a crib made of railroad
ties sunken on end, and must have been about two meters high; a cover of
branches and dead leaves completed it, standing empty and abandoned.
There he stretched Perea, who remained motionless, and returned to the
coach, took the quilt, the straw, and from the nearest bonfire snatched
a handful of burning mesquite that he carried on high through the night,
lighting his path with a blaze red as blood.

He found Perea exactly where he had left him, still motionless,
without having changed his position by one single finger. He did not
see his face, nor did he try to see it. Was he still alive? Had he
died yet? He did not wish to find out; he threw the branches on top of
the body, filled the crib full of mesquite sticks, and with the brand
taken from the bivouac, set fire to it. The smoke, light and hot, went
up and up, leaving an odor of dry wood. Suddenly, from the heap of
wood there shot a flaring blaze, lighting up the old man, standing with
crossed arms, hatless and calm. The heat became suffocating, and all
around the bonfire the gloomy dark fields looked like a sheet of iron
over which the scorching heat of the fire extended in interminable waves;
a yellowish halo encircled that singular bonfire, and farther off, dark-
ness.

Tiburcio felt that his lips were damp. He touched them: all of his
mustache was damp, and both his cheeks. All at once he felt as if the
mountains had hurled themselves upon him, and he fell on his knees,
opened his arms and remained motionless; only his lips trembled, driven
by a fervor that seemed to break in his breast.
He arose and with his head lowered went toward his car; he sat down in the door, swinging his legs in space. At a distance he distinguished a red point from which drifted off a thin column of light bluish smoke. It looked like a cigarette that was giving off rings. From his pocket he took out leaf and tobacco, and smoking, smoking, and watching that point of fire grow fainter and fainter, he stayed in the door of the car until dawn, swinging his loose feet.
At dawn the morning star found Tiburcio sleepless. Crouched in the farthest corner of his car, the old man felt the movement of the troops climbing into the trains; the roof plates cracked from the weight of the men, and the officers were shouting orders, "Up, boys! The real thing's coming!" War songs rose into the air like the smoke of the locomotives, like the trembling of bells and the hiss of steam. Stragglers went by the doors of his car in a great hurry, with guns on their shoulders, on the run to their own coaches.

Nobody climbed onto 7121. It was an old car with discolored walls; the planks of the floor had great holes through which came the creaking of the wheels. On one side were several boxes of ammunition piled on top of each other; on the other sat Tiburcio on his bed, passing the hours contemplating the labels painted in red on the boxes: Winchester. Mentally he added the numbers 30-30 up and down and then crosswise. On the walls some sacks of food were hung from nails, a carbine swung from a hook, and over the boxes were spread some half worn out tarpaulins. There was room for ten or twelve men, comfortably, but Tiburcio did not hear one single step on the roof, nor did he see one single face appear outside the wide doorframe. He felt humiliated, and it made him angry. "Fools—as if you were going to live a hundred years..." He went to the door, straight as a spear of maguary, and as solitary. The train had begun to roll, and beneath its wheels the pine ties were groaning. Tiburcio felt as if he were one of them, and on his shoulders rested the weight of the world; he wanted to scream, but remained mute; he wanted to strike, burn, destroy, but he remained motionless. Before his eyes the wasteland unrolled like an enormous dirty bandage.
On the curves he saw the other coaches, filled with men who were shouting and singing, emboldened by the proximity of battle. They seemed to breathe in the perfume of gunpowder. Only he, with his nose contracted, gave the impression of smelling whiffs from a dung heap. All morning he went on thinking of the same idea, clenching his teeth as if he had made it a prisoner between his jawbones and did not want it to escape. It was like an interminable nightmare, a murmur from a never-changing forest.

The trains arrived at Calera, and the army once more stood on ground. Like big blue oranges, the cannons were rolled down from their platforms, the draft animals were yoked onto them, and they disappeared at full speed to various points of the valley. General Angeles passed on horseback, with his olive-colored sombrero tilted on the left side, the brim caught to the crown by a tricolor cockade. Toward Morelos the troops from Sanpedra, Juárez, and Lucerno left to station themselves to support the cavalry of Trinidad Rodríguez, who was pursuing the enemy toward Las Pilas and Hacienda Nueva.

After midday the coaches were empty. The infantry commanded by Herrera went to camp at Chiquihuilla, while those of Batista, Triana, Contreras, Ramírez, Domínguez, and Gallo had to take positions in the direction of Guadalupe, by the side of the road abandoned by the Federals when they were dislodged from their positions in the hills of Loreto, El Grillo, La Sierpe, Clérigos, and La Buca. General Gonzalitos was sent with his infantry to station themselves at Vetragna, where the artillery was spread out to pound the enemy positions.
Over the valley fell a thick quick shower. The air remained clear as a crystal imprisoning the chapel of Vetagrande, raised on the crest of a little hill; the mysterious ridges in which the enormous mouths of mines were open; the chain of knolls that were like a wall; and below, the green countryside sewn with little villages paralyzed by war, among which wound the roads, like rivulets of loose earth. From time to time dark serpents of men, horses, and cannons climbed and descended the hills, then disappeared behind the crests of hostile cliffs. The wind bore the sound of skirmish and bugle notes. Toward Guadalupe, a dark lagoon that looked like smoked glass, and farther on, two or three lines of sandy hills; finally, very high among all of them, an enormous peak capped by two jagged rocky crests like two columns, wide and covered with live-oaks, all emerging from a cone of stone: La Buca.

Tiburocio wandered through Calera all afternoon without speaking to anybody, without a word addressed to him. Everybody else was absorbed in the preparations for war, the Presidencia Municipal, where Urbina had taken rooms, being the center of the vortex that swallowed and spat out torrents of men and horses. The brigade chiefs entered with their large staffs to receive orders for stations, while the signal for attack was being given; left with them on their horses at a gallop toward the towns and hills.

Amid that restless multitude Tiburocio grew tired of having nothing to do. He mingled among the artillery coaches, and without anybody's asking him, he helped catch the mules, arrange the garrisons, lower the boxes of ammunition. And when night came, he went to his car, which nobody else entered, and slept like a log.
Two days passed in preparation, more trains arrived, more troops were distributed in their positions; and the Federal artillery had now commenced to shower grapeshot. To Calera came the first wounded: artillerymen who had lost one of their pieces in Veta Grande when a shell had burst upon it; and others who were shelled by one of their own grenades that exploded in the hands of a slow operator. There also arrived wounded men from the Mina de Plata, telling that they were resting in a large corral among the impediments of the artillery, when a torpedo opened over their heads; others, riders who had had a storm of shot let loose over them when passing along an open road to occupy positions; infantrymen surprised when ascending some hill visible from the peaks of La Bula. All wounded before the battle, without defending themselves, without having fired a single shot.

There were not enough stretcher-bearers to carry so many insensible men to the trains which were to leave immediately for Torredon, carrying a load of shattered flesh. At times livid sufferers were stretched on planks, motionless as cadavers, their only sign of life a yellow glance from glassy eyes. The ones wounded in the head or arms walked, leaning on their companions who helped them to the trains, and later, when the planks ran out and all the stretchers were filled, the wounded went by hanging between two men, one holding him by the knees and another supporting him under the arms; each trio left red splotches on the loose earth. And at last, strong men who bore on their shoulders like sacks of grain, bloody soldiers with head and arms loosely hanging.

The procession seemed interminable, for from all sides came the wounded to the Calera station, and from the ambulance cars came orders
to bring them in immediately; wounds would be taken care of on board
the coaches leaving for the north. Two hundred, three hundred wounded
men passed in one hour, sent from all positions at the announcement of
the departure of the first hospital train, and Tiburcio saw them pass
in front of his car. Some, lightly wounded, were protesting because
they were being retired from the line of fire; they wanted to go back,
to fight, and a scratch did not deserve returning to Torreón before
seeing the battle won. Others, with ashen faces and limp limbs, sunken
stomachs and motionless breasts, seemed not to take account of anything.
On seeing them pass, the old man shook his head from one side to the
other. "These will never reach Torreón, and no longer will they find
space in the coaches."

"It's useless to take them—by damn they'll be corpses."

Soon there were not enough men to carry other victims piled up at
the entrance of the Presidencia and lying on dirty, bloody mats. When
the doctors with the Red Cross ambulance saw Tiburcio, who had divested
himself of his bandoleers and put his pistol under his bed, they re-
buked him. "Here, you old nuisance, be of some use! Don't you see
these poor fellows that must be carried to the train?"

They gave him a very young boy to carry, who had his right thigh
mangled by a fragment of a grenade. He was less than fifteen and small.
He was crying when Tiburcio took him in his arms like a nursemaid and
went carrying him carefully some distance from the train. The old man
scolded him in a low voice. "Fool, why are you getting mixed up in
this? At least you're going to be a cripple, and if you don't die of
this, someday you'll die of something else...."
"I'm not afraid of being a cripple. I wanted to climb La Bufa."

Pressing him against his breast, Tiburcio's jacket was soaked with blood. The mutilated thigh was bleeding horribly, and the boy was white as a sheet. Tiburcio gently laid him on the ground and bandaged the leg with his handkerchief. "La Bufa—did you think it would be so simple? They're going to sweat blood before they climb it."

They traveled until they reached the hospital trains; in the boxcars red quilts were spread on the floor, indicating the place for the wounded, and there they were gathering, twenty or thirty in each car. Tiburcio had to entrust his load to another for a moment and climb to the car to haul the boy up. Already it was almost full. In front, the stretcher-bearers and soldiers had left wounded men piled up at the door, some on top of others like trunks of trees, like bundles of straw. They were groaning and moaning in a monotonous choir of lamentations. In a corner a young internee, half naked, sweaty, red as a plumato and squint-eyed, was rapidly treating the wounded. Toward him went Tiburcio, stepping on one, pushing another out of the way, and placed the boy under his very eyes, bulgy as fried eggs. The other wounded men protested; they had arrived first; it sounded as if they were barking, "My turn—it's my turn!" They crawled, they shoved. The worst ones rolled their eyes in their sockets, imploring help.

It had grown dark, and they lit candles, sticking them in the cracks in the walls of the car. By the orangish flare of the stearine lamp, the young doctor works anxiously. He does nothing but bandage, pressing tightly, wrapping the gauze strips until the flesh is compressed together, and dropping a stream of iodine in the wound. The wounded man
trembles and screams, and then they take him to the other end of the
ear; in a little while he revives and asks for a cigarette, and among
those who can talk, they begin to tell each other about their wounds,
pleased with having been so close to the enemy that they have been the
first to receive steel and fire. They cheer each other, and then, all
at once, they complain of having lost the great spectacle of the real
battle.

"They shot me off my horse. We were protecting a battery that was
going in hastily because the other had been put out of commission. And
in order to get there more quickly we rode into a clearing between two
hills; in a minute they were throwing melons at our heads. And what a
crop of them! They really gave us a sprinkling!" His head was complete-
ly bandaged, and on the white wrapping blood and iodine made a stain of
all shades from yellow to black. He had received buckshot in the head,
the face, neck and shoulders. They had to cut his blouse off him, and
after swathing him in bandages, they covered him with a blanket. An-
other, one had his arm tied to his body, said, "We ran into a Federal
outpost on a ranch called San Vicente. They hailed us very hard, and it
took us a half hour to overcome them. In flight, one got me in the
shoulder."

"And you, you didn't damage him?"

"It would have been too much trouble, because I'm not left-handed.
You see how my right hand is." And he showed his hand, swollen and
blackened, stiff in its bandages. "But I had the pleasure of seeing
him fall with his nose in the dirt."
They climbed up with one who was screaming like a madman. His stomach was destroyed. Blood was gushing out of him, and in his leaps up and down on the stretcher, his intestines moved around in him like animals in a sack. None of the wounded men protested when they took him out of turn to the doctor's corner. The intern's eyes became even more protruding, he shook his head, and without bandaging, he prepared a needle to inject a yellowish liquid that he took from a flask in his medicine chest. In a little while the man seemed to be asleep, emitting a low snore. Motionless, he appeared to be chained to his cot. Everything around him became silent, everybody understanding that it was the end. Soon there arrived new wounded, the crowd undulated, fell back, spread out. In the corners the less seriously hurt were squatting; others were stretched like dead men on their backs in the middle of the coach. The attendants passed from one side to the other of the car without seeing where they trampled. There was almost no floor space between bodies, and they walked upon a carpet of human flesh.

"Let me go—let me go back!"

The boy with the bloody thigh was standing on his one good foot, leaning against the wall of the car, trying to get to the door and leave. On moving he made one of the candles stuck between the boards fall, and the car was almost in darkness, for only one flame was shedding light on the stacked-up bodies. Tiburcio raised the boy in the air and carried him to a corner, walking on inert bodies that hurled curses and confused complaints. Then he went outside. It seemed to him that he was leaving a tomb ready to be closed. For a while the howls of that frightful car followed him. "Fools—if they knew the reward that is waiting for them!
They fight like lions, risk their lives ten times, get their hides shot off, and when they're no good for anything any longer, they'll give them a kick in the seat."

With his teeth clamped he went along muttering to himself. From each car came a square of light and a burst of groans. In the whole train inexpert internes must have been tying up bodies and throwing in the iodine, the same on the head as in the stomach, to old men and boys. Iodine and more iodine...

On the road he met two soldiers bearing a boy wounded in the forehead. A sharp projectile had opened a round buttonhole in it, through which life would not be long in buttoning itself to death. With closed eyes the boy rolled his head from side to side, and without complaining he went on smiling, as if he beheld a wonderful sight.

"Another idiot..." He felt a wild desire to attack all of them, and those who were going with guns on their shoulders, rapidly and contentedly, to their positions; to shout to them that their sacrifice was going to be useless; that war was inglorious, and men who waged it thankless and bloodthirsty. He conceived against his leaders the bitterest phrases, many times cursing the struggle in which had remained, invisible to glory, those five men whom he loved as sons. Before him passed a battalion playing a war song. His blood boiled and his eyes shone; biting his lips until the blood ran, he confessed his grief to himself, "And to think I envy them..."

In the damp dark night, the solitary figure wandered. The echo of shots pursued him, and from a crest of La Buja a small flare that broke up the shadows seemed to him the eye of the entire army, noticing that he was not in his place.
On the next day, June 22, Pancho Villa arrived. Ángeles informed him of the occupied positions and made the last distribution of troops for the combat: Urbina and his brigades against La Bufa; Villa and his against Loreto. He found out that a great number of men had been wounded, and remembering the days of the attack on Torreón, he thought there must be some soldiers hidden on the train who were avoiding battle. And on his nervous little horse he went to Calera, followed by an escort of his faithful dorados. In the station, in front of the trains, he dismounted and searched from car to car, peering in the corners, under the bundles of impediments, and discovered several men who seemed able to fight, yet were not.

Furious because of the cowardice of those men, he came to car 7121. Tiburcio was seated in the door, smoking, without arms at his belt or bandoleers across his chest. When he saw his chief coming, he rapidly stood at attention and saluted; his eyes lit up and he felt himself tingle with enthusiasm. One word, one gesture, and he would run where the Federals were entrenched, firing furiously at them...That man there was indeed a man, a leader of men—not an imitation like Urbina, a son of a bitch and a horse thief. He breathed in the moist air with full lungs and wanted to shout a "Viva Villa" that could be heard all over Zacatecas...

But on noticing the car, Pancho Villa shrugged his shoulders instinctively, and his burning glance expressed a sudden fear. An instant he looked Tiburcio up and down, a making a curve he drew away from the car and passed on, lengthening his step. Inside, the old man became limp as an empty sack, his back sagging like a blade of grass
in the wind.

"It's just as well," he said. "Here everything is all over."

Slowly he belted on his pistol, placed the bandoleers over his shoulders, and with his equipment as complete as if he were going to battle, he gripped his carbine and took one long jump from the car into the night.
"Stick Palomo—stick Palomo!"

The little boy, sinking his bare feet in recently turned earth, went toward the oxen, goading one with an ash stick in the hind quarters. The patient animal switched his tail over the wounded spot, striking itself with the dirty hairs and hurrying its step. The two animals wore a yoke as heavy as iron, forcing their heads down and their thirsty lips almost scraping the dirt. From the yoke hung a pole the thickness of a man's thigh, well tied with strips of rawhide, pulling a plow equally heavy and bulky, over which, with his arms spread wide and his body bent like a bowed archer, burying his feet and wavering at each step, tired and sweaty, the man kept repeating, "Stick Palomo..."

At the end of the short and wavy furrow the man stopped, and while he passed his hand over his brow to wipe off the sweat, involuntarily, absent-mindedly his eyes swept over the valley, which held nothing new for him: the same round hills that whimsically took the graceful form of a woman, on which the live-oaks and the madronos interlaced; the arroyo, now burbling with blue water, slipping away through the stony course hidden under the brambles; the backwater, on whose bank the willows leaned to comb the water with their long fronds; the wooden house at the entrance to the valley, where his wife and daughter were cleansing the corn measures for sowings; and the little piece of land itself, half as dusty as a road, half turned over in parallel lines which seemed to have been scratched by an enormous comb; his yoked oxen and his son.

"What's the matter, papa? Are you tired already?"

The old man raised his glance to calculate the time by the position of the sun, which was almost in the middle of the sky, as smooth as an
unruffled sea; the wind was not rippling it, and the clouds were caught on the pinnacles of the mountains, distant as other worlds.

"We'll take another two turns..."

"I'm hungry."

On the beam of the plow the man was carrying a handkerchief with its corners tied diagonally, from which he took out a small thick tortilla, the floury and typical wheatcake.

"It's been a long time since you've brought any venison, father."

Hung from the same beam, the 30-30 opened its small round eye, peeping between the heads of the oxen; it was old and dirty now; from lack of oil, the rust was commencing to corrode the surface of the barrel, and the wood of the butt, discolored and scratched, with mud in the grooves, looked like the sole of a shoe. The man looked at it with fixed and affectionate eyes, thinking of something far away, something even farther than the uneven mountain range, that perhaps even the sun had forgotten. With the light of his eyes he caressed the old Revolutionary rifle, loud, faithful, and unerring, that he had carried for two years hung from that beam, engulfing dust through its hollow and lidless eye; two years in which its report, resounding with mysterious echoes that rang through the trees of the forest to die in the ground, received no answer whatever, and its glance saw no man or deer, nor did its narrow vibrating stomach shed more death for man.

Leaning on the plow, the countryman stretched out his right hand to touch his gun in a caress that was at the same time a question:

"When are we going back, you and I?" And then aloud, "We can't do much shooting at deer, son, because our ammunition is running out, and who
knows when we may need it."

"What do you want it for?"

"He'll come some day—he'll come. Stick Palomo!"

"Who's coming, Father?"

"The Old Man, General Villa. Some day, some month, he'll come..."

The man's body shook as if electrified by enthusiasm; he went along
pushing the plow, raising it when he felt rocks under the plowshare,
pushing it down when the pull of the team raised it to the surface of the
ground, guiding it in irregular parallel to the recently turned furrow.
He let his filthy torn sombrero fall back, hanging by the chinstrap, and
letting loose his lank hair, long and entirely white, that looked like
soapsuds on his great round head. Suddenly, as if he wished to shatter
the silence of the valley, he began to sing an old war song, the tune of
which was rapid and varied, the words coarse and mocking.

"When we enter Chihuahua
We'll buy a plow,
And make Caraveo and Mercedes
Pull it like a cow..."

"Mama says Villa is a bad man."

"Bad? Yes, but for whom? Can those complain of him who never suf-
fered anything? What he really is, is a good man for war. I was with
him two years and I always saw him come out ahead. He knew how to com-
mand, and he shared everything."

The boy was paying little attention to his father, who went on talk-
ing with his gaze fixed on the same spot of motionless and brilliant hori-
zon, as if his eyes were the ends of two guns pointed at a detail of the
past.

"I'm afraid of him..."
Abruptly the old rancher pulled back on the plow and the oxen stopped. "Hold your tongue! There's nothing to be afraid of, and if you're afraid of him or anybody else, you should keep still and swallow it. Some day you'll see him, and, like your father, you will follow him, and never be afraid."

"And are we going to leave mana and sister?"

The man did not answer; he pushed his sleeves up to his elbows, clucked his tongue, and when the oxen resumed their plodding, he again bent over the plow. He had never thought of his wife and daughter in any of the times that he had turned over and over in his mind the idea of rejoining the chief. The other time, when the Revolution began toward the first of 1913, he had left his wife and two children abandoned to their fate, because it was impossible to be burdened with them in those months of incessant battle, of daily skirmishes, flight, bold clashes, ambuscades. How much misery and what abandonment everybody suffered that time, until, without knowing how, carried perhaps by an indefinite presentiment, they all went to look for refuge in the ranch they had left at the call of war. Then, he had promised the woman, for her, for the children, for himself, he would stay the rest of his life in that tranquil and fertile valley; the Bustillos estate was nearby, and the railroad line. There two years passed in which the man knew that Villa had been defeated, and with his own eyes, fierce and hard, saw pass the trains of new enemies in the direction of the mountains, to occupy the cities that the Villistas could not save.

The ranchers themselves, once Villistas, now did not like him, because Villa robbed and destroyed; they formed a social defense in each
town to combat him, and to Tiburcio himself they had come to invite him to join the defense, but he did not wish to. Sturdy and loyal, he had answered, calculating each word, "I was a Villista; I am still one, and I shall always be one." They told him that he was an unbalanced old man and left him to work his plot of land. Many times he knew that Villa had passed nearby; then the "defenders" sought him out again and looked at him suspiciously, asking him if he had talked with the Old Man. "When he speaks, and when I see him," he answered them, "that's when I'll go with him forever." The others threatened him, "You are spying on us." He left them without answering.

Other times, in Hacienda, they told him that Villa had died, that they had found his horse saddled, the trappings covered with blood, there in Ojinaga after Carranza's soldiers had followed him league after league, shooting at him every so often. Or rather, vaqueros from Durango, four hundred kilometers to the south, were said to have seen him buried after a foiled attempt on a mine at Pedrizales. He never believed all that, and went on hoping that some day, some month, the chief would pass through there and take him along. He did not look for him, because the last time he saw him, Villa had ignored him on leaving him in the train without calling him to fight against the Federals in Zacatecas. But whenever he might say, "Let's go..."

"We'll go—we'll go, boy!"

They took two more turns, and leaving the oxen yoked went to rest under a sabino on the bank of the arroyo. There they ate their tortillas, drank the blue water, and stretched out in the shade, with their faces covered by the leaves.
The oxen, their feet free, were chewing with their heads crushed down by the yoke. They were two filthy animals, with their bones sharply standing out; it seemed that they had only skin, like a dirty and empty wrap thrown to dry on a mesquite. Over them zoomed the flies, persistently eluding the blows of their hairy tails to come back and light again, after some more aerial maneuvers, on the buttocks where the punctes of the stick had drawn blood.

On his back on the ground, the rancher heard all the sounds: the uniform breathing of the oxen, the song of the branches that murmured the same theme hour after hour, the gurgling of a slender thread of water that leaped among the rocks, the fluttering of the sparrows' wings that rose in flocks among the trees, the curious voice of some lark at the edge of his nest. He also heard something that he could not explain for a moment: the earth had its own noise, like a low moan, without interruption. Pressing his ear to the ground, it seemed to him as if the arroyo were growing in volume, as if the water were breaking over trunks of trees on the rocky bed of the stream. It was also like the sound from a mill, like cart wheels going around. "Some men are coming through the ravine; somebody on the way to the Bustillos fields; maybe some vaqueros driving cattle, or 'defenders' from San Nicolás de Carretas after some cattle thief that had stolen stock from them." As they were undoubtedly yet far off, and only the shaking of the earth announced them, the man remained lying down.

"Do you hear, father? Some men are coming on horseback."

"Yes, don't get up; we'll wait for them here."
After a while he again put his ear to the ground; the trembling was heard nearer, and at the same time, other sounds were mixed with the gentle voices of the valley. Some shouts of men came, as very high, to lose themselves in the motionless layers of the air. Then the rancher got up and walked slowly toward his oxen. In the ravine, where the little hill seemed split by a giant axe, the foliage was waving, two or three larks flew up to stain the blue span of the sky with yellow, and in the brakes of the arroyo the rabbits fled from the cattle path. Two riders appeared between the oaks and stopped. They fired a shot that frightened the indolent valley, then waited.

Near the oxen, the laborer raised his sombrero, and gave a shout that shattered the concentric circles that were unrolling in the air, the center pierced by the report of the gun. "Don't shoot! I am peaceful!" And he separated himself from the team so they could see him alone and unarmed. The boy, frightened, huddled up at the trunk of the sabine. The riders approached rapidly, while behind them in the ravine appeared a compact mass of horses and men.

"Hey, old man!"

"What do you want?"

"What 'Defense' do you belong to?"

"None."

"Are you alone?"

"With only the boy."

They drew near. They came on tired mags that were trembling on their feet, turning their heads toward the arroyo and fresh water. They carried carbines laid between their stomachs and the saddle horns, and were
covered with dust, with long beards and hair plastered down with a paste of dust, sweat, and grease; ragged, barefooted. Nevertheless, they had something of beauty: their carriage. Glances bright as a crow's; strong jaws, like a wolf's; haughty heads and decisive gestures. The man who rebels is always like this, and does not change even at the hour of death. There are in him traces that mark the vigor of his soul, lines engraved by destiny. A halo surrounds him, as of a storm.

The rancheur, now standing up, smiled. "Now you know who they are," the deserter of Zasatecas said to himself, and stood at attention.

"Villistas?"
"For anything that may come up?"
"The leader?"
"What leader?"

"My General Villa..." The voice of the countryman had a strange ascent: it was commanding and yet it seemed to weep. Like the blow of an axe: first, the strike, and then, the crashing of the trunk.

The other riders came up and surrounded them; the boy glued himself to the sabine, seeking protection, and the father looked over all those faces that surged from the mass of men to his heart's content. Many faces seemed familiar to him under the mask of dirt and beard. He smiled at them.

At the end of the troop, with nobody else at his back, came the one he was looking for, cutting through the circle of his men like a dagger. His horse advanced to the center where the laborer stood at attention, saluting. Without speaking he looked at him a moment.

"You are Tiburcio Maya."
"Yes, my General."

"They call you the Lion of San Pedro."

"Like five others."

"You were with me in San Andrés, when we defected Félix Tarrazas."

"Yes, General."

"In the hills of Rancheria, against Francisco Castro."

"Yes, General."

"You were at Chihuahua..."

"I picked Navarro up when a grenade killed him, in the same spot where you were a minute before."

The horseman smiled and pushed his sombrero back; he had a broad face, with apoplectic veins over his ears, and his face was as red as the setting sun; he took one foot from the stirrup and rested it on the saddle, leaning on his thigh and putting his elbow on the back of the saddle.

"Do you remember when we seized the trains at Laguna?"

"Yes, General."

"The capture of Juárez City?"

"Yes, General."

"You were with those men who took the artillery in the sand at Sier- ra Blanca."

"From José Inés Salazar."

"You were in the assault on La Fila."

"I left two companions there."

"And you went as emissary to Torreon."

Villa took pleasure in showing off his prodigious memory. Like Tiburcio, he was said to know every one of his men; he remembered the times
that they had been near him in battle, and the excursions through the
deserts; their loyalty and their treacheries, their cowardice, their
successes, their crimes.

"Ah, ungrateful old man! You left me at Zacatecas, when we were the
hardest-pressed, and left in a hospital brain." He spoke with tightened
jaws, spitting the words out from his untamed mustache, and clenching
his fists as if for a fight.

"Pardon me, General, but I did not desert; it was you yourself who
ignored me; you didn't want me in the Northern Division, because you were
afraid that I might have spread the smallpox. And in the hottest moments
of battle I was good for nothing but to carry wounded. Everyone fled
from me, they distrusted me, they ran off from me. Then, why not? I lay
down between two wounded men and let them drag me to Torreón."

"Well, well—now you see it was all for the best. Now I do want
you, because we are going to a sacred struggle. We are going to avenge
all our brothers who have fallen in this fight against Carranza, because
they are the devils of the other side who are helping to finish us. Have
you a gun? Get it, and let's go! Don't forget that here are the best
men who ever wore pants!"

Tiburcio was stretching; he seemed to be growing, to be swelling.

"Really, General, do you want me to go with you?"

"That's enough. Get your rifles and horse, if you have one."

The boy, clinging to his father, spoke to him in a low voice. "And
mother? And sister?"

The man felt a lightening flash in his soul, which filled him with
dilemma and was the beginning of an interior tempest. A wind of violence,
battle, and death darkened his mind and pushed him toward the band, to follow it; to be a part of it; to strike, burn, and destroy with it; or to disappear. And new lightenings showed him the two women who were behind him on the cleared path where the grass never grew. He stammered,

"Indeed I would want to, General, but..." His voice changed; it was not like the axe now, but like the foliage that trembles and murmurs gently, coaxing the woodsutter who threatens it.

"But, why?"

"My wife—my daughter."

On the bestial mouth of the monster there formed a frightful smile. From it words came out hissing and crawling like snakes.

"Ah! You have a wife; you have a daughter. Good, good! Why didn't you say so before? The situation changes; take me where they are."

The countryman indicated with his extended arm the little wooden house resting on the hill, green as a forest, low-roofed, almost a part of the sea of oaks. And then, happily, as if he had escaped from a great danger, he led the party across the worked earth, jumping the furrows three by three so as not to ruin them, without noticing that behind him the horses were trampling them down.

"Have you eaten yet, General? I'll have my wife roast a kid..."

In the house the woman and her daughter, who had seen the crowd coming, were on their knees before a discolored chrome of an unknown saint, praying loudly.

"Women, women, don't be afraid; I'm not going to do anything to you."

They got up, and trembling like jelly, went to roast the kid. Villa squatted, leaning his shoulders in a corner, and before eating, he made the woman taste it, then the daughter and son; after which he devoured
like a jaguar, holding the piece of meat in both hands. Gorged, he stood up, wiping his mouth on his sleeve, and remembering the manners of a rancher. "God be thanked," he muttered, "for our food."

He went toward the girl, running his enormous hand over her head.

"You are right, Tiburcio Maya. How can you leave them? But I need you; I need all the men who can join up with me, and you will have to come with me today itself. And so that you may know that they are not going to be hungry, nor suffer because of your absence, look!" Rapidly as the lash of a whip he drew his pistol, and with two shots stretched the woman and her daughter bloody and motionless.

"Now you have nobody: you don't need either ranch or oxen. Get your rifle and let's go...."

With his eyes red and his lower jaw loose and trembling, his hands convulsed, his brow damp with perspiration, over which fell his white hair like foam, the man took his son by the hand and went out the door. Of the first Villista he met he asked a cartridge-belt, which he slung over his shoulder; asked for a gun, which the other handed over at a signal from the chief, and began to walk over the earth of his parcel of land that the horses had ruined, toward the north, toward the war, toward his destiny—with his chest out, his shoulders thrown back, and his head raised to the wind, ready to lay down his life for Francisco Villa.
ADVICE

In the mouth of the arroyo that the column had passed through on its march, the vanguard stopped a rancho who was returning from Bustillos to San Lorenzo, driving two burros with empty panniers. He said that trains of Carranza soldiers had passed through to the northeast a week ago; the majority of these troops were in San Antonio de los Arenales, where a branch railroad turned toward the mines of Oumihuirischie, but one regiment had remained on the Hacienda estate, so that the horses, who were very thin, could pasture on the open plains.

"And what have they done?" Villa asked him.

"Nothing but catch a drove of hogs, fill up a train, and send it off to Chihuahua..."

"Do they have locomotives?"

"In Bustillos, no; I can't say whether they have or not in San Antonio."

The rebel thought for a moment; in front of him the plain spread away without a single ripple, covered with tall fodder grass that was beginning to turn green. The heart of the Hacienda estate could be well seen, with its long white walls reflecting in the sun, and the cupola of the Sulcoagas family chapel. Villa knew that Hacienda well, from the days before Don Francisco Badaro's revolution began. Near the group of buildings the dark spots which were the horses could be clearly seen. "If I seize it," thought Villa, "I'll leave them without animals to follow me." But it was too close to the Hacienda, and before he could get there, the soldiers would come out to defend it. On the other side, ten or twelve kilometers away on the flat ground, appeared the station of San Antonio, with some long dark lines, the trains, enlarged by the clarity of the air. Surely
the Carrancistas had not noticed the proximity of the rebels, because the
vanguard of the column, twelve or fifteen riders, had hardly showed in
the mouth of the pass.

It was mid-afternoon and no movement was perceived on the broad
prairie. In full sunlight, without a cloud or a puff of wind to raise the
dust, it would have been dangerous to venture through the plain. The sol-
diers would see them instantly, and possessing artillery, could bombard
them.

"Did you see if they were carrying guns?"

"I didn't see any."

"In case they have..." Turning his horse, he rode back into the can-
yon, where the main body of his men were. "Dismount!" he shouted to them.
"Loosen the cinches and see if you can asleep here until it gets dark." He
himself set the example, jumping lightly to earth and freeing his horse
from the tight cinches; he untied his reins and taking the end of the rope
in his hand, climbed half way up the side of the hill, sat down on the
ground, back to a tall straight rock, from where he looked out over his
column. There was not one single man or animal that he couldn't see. He
pulled his sombrero down over his face and sat still. It couldn't be told
whether he was asleep or whether he stayed awake.

The other rebels stretched out on the ground to rest. There was among
them a man named Miguel Contreras, whom Tiburcio had met on the march to
Trenza two years before. He belonged to the Villa Brigade then, under
Jose Rodrigues, now dead. Miguel had carried the Maya boy behind him since
they left the ranch, and when they stopped to rest, he joined Tiburcio.
"He is not the same now," he said to Tiburcio, making a gesture with his head toward the rock. "He is more distrustful than ever since Governor Gameros put out a new law, that anybody who would kill 'Pancho Pistolas' or hand him over alive, would receive fifty thousand silver pesos."

"Does he know it?"

"Naturally. He laughed when they brought him a paper in which the decree was printed, and what do you think he said? That it was too much money for one single head!"

"But it made him mad, surely?"

"Hell, no! Can you imagine what it is to distrust everybody? So many have turned on him, even those that were said to be of his best men, that outside of the 'lorados' that he has left, he doesn't have confidence in anybody. Remember how he sat down at your ranch at noon when you gave him his dinner? In a corner, so close to the wall that nobody could get behind him, and with his pistol right at hand. The ones that cook his food, and their children, if they have any, have to first taste everything he wants to eat, so they won't poison him like a dog."

"I don't think anybody around here would want to kill him. They're all Villistas."

"They were—not now. When he was winning, and everybody with him had money and good horses, and a house in every town where we could go, indeed they were Villistas. But there was the fight with Carranza, the defeat in Celaya, the bad luck of the expedition to Sonora, and now everybody says he is a bandit, and that we are no better, going around stealing cattle. Of course, because we have to have something to eat, but not to
make men who were our friends before shoot at us now. And now that there are so many generals with the Carrancistas who were with us before, and now that they are after us..."

"Really? But, who?"

"What good is letting out names——it's a revolution. The defenses were organized, and when we get near a town, everybody takes to the mountains with their women and children, their cattle, their horses, and then they call the men from another town, and so we always have them on top of us. And I tell you that we never know where the Old Man sleeps."

"Does he go off?"

"Every night. He leaves us in camp, goes over everything well to see if anyone is missing, and then he gets on his horse and disappears. Nobody can follow him, because he runs the risk of getting shot. If an emergency occurs, don't move, stay where you are, because if you want to go to some arroyo, or near a cave, when least expect he is near, and he thinks you are spying on him and he won't pardon you."

Miguel's horse, on breaking into a trot, loosened his saddle and began to try to kick it off; the rider went to unsaddle him, and Tiburcio sat thinking of the news his friend had told him. Pancho Villa was right; fifty thousand pesos was a lot of money for one head, and the idea of collecting them might occur to anybody. But that any man under his command might betray him seemed impossible. He himself——would he be capable of——go on, what nonsense!"

He arose and helped Contreras carry his saddle to the place where they had been talking; he threw his arm over Miguel's shoulder and resumed the interrupted conversation. "I, on my word, would not be capable of selling
him out."

The other looked at him fixedly, as if he might wish to make out some bad intention in Tiburcio's words. "Look," he said to him, "let's not talk about this any longer, neither you nor I. It's better not to think about it, because there's sure to be someone who will go to him and tell him that we have been talking about this."

Nobody seemed to be paying any attention to them; most of the others, worn out by the prolonged marches, weak from night watches, were sleeping like logs from the time they lay down where the grass was the thickest, or on some patches of warm and on the bank of the stream. Only a few sentinels posted at the entrance of the canyon were watching with eyes fixed on the Bustillos house, which, at sunset, was turning yellowish. The wind had begun to blow and the foliage was swaying. Two or three rebels were running on foot among the rocks, following some horse that had escaped, and above all of them, the Old Man was still leaning against the straight rock, with his sombrero over his face, in the same position.

"Who knows if he is watching us! He must have noticed that, while the others were asleep, we were talking. You'd better lie down right now; cover your face with your sombrero, and listen."

"Do you think he notices?" asked Tiburcio while he stretched out on his back and pretended to go to sleep. At his side the boy was snoring.

"I'll bet you there isn't a fly in the whole canyon that he doesn't see. You'll see when we start again; he names the vanguard, tells them the road, because it is an old one he has drawn inside his head, and then watches us pass one by one, until the very last man. At times we have been no more than thirty, but parties that were on the other side
join us, and we become quite an army. It makes no difference to him: he passes us all in review and stays at the tail end, in such a way that he sees no more than the backs of the men and the haunches of the horses. And yet, so suspicious is he, he turns back every once in a while over the road that we have passed, to see that nobody is following him.

"One time, when he was beginning to take this precaution, we were coming back from Sonora after things had gone so badly for us. We had no more than three hundred men, because he had ordered the parties to divide. Now you know how it is: suddenly he makes us take some thirty-league marches, and, finally, we find that there are others here waiting for us. Well, we were going to fall on Tamosachico, where the Carrancistas hadn't arrived yet. Near Yepónera we had already come some twenty leagues that day since the sun came up. All of us were tired, the horses, too, and he at the end of the column. There are some leaning slabs of rock around there, very slippery, that edge off into a very deep gorge. There was no more than a little trail where a horse could barely get through. He had told us not to spread out, but to go one right behind the tail of another, in case anything might happen, and that's how we were going along.

"Nobody was speaking, because when a man has been balancing himself on a horse for twelve hours, he doesn't feel like chatting. A good many of us were half asleep, which is the worst thing, because if, in some lurch, you give the wrong pull on the rein, your horse would side-step and throw you off. On account of this, I prefer the flat country. Well, the fact is that we were all cursing. Then were we going to stop? I tell you that he wouldn't even give us time to eat: each man was chewing his tortillas in the saddle, and if you wanted to get off, you had to bear it.
"There was a boy; I don't know where he must have joined up, but I think it was after we had been defeated north of Hermosillo. He had no more than got in his saddle, poor little boy, and as he was riding a bad horse, the animal and he both got tired at the same time. Little by little the rest were leaving him behind, because he was minding the order to ride close to the one ahead, and was cutting himself out of the column, in such a way that the rest of us were getting ahead of him one by one—do you understand me? Well, on passing close to him, we saw his face; it would have made you pity him, because he was yellow, his mouth was open, and his dirty eyes, the color of ashes, were closing. He asked the same thing of each man, 'Are we almost there?'

"Some, on seeing him so exhausted, told him 'Yes', even though we knew well that it was still three or four leagues to Yerónima. Others, bad men, told him that when the sun went down, we would be half-way there, and the poor boy turned even more yellow. His stomach hurt him, because he said there was too much water in his bladder, and he could not get down or stop. You understand me. The case is that, as I told you, all of us left him behind. I confess that we were tired, too, because it was a terrible ride over such a bad road, but, finally, one finds out what this life is, and his body gets accustomed to it.

"It had to be: the old man caught up with him, as he had noticed that the boy was out of line. I think he must have distrusted him, because he looked very big, and he did not believe the poor boy was not able to stay in the saddle; and, of all bad things, he was the latest to have volunteered. I imagine the old man thought something bad about him, as he rode behind him a long time, without finding out what was
wrong, nor looking at him from all sides. The boy did not turn his face.
I believe that, without knowing who it was who came up behind him, he
said, 'Brother, will it be long till we get there?'

"The Old Man told him the truth. 'Inside of two hours you can com-
mence firing, if there are enemies in Yerena.'

"'I can't now,' he said, and stopping his horse, he got off to go
and stand near a tree to do what he had to do; you know what it was. The
Old Man did not lose a movement, and when he came back, he asked him,
'Are you tired, boy?'

"'Yes, chief, and I think I'll stay here awhile, and catch up with
you later...'

"I don't know if the Old Man took pity on him, and did what he did on
account of it, or if he didn't want the boy to stay behind him. The fact
is that when he saw the boy going to his horse to catch him by the bridle
and let him walk freely, he said to him, 'Poor little boy—rest—rest
in peace—but you won't catch up with me.' And in less time than it takes
to tell it, he shot him in the head. The boy fell over the rocks and went
rolling down the cliff. Since then, anybody who gets tired stands it..."

"It seems to me," said Tiburcio, after thinking a while, "that what
you wanted was to give me a piece of advice..."

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When night had fallen, the column began the march. All were in-
structed about what they were to do: to follow the one ahead without los-
ing sight of him, not to speak, not to light a cigarette, to make the least
noise possible. The man in front was guided by a star that Villa had in-
dicated to him; it was in the direction of the arroyo of Nogales, and had
to be followed in a straight line in order to come out exactly in the middle, between the Pestillos horses and the troop that was in San Antonio. The rest had to follow the guide, four abreast. Altogether the string of men and horses was a little more than a kilometer long.

From the time the sun went down, the wind began to blow over toward the ridge of mountains. Lights were seen in the station and in Hacienda; the chapel bell rang, alarming Villa, who feared that he had been discovered, and that the ringing was the signal for the troops to assemble. Then the chief passed the word along for everybody to proceed at a trot.

The plain became quiet once more, with no more sound than the bawl of some stray head of cattle, long and plaintive as the cry of a wounded man, and the whisper of the wind.

Contreras had again mounted the boy behind him, and Tiburcio, who had nothing to ride, went running along at an Indian trot, halfway down the column, determined not to be passed by any horseman. Notwithstanding the fact that he was old, his powerful constitution overcame the fatigue of the march, and he kept trotting without a false step, rhythmically, breathing evenly. The riders made more noise than he, because they always carried something that jingled on their trappings, something that clashed against the gun lashed under the thigh, that vibrated in the stirrups, or struck against the saddle horn.

In an hour they came to the railroad line. One caught up his lasso, and throwing the loop over the telegraph wires that vibrated as if they had canaries inside them, gave such a strong pull, making his horse sit back on its haunches, that the wires fell to earth.

"Just in case..."
The ones who came up after him said to him, "Don't you want us to tear up the track, Colonel?"

"It isn't worth the trouble."

They passed over the tracks; they were in the exact spot to close their claws. Nothing moved on either side, but the tracks gave the impression of danger, since the enemy was on both flanks. About two hundred meters away, the square shadow of a house loomed up in the darkness: the Llano station, dark and silent. Twenty men were detached to see if there was anyone, or anything that could be used, but also with the warning not to set fire to the building, and they came back saying that it was empty, with doors and windows broken in. The war had already passed along there.

Tiburcio raised his head and looked at the sky. While he stayed on the other side of the tracks, the chief gave orders to quicken step, and the only child in the column wanted to sleep. Looking upward, he erased from his mind the party of Villistas, the plain, the son riding behind Contreras' saddle, holding on. Up there nothing had changed: the "Three Kings" exactly over his head, and at one side, the "Little Car", with a cross of stars on the point of the beam. He had seen it just that way the night before, when in the door of his cabin he was going over the idea of again becoming a soldier of Francisco Villa; behind him the children were saying their prayers, and when they finished, his wife called him to bed, a thick straw mat under a quilt; the children snored, stretched out under the same blanket in innocent promiscuity, and he felt his wife tracing a cross with her fingers on her tired brow, while she was finishing her prayer, "And deliver us from all evil, amen."
"Old man, you're falling behind..."

For a fact, Contreras and the boy were now far ahead. With a long trot he overtook them when the vanguard came to the bank of the motionless and milky lagoon, which looked like an enormous white canvas stretched to dry on the prairie grass. Following the edge, covered with thick mud ooze, the rebels continued their march toward the north. In the darkness it was difficult to distinguish their silhouettes. They felt themselves to be parts of an uneasy and watchful chain; each link pulled head, and in its turn, pulls. At times, a star is reflected on the glancing mirror of a gun barrel, and seems a flash of lightning flickering among the horses.

The silence of everything is oppressing; it seems like a caravan of ghosts that must disappear at the slightest sound of real life. When some rule with the impedimenta gets tired and sleepy, and steps out of line into the quiet water, splashing, a rider turns him back with blows of his quirt, without a word, without a cry. And when one of the men going along went over, throws out his arms and yawns, from both sides, in front and behind, hisses come at him like the buzzing of wasps.

It must have been past midnight and the lagoon had been left far behind, pale and dead. An hour later the column, without lighting fires to heat food, camped on the Rubio Hacienda.
On the following day Villa sent for Tiburcio, and while the column was trotting north in the direction of El Carmen, he had him march at his side along a wagon road.

"Look, old man," he began, "I don't want you to think bad of me for what I did yesterday. On my word as a man, what I wanted to do was to remove all your worry about coming along. Right now you're probably going along thinking "My wife—my wife," and when we get into battle, your knees will buckle up. I'm telling you from experience; I have left many women, and to an exact number I don't know how many children I have, and I always go along half preoccupied thinking that the Carrancistas will take their revenge on them. You, now you are peaceful, because you know that nothing bad can happen to your wife..."

Tiburcio looked and looked at him, without being able to take his eyes off him. On speaking to him, Villa did not appear to be much interested in him; he was watching the advance of the column, and, at a walk, balancing his body to the step of the horse. By spells, the old Lion wanted to throw his gun in the chief's face and shoot one shot, but then he changed his mind when he heard the voice, trying to be amiable.

"Now imagine," he went on saying to the old man, "that some day a bullet would come out of your gun, and like shooting anybody else, it would kill me, split my skull, and you would go back to your ranch. You would not find your wife, and then you would say, 'What did I gain by killing the chief, who loved me so much?' You would begin to weep, and the rest of your life you would regret having been so foolish and not having aimed somewhere else. And you would say, 'Because of me they go on oppressing the people, because my General Villa was the only one who
could have freed them; my poor General, who was such a good man..."

Villa's voice was becoming more and more weepy, because he always was very easy to arouse emotionally, like those drunks who cannot stand a sad face, who cry and embrace each other, swearing eternal love. Tiburcio also suffered from the same soft-heartedness, and little by little he was weakening.

"No, General, I swear to you..."

"Wait a minute; some day they'll tell you that they'll give fifty thousand pesos to the one who kills me or hands me over. It's true; they do offer it, but one actual gift is worth more than a hundred promises: don't think the silver is going to be turned loose to the one who presents himself saying he has killed me. He won't even be given the money if he proves it with my head, which is the piece they've offered fifty thousands pesos for, believing that the rest of my body isn't worth anything. Then they'll invent the lie that you killed somebody else somewhere, and you'll reproach yourself severely. And you will think, 'For this did I forfeit my General Villa, who was my friend, and who loved me like a brother?''"

Tiburcio could bear no more; he caught hold of his leader's leg, embracing it and leaning his head against his thigh; the tears sprang from him like a cataract and soaked the rider's trouser leg. Neither the horse nor the man stopped walking, and marched along that way for quite a while. Tiburcio made promise after promise; he was loyal to his general, and he had always been looking for him; he had always taught his son, the little boy riding behind Miguel Contreras, to be a Villista, and the two of them would have their hides stripped from their bodies
to do what he wished. If he distrusted them, it would be better to shoot him here in the head right now, without his seeing it, so that he wouldn't have the pain of knowing his chief did not believe him.

"That's all right—that's all right—I believe you. I am going to give you a horse, and from now on you will ride in my guard." And when they halted at noon, Villa went to one of the mules that was carrying boxes of ammunition on its back, opened two big boxes of cartridges, distributed them, and gave the mule to Tiburcio to ride.

"Your feet must be hurting you. Get on this mule, until we find a good horse for you, that's worth at least five hundred pesos." He filled his cartridge belt, embraced him, and gave orders to resume march.

The mule carried no saddle, but a packsaddle of dry leather, so wide that Tiburcio had to sit with his legs spread out as if he were riding two horses at once, but it was better than walking. He adapted himself as best he could and caught up with Miguel Contreras. "Let me carry the boy now," he said, and taking him, the two shared the big saddle comfortably. Afterwards he told Contreras very happily everything that his General Villa had said to him.

"Now you'll see: he goes around saying things like that to everybody. The Old Man is very clever. The next thing will be for somebody to tie you up tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"You'll see: one of the Military Staff will come to you and say, 'Tiburcio, you have all the confidence of the chief, and he commands me to give you a commission; here's a man who we believe wants to trick
us; you are to get next to him and watch him so he won't escape. If he
gets away from you, the General will be very angry with you and who knows
what will happen to you!"

"And what's bad about that?"

"He's told the same thing to others; you are watching them, but
they are watching you; and there is yet a third person watching you
three, and like that, from trick to trick, he even suspects his most
trusted officers..."

"You're exaggerating, the same as with that story of the boy who got
tired on the road."

Contreras paid no attention to him, but whipped his horse and rode
off at a sudden gallop.

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With the boy behind him, hanging onto his belt, Tiburecio rocked
along in silence like the rest. This abstraction of the crowd surprised
him; he found it strange that hundreds of men who were united, perhaps
for life, should march side by side, indifferent, enwrapped in themselves,
mutually hostile. Was it the result of an order of the chief, or did some
other motive inspire it? He did not understand why, from the moment the
march began, the troop that had been at ease, noisy, jovial, and animated,
had become hushed. Was it because of the fear of attracting danger, bat­
tle, and death? Perhaps, because while advancing all of them were spying,
watching; their glances scattered over the countryside, fearful of see­
ing a cloud of dust or a plume of smoke rise up, watching to detect any
movement in the foliage that might indicate the presence of a man. They
didn't rest in watching, turning their heads from one side to another,
trying to see through trees to find out if enemies were behind them, or searching the treetops to discover if there were some lookout in them waiting to give the signal to attack. Tiburcio felt all this in the uneasiness of the troop, heavy as a box of ammunition. He understood that his companions today wanted to have eyes on all sides, even in the backs of their heads; to be the color of earth, and so small that the grass could hide them. It was because they all felt themselves to be in enemy territory, and Tiburcio remembered that only three years before everything around had been Villista—land and air, men and their workings. Then they all rode happily, confidently, knowing that in haciendas and towns they always had friends, allies, and comrades.

"That's right," he thought, "but then we were a part of the constitutionalist army, and we were fighting against the usurpers. Now, what are we?"

Some of the faces told him; neither were they the same, for many of them held something of tragedy. Seeing certain men of the column with their glances restless and grim; their gestures of hatred; their scars; their indifference, he ended by asking himself if they were fighters who voluntarily seek death for a popular cause, or fugitives for whom liberty exists only in the deserts, and who defend their lives like persecuted beasts.

"Are we soldiers, or are we..." Tiburcio's thought paused, frightened at the edge of the word. It drew back, then went to take another flight, deliberately, over the same precipice. "It seems that the light makes them bad, the day uncovers them, the sun watches them and accuses them."

Why doesn't the night extend itself, take in all the hours, make itself
erfcermlt
In the shadows are security, confidence, protection. Darkness surrounds them, binds them, embraces them as friends, loves them as brothers, because their souls are also shadows, and their thoughts, their plans, their passions, their lives, are shadows—shadows. Where they go they submerge all in everlasting darkness. They are a blot on the sun; they are chaos. They carry death in themselves, even while living.

He remembered: the Northern Division, battalions, regiments, artillery, trains, cities. On the outside all the men were alike in appearance: their uniform. On the inside, alike in action: their discipline. Thousands of men. Triumphs. They surrounded cities, no matter how big they were; they flooded the prairies, no matter how wide. One died flinging shouts of enthusiasm between spurts of blood, one fell seeing others go on. Before being clouded forever, one's eyes were dazzled by victory. All around, the admiration of the people; esteem, affection.

He observed: the rapid but small column; only riders; no arms but rifles. The desert surrounds them; silence covers them. Outside, all the men alike in appearance: misery. Inside, all alike: despair, hatred. And other things: defeat, persecution. They flee from the towns, no matter how small; they avoid the prairie, because on it even that pitiful column is noticeable. The silence is indicative of fear, of disunity. One who falls perhaps sees the others abandon him and flee to save themselves. Around them, the adhesion of the countrymen, now organized in Social Defenses. Hostility, opposition, peril. Turbio's thought flung itself headlong into the abyss: "We are bandits!"
All? No! But there is a sign that equalizes them, a mark that
distinguishes them from other men, that separates them, that checks
them. Their bodies are for the gallows. When they are surrounded,
when they are conquered, they will die. The one who does not escape
will swing from a limb, and anyone who sees him will take pleasure in
it, seeing on his brow the sign, the word "bandit". All of them aren't,
but he who falls will have no time to tell it or to beg mercy.

"It's all right. We won't ask pardon. We'll defend ourselves!
We'll kill! We are bandits!"

All? No! Why doubt that there in the troop unrolling itself along
the dusty road are men like himself, who went into battle impelled by a
common sentiment, in many of them never defined, in search of a general
betterment for the people of the country? Who presented themselves with
horse and rifle to the nearest Revolutionary chief, offering life and
blood to overthrow a government built on crime? They, who did not rob,
who did not murder, who did not take advantage of the struggle to en-
rich themselves, nor violate women during the sacking that the greedy
rabble performed, who did not execute prisoners or set fire to homes—
why do they have to be like the others?

If they have killed, it was in battle and through the necessity of
the struggle, without hatred for the soldier on the other side, at whom
they aimed and struck down. In justice, they cannot be called, then,
bandits.

"Then why are we going along here like this?"

In other times the one who came to the end of the chain had in his
hands power, money; he shared everything; some received promotions;
others, honors; others, gold. Any who followed him received much, because there was much, and with high positions and money they acquired everything to satisfy body and spirit. And then, he was beaten, he fell, he saw his own men scatter, abandon him, persecute him, shoot at him. Those who didn't hide their admiration, those that bowed down before him straightened up on seeing him defected and slandered him, looking for the most insulting words to revile him.

And he rebelled, punishing whoever fell into his inexorable clutch. In his disillusion, hatred, rage, and cruelty, desire for revenge went unrolling with frightful intensity. And when he touches, he kills; when he insults, he destroys; when he looks, he paralyzes. His hatred has the force that his Division had before; he buries the plains, he makes the mountains tremble. At his name alone, cities shrink within their strongholds. Wherever a fire is lit, wherever a shot is fired, wherever a body is found decomposing, it is believed to be the curse of his touch.

"I have the honor to inform you," said a general of whom news was asked concerning the whereabouts of the rebel, "that Francisco Villa can be found anywhere and nowhere."

It is then that he needs those men whom he has won over, not with high positions, not with gold, but with a glance, a word, or a good deed that he himself does not remember. They follow him who did not leave their names written in the hall of fame of the constitutionalist army, those who did not attach a price to their cooperation, those who did not sell their loyalty like a quarter of beef.

And hatred of him blinds them, thirst for revenge upon him now torments them.
They are on the desert; snow is falling; they are hungry. A train goes by; they hold it up; take the clothing off the passengers; eat a few mouthfuls and ride off.

Outside the law

They come to a town; they ask for dinner; they are denied it; they take it by force.

Outside the law

They pass through a hacienda; they fire from the Defenses; and in reprisal the Villistas burn the house.

Outside the law

In order that they won't have anything to eat, one general drives all the livestock to his hacienda, far away. They destroy bridges, tear up tracks.

Outside the law

Anyone they capture, they hang, with no preamble. All that is being outside the law.

"That's all right! They'll never get a chance at us: our carbines will thunder."

Then why are they here? Why do they flee; why go hungry; why travel through snow and across deserts? Why defy the enormous mass of enemies? If they were to present themselves to the government, saying, "We are mistaken and we are ready to give Villa up," men would receive them, give them money, and turn them loose like dogs of prey to hunt him down, because they know his scent and his track, and would smell him out without fail.

Then the law would open like a door and they would pass inside.
"That's all very well, but we are faithful to Francisco Villa."

"He is the most terrible of all murderers!" said those who two years ago took advantage of his triumphs, and who now revile him.

"He is the national shame of Mexico, the scourge of the North, the scourge of the world: He robs, murders, assaults, destroys, burns, demolishes! He challenges the stranger, puts the country on the verge of international war, ruins his fatherland, and wherever he steps, the track of his foot is filled with blood!"

"It may be so, but we are faithful to Francisco Villa. We are ready to die for Francisco Villa."

The instinct of danger bound Tiburcio to the rest of the men in the column, braided him with all and every one of them, and he, though he was not, had become bandit.

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On the Carmen hacienda, in order to rest and get dried meat, corn, brown sugar, and other food, to wait for the guides who were to inform them of the actions of the enemy, the column camped. An officer of the guard approached Tiburcio, who was taking the trappings from his mule and tethering him, and laying an arm over his shoulders, said to him in a whisper, "Listen, old man, you are going to be in the guard now, because the chief has ordered it; but while we are reorganizing it, you will have this commission: there are a couple of fellows here that we don't trust, because it seems that they want to desert. You understand; they're the kind that will break away if they get the chance. The General wants to give you proof of his confidence; you are to join them and see that they don't escape. Don't let them out of your sight, because if one
gets away—well, you know how the chief is—then he gets enraged about something, he does something terrible...

"All right; I'll watch them."

The officer made a gesture toward two men who were coming toward Tiburcio, looking at him fixedly.
Tiburcio understood that from that moment he was both prisoner and jailer, for he did not doubt that those two companions, tied like himself by the same chain, had received the same order: watch, watch. Contreras had not lied, and surely he was also entangled. With whom? He could ride ahead or fall back freely during the march, going to chat with some or others in the halts, and on the afternoon of the wait before going to Bustillos, nobody came to interrupt him when he talked to Tiburcio on the bank of the arroyo. "They must have been watching him from a distance," he thought, and then, seeing his two guardians—his two prisoners—finishing unsaddling, he went toward them and spoke to them. "We are supposed to ride together; I am Tiburcio Maya."

They stood looking at him; one had gold-rimmed spectacles with heavy lenses, and wore riding breeches and strong boots; the other was a small fat rancher, dirty and ragged. They held out their hands to him.

"Pleased to meet you. I am Lieutenant-Colonel Balboa, formerly a Federal, but now a soldier. Now you see what the tricks of fate are: I joined the Northern Division as an engineer; time came and went, and now there's nothing that a specialist in fortification can do in this column, they have demoted me." He stopped, looking suspiciously at Tiburcio and the other man, on whose shoulder he amiably dropped his hand. "Don't think I'm complaining, Celestino; on the contrary, I am very honored this way in showing my respect for General Villa, for whom I have as much regard as you."

Celestino laughed stupidly, showing teeth covered with green crust, like an oak leaf stuck between his big protruding lips.
"The same goes for me. Whether you want to or not, you have to put up with it. You started out being a Villista, and you'll have to die Villista. Isn't that right, old man?"

"Yes, we're all in for it."

"That's right. You two take the horses to water. I'll be keeping an eye on you from here."

The Lieutenant-Colonel was leading the two horses toward the watering troughs, which formed a square in the middle of the little plaza in front of the big house of the hacienda. An open well in the center let the water run out in big troughs. The horses and men were drinking, in a mass, disputing for room with shoves and coarse expressions. Some put their faces in the water to drink and clean off the dust at the same time. The horses splashed in the puddles all around the drinkers, and the pulleys of the well creaked, pulling up the buckets.

While the former army officer waited patiently for a space to clear out for his animals, Tiburcio overtook him. "Why do you let yourself be commanded like that? It's only right for each man to take his own horse..."

"Don't shout, don't shout—you don't know what this is: it's not an army, but a hell. I know that I can talk to you and you won't give me away; at least, you are not corrupted yet..." As if absent-mindedly, he turned his head and made out Celestino sitting on the corral fence, watching them. He pretended to be arranging the halter on one of the horses, massaged their bellies, and when he hid his head, leaning over behind the beasts, he went on with his story in fragments. "He's a sly, do you understand? Poor little horse, you're awfully lean. He tells
whatever one says and what one doesn't say. I have to say up this
stirrup. The one that was in our party before you—then are your
horses going to stop drinking, man? Do you think you can fatten them
up on water? ... The chief killed him. Do I get some water now? You
go on; I'll take mine when my turn comes. What did you say? You'll
be in the same fix!"

Five or six animals took their heads out of the water and lifted
them, blowing foam between their slack lips. Balboa went up to the
trough and Tiburcio followed him.

"Why did he kill him?"

"Hey, you! A drop of water for these poor horses! Gossip, sir;
pure lies. We were coming from Durango, and one night, poor Macario—
we were all complaining because we had made a thirty-league march, may-
be more, and he said, 'I'm......of this life.' We went to sleep, and
the next morning I saw him hanged. Let's see, imbecile, let me take
this bucket!" Pulling on the rope, he was able to drown his voice in
the squeaking of the pulley. His voice, thin and toneless, like that
of a dying man, went on speaking to Tiburcio, and he looked in the op-
posite direction, pretending under the suspicious vigilance of the spy.

"What do you think Celestino told me? 'Did you see him, Federal?
His tongue was so long it hung out of his mouth.' Who besides Celestino
could have accused him? Now, watch yourself, old man. Help me, carry
my coat while I take Celestino's horse back to him; afterwards, give it
back to me."

They separated, and when it was growing dark, Celestino came up to
Tiburcio. "Hey, old man, don't go hiding from me. Come with me, now
that we are bunking together. What did that Federal four-eyes say to you when you were talking?"

"He was telling me that when he was a Federal he had a black horse..." He walked on a few steps, as being near that man disgusted him.

"Stop right there!" Celestino said to him. "Tell me what he said about me!"

"Not a word."

"Then why did he turn his back to where I was?"

"Ask him."

"Now, listen, you'd better watch out. If that fellow gives us the slip, it'll go bad with you."

"Why me, and not you?"

Celestino laughed his green laugh, and put his hat on with an insolent gesture. "I'm as free as air..."

"Why me?"

"Because! Because you two are fixing it up to get away."

"That's a lie!

"Like your grandmother, it is!"

Tiburcio wanted to knock him down, but the other had put his hand on his pistol, even though he didn't unsheath it.

"Calm yourself, old man, and don't get mad at me because you're repenting. Come on, let's go to sleep. And don't try any funny moves on me!"

The old man snorted. Dog! Slime! Who was he to treat them like no-goods? The next day he would go to General Villa and ask him to take
away that companion, because he himself was above all suspicion and
didn't want to have spies over him. When was that ever his custom in
the Northern Division? With hard fists and set jaws, he found his place.
It was on one end of the porch of the big house. All the roofed space was
full of sleeping men. In the shadows a head rose up. "Is that you,
father? You lost me."

"Yes, son, go to sleep." He lay down between the boy and the ex-
Federal, who was snoring like a pair of bellows. On his other side, with
his pistol pressed to his face, Celestino settled himself to go to sleep.

"Good night."

"Night..."

* * *

They were awakened by kicks and shouts.

"Get up, get up! Here come those devils!"

The camp was boiling in a tremendous confusion. In the dark night
the men were running toward the corrals where they had left their horses,
feeling for them in order to saddle them. Some found theirs quickly, and
left with them at a gallop through the gates, trampling men on foot who
were coming in to look for their own. Voices burst out like rockets
everywhere.

"First regiment, here! Boys! Hurry, hurry!"

"Who gave the word?"

"Mendoza, who just flew in here from Rubio."

There wasn't a single light on earth, nor a single star in the sky.
Men and beasts milled around in the thick and hostile dark. The horses
were frightened and several broke their martingales, got out of hand,
climbed on other horses, kicked men.

"Hurry, hurry!"

"Where are we going?"

"Who knows..."

"Where is the chief?"

"Who knows..."

"My horse..."

"Catch the first one you come to; everybody else will do the same."

At the corral gate a shout sounded above the din. "Five minutes to line up by those big poplars!"

Everybody left at once, jamming together trying to be first through the gate. A few mounted; the rest, grabbing the halter of the first horse their hands touched, saddled or unsaddled, his own or somebody else's.

"To the right, to the right..."

The mass scattered as if shot out of the corrals, at a dead run, toward the big trees. At the last, drawing lots for abandoned hats, blankets spread out on the ground, and spurs lost from riding equipment, came Balboa and Celestino, Tiburcio and his son. At the cries of danger, the spy had taken each of the other two men by the arm, and without letting them get away from him, had led them through the disorganized jumble, to the manger where their horses were eating; he watched them saddle, mount first, and made them ride in front of him.

"Hey, blind man," he shouted to Balboa when they had ridden out, "it seems to me that you must have tipped those monkeys off to come here. I think I'll tell the General."
The old officer seemed not to hear him and began to gallop after the others, in a grayish cloud of dust. When they came to the poplars, there were only a few left there, shouting orders.

"To the north, wherever you can! Don't pass the river; leave it at your left! Charge to the hills, where they split at Namiquipa."

"Now we're the last ones," said Celestino.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, General," he answered, recognizing the voice. Beneath one of the poplars was seen the outline of a rider, taller than the rest, with three men on each side.

"Get going, then—with no noise!"

Through the prairie the four hundred riders dispersed at a gallop. Some of the horses made missteps in the dark and rolled over, throwing their riders off. The Villistas now gave no cry: the only sound was that of arms bumping against saddles or the jingling of their ornaments. In a rhythmic gallop the troop flowed north. From the earth was rising a gray smoke like dust. The profiles of the mountains and the treetops were beginning to stand out, like very tall men wrapped in black sarapes, who, motionless, were watching the strange cavalcade. A rooster's crowing greeted the dawn from some nearby corral, while in the rearguard, not far from the heart of the hacienda, some shots broke the air.

"They're shooting at our rear," growled Celestino, turning his head. Behind him an enormous bird seemed to be jumping along: a dark mass rose up and fell back to earth, rhythmically. A film of dust surrounded it, and made profiles stand out: seven bulks, separated on top by the growing light, joined lower down by darkness.
The prairie went on spreading out; on one side, a narrow river
sunken like a scar in the earth; on the other, rocky hills, covered with
mesquite. The mass of rebels went on thinning out, stretching the spaces
between riders, drawing itself to a point like an arrow, and went on ad-
vancing. Suddenly, like a bonfire, it dawned.

The march lasted all day. On occasions, when they reached some
little grove of trees that offered shade and protection, Villa gave
orders to rest for twenty minutes, for a half hour, and then on again.
The horses were breathing like locomotives going uphill, their coats
shining with warm sweat, and their gallop was getting slower and slower,
until, at last, they broke into a long trot.

Hanging on with his arms around his father's waist, the little boy
was complaining. "I'm tired, papa," and the old man consoled him, promising
him a halt for a day and a night. At times he felt his son's arms, clinging
to his breast, were getting weak, slipping. "Hey, don't go to sleep!" The
boy murmured and pressed his legs tighter to the saddle.

Past midday a cloud of dust was sighted to the north, and the chief
came up. "That must be the 'defenders' of Mamiquipa," he said, and ordered
the column to turn off toward the northeast, in the direction of Santa Clara.

"There can't be many of them, General; we can attack them."

"A distrustful man is worth two, boy. While we don't know how many
there are, it's best to give them the slip, because if we meet them, the
best that can happen to us is to get caught by the tail by those fellows
coming from Bustillos."

Upon changing direction, the march of the Villistas became more dif-
ficult; they had to cross through several lines of hills on the diagonal,
higher every time. The horses took frequent bad steps; the men relaxed their aching legs and let them bump against the sides, like beginners. Nevertheless, there were no orders to proceed at a walk, and the race went on, now weak and dragging.

A long canyon opened its mouth, showing its neck that stretched in the direction of the march, and the column threw itself inside, to rest from so much up and down.

"Now, boys, proceed at a walk..."

On one flank, in the hills that ran parallel to the canyon, about three kilometers away, a rider seeming to be entirely alone was traveling in the same direction as the Villistas, following the line of those rocky vertebrae. He disappeared only to show up again hundreds of meters farther on, and nobody paid any attention to him.

At the end of the canyon was a ranch called El Piojo. There were two empty houses and a little garden in which two old women who could hardly move were bent over among the plants. Over the lettuce and the turnips, a peach tree, solitary and happy, opened its flowering arms in a shower of yellow and rosy petals; bare of leaves, perfumed and slender, the tree was basking in the freshness of the afternoon, and under its shade, caressing as a woman's hand, the old women saw the column pass.

All this was unfolding itself on the top of a little knoll covered with palmettos, and in a little while disappeared behind the round profile beaten by the wind.

A rider turned back toward the ranch at the same time in which a group of fourteen or fifteen mounted men appeared on the other side, appearing to be following the tracks of the Villista cavalry; the rebel
hesitated a moment, and then went toward the garden with a long gallop; he reached the women when the group of ranchers fired at him; over his head was woven a mat of danger that was descending and spreading out; a bullet pierced the rosy plumage of the tree, a few petals fell, fluttering like butterflies.

The man was almost closed in, and by their shots, the others assured him they were his enemies.

"Listen, old women!" he shouted. "Cover that peach tree, because it's going to freeze tonight! I want to eat its fruit in September!"

And then, like a projectile that carries its own power within itself, he climbed the crest of the hill followed by reports, and was lost behind the ridge, going toward his own men. It was Francisco Villa.

***

Two more times the members of the Social Defense of Namiquipa shot at small groups of Villistas detached from the column to stop them, while the rest advanced into the night, engaging in short skirmishes in which men on both sides were killed. On the "defenders" turning back, the rebels of the rearguard returned to the column, carrying four corpses laid across their own respective saddles.

Balboa was leading one animal on which a body was doubled and hanging over the saddle like a half-empty sack of flour. "They got him, General," he said, standing at attention before Villa in impeccable form, and gesturing toward the bloody remains.

"It must have been his turn, because nobody dies before his time."

They buried the four bodies barely below the surface of the ground, so as not to lose much time, and the troop continued its march.
On a horse that had bloodstains on the saddle and trappings rode Tiburcio between his son and Balboa.

"Listen, Federal," said the old man to the engineer, "did you notice that Celestino had a bullet-hole in the back of his neck?"

Balboa did not answer. He seemed to tremble. He shut his eyes, but the thick lenses of his glasses flamed as if a fire were crackling behind them. It looked as if those flashes were reflections of the sun, that was also burning, half sunken in the mountains.

In the night the frost fell suddenly, like Celestino.
Tiburcio, musing on some indefinite idea, rode in silence after his son, who, mounted on Celestino's horse still stained with blood on the haunches, sat where the reddish hairs had been plastered down in a crust covered with dust. And further on, the ex-Federal, Balboa, was balancing himself, enigmatically silent.

The Old Man never took his eyes off the ex-officer; he kept his glance on him constantly, abstractedly, as if all thought had escaped from him. On feeling himself watched, the Lieutenant-Colonel shortened his horse's pace to fall back with Tiburcio, and the two rode halfway down the silent column, as hushed as the rest. Then Tiburcio let his indifferent gaze fall on the bloodstains on Celestino's horse.

That night Balboa spoke to him. They were on sentinel duty at the entrance to a highway lined with ash trees, straight toward the heart of the hacienda on which they had camped.

"Tiburcio, are you sorry? I'm not, believe me," he raised his arm, letting his right hand fall on the old man's shoulder. "I'll tell you about Celestino: now that he has been left behind, my spirit is lifted and expanded, it has been freed, and it rejoices. It was crushed by distrust, treachery, villainy. Ignorant violence oppressed it, meanness humiliated it and enjoyed its apparent superiority. All that is ended. You see—a single shot."

"Yes, in the back of the neck."

The Lieutenant-Colonel stammered. "The place isn't important, doesn't matter. The matter is that he is dead. I had had enough. I rose above that man. Many times I thought: 'Why do we go on like this? What ideal is leading us? Where is this crazy machine taking us?"
"I've asked myself that same thing many times."

Indifferent to the interruption, the ex-Federal was becoming excited. "Reason takes fire like gunpowder, but it is also put out immediately. It is not possible to reason in this atmosphere. Nevertheless, it must be understood that we are here to defend ourselves, because we are weak. On the other hand, we would pursue. We do not hate, as the wild boar does not hate the dog: it runs when it can, and only when it is closed in by the enemy does it turn and fight him. We are like that: when pursued by a pack of hounds, we defend ourselves. We are fighting in our own defense, and nothing more. We kill in our own defense."

"And Celestino?"

"He hated, and he pursued."

They were silent in the middle of the night. The ash trees on the road were crying, and their branches were shivering. Wrapped in their overcoats, the two motionless sentinels seemed shadows of dead tree stumps in some fantastic sketch. On the dizzy ledge of their thought, ideas climbed to the rugged surface, and plunged down again into the chasm; they went turning one after the other, like cogs in a wheel. Thus, sleepless, while the rest of the column had submerged itself in the ocean of dreams, the two men exhaled a double monologue.

"The General wants to attack the Americans—he hates them."

"He's waiting for an opportune moment, or looking for a pretext."

"For him, his future is in shadows; he cannot see it, and because of that, he ignores the consequence of his acts. He does not reason, he doesn't deduce, nor look for reason. He believes his future will end when he dies."

"He is right. What matters the future to us, men cut off from
humanity? Ours cannot be different; it will be more or less prolonged,
but the end is immutable."

"Ours doesn't matter: men disappear, and the memory of their deeds
stays alive. Action: that's what's important. The author is swallowed
up in time."

"Not always. A great doer gives worth to what he does."

"A great doer—he!

"In a great event...

They stood face to face in the darkness. They could not see each
other. Between their two pairs of eyes rushed the course of coming
events, and both were astonished at what they saw: the confusion of the
struggle, and death overflowing its banks; the war passing a virgin
frontier; hatred seizing forbidden prey; audacity provoking the awaken-
ing of a giant, and his rage.

"Do you know what we're going to do, Tiburcio? Write a little
History."

"Yes. With bullets!"

* * *

On March 6 the column arrived at Palomas. On a prairie, the town
seemed to have stopped before it got to its destination, as if it were
afraid to place itself on the edge of the international boundary line,
and was caught shrinking, as if in ambush, not far from the intangible
line between races.

Farther to the north, like a woman leaning from her window, the
city of Columbus, New Mexico, offered herself; she seemed to come out
to meet one, easy and exciting. Wooden sentry-houses for indolent watchmen pretended a vigilance that was obligatory, but disagreeable for whoever had to exercise it; a deep ditch boasted of being a trench; some wire entanglements seemed to cover its appearance with their rusty barbs; and behind the small group of houses, like a supreme defender, a high stockade with a flagpole giving it importance. The fort!

"Is that all?"

The crazily warlike spirit of Pancho Villa must have smiled to itself. "Is that all?" Before him, forts considered as eternal by military experts had been blown up; before him, seasoned troops had been scattered; before him had fled, like smoke, divisions that boasted of being invincible. "Is this the Colossus of the North?" The man must have breathed with full lungs, blowing himself up as if he were rubber. He decided everything, but he was not alone, nor could he work alone. "The others, will they go on over?" He understood that he must ignite the spirit of his men. He needed a pretext. He waited.

He had four hundred soldiers, but his friends numbered thousands; all the inhabitants. When he presented himself under the trees or at some door in Palomas, old men, women, children with absorbed faces, all crowded to him, spoke to him. He found out everything; it was said that a great shipment of ammunition was going to pass through Columbus for him; it was said that he had called together various American politicians for a conference on the frontier, because he wanted to make offerings of friendship to the United States, and to obtain, if not their help, at least, their tolerance. "And what more? What more?" That they are suspicious. Already some American cowboys from the Palomas
Land Co., who were having a rodeo, galloped across the border when they heard Pancho Villa was near. "Fear never walks..."

The rebel left a memory: behind him, four American ranchers had been hanged—McKinney, Corbett, O'Neill, and that other one whose name Pancho did not even know. "Four—they're nothing."

"And how many American soldiers are there? Many?"

"Something like five hundred. The chief is Colonel Herbert J. Slo-cum, of the Thirteenth Regiment."

"Who is well acquainted with the town?"

A feeble old man with a big drooping mustache, pale face, and a voice that seemed to be dragged out of him, it was so heavy, approached Pancho and said to him, "I, my General."

"What is your name?"

"Leobardo Marquez, at your service."

"Come over here." The two drew to one side and talked together for more than a half hour. Marquez leaned over the ground and drew lines in the loose dirt with his rusty forefinger. And Villa, squatted, was questioning him.

***

The rebel chief left Palomas on March 7, leaving only forty or fifty of his men, trustees and loafers, in the barracks. And soon there came to Palomas, proceeding from the American side, unknown men who asked, "Where is General Villa?"

"He's gone. Over toward Sonora. He went to see if he can find a friend who owes him a little money—and who doesn't want to pay him on the level."
Not only the Villista soldiers said that, but also the people in the village; everybody had seen Villa and his men leave with big sacks of provisions piled on the mules; food as for a long march. And in the column, everybody said that the trip was for Sonora, on the other side of the ridge of mountains. Francisco Beltrán, the unyielding Yaqui general, smiled at the idea of visiting the rugged mountains of his people, and no one had looked for guides to take him through the defiles, hiring the best known.

On the night of March 8, the newspaper correspondents of American papers who had come to Columbus on hearing of the proximity of Villa, telegraphed to their papers: "Rebel chief is Sonora bound." And all the inhabitants of Palomas, Mexico, and of Columbus, New Mexico, drank their dreams in great gulps, believing to see Villa in the bottom of the cup, curling himself toward the mountains of the west, red and burning, like the ball of fire that lights the late afternoon.

***

In those times of war, thousands of Mexican countrymen who had not decided to take part in the struggle, helpless to work in agricultural pursuits, emigrated to the United States. They crossed the frontier in stragglers, dirty, straggly haired, hungry, like all emigrants whom misery drives to foreign lands. It was pitiful to see them cross the boundary line and enter the United States: they were herded in droves like cattle, driven to the Emigration Offices, where they were looked at with a scorn, how many times the Americans had wanted to drive that dirty mass of human flesh back into Mexico! But the Mexican was useful, a beast of labor, tireless and cheap, for the factories that were working day and night.
making products to sell to Europe at war; and they were also long-suffering farmers, accustomed to working the earth from before sunup—"It's all right; let the Mexicans in!" But, how! They were undressed, so that their clothing could be fumigated, as if they were plague-ridden. And as if some vermin or scab could still remain on their bodies, all the men were thrown into one tank, the women into another, naked, to be washed in an insecticide solution, with a gasoline base, like cattle that have to be dipped for ticks.

Those hungry people stood it all; misery was stronger than decorum; hunger and hope of near well-being made them hold back tears of shame, and enter the disinfectant baths without a protest. Thousands of men, and thousands of women, hundreds of starving children, entered those "prophylactic" tanks at El Paso, Texas, as the first act to being accepted as beasts of burden for the service of capitalism.

One day, when seventeen men were in the bath, a little flame, almost invisible it was so small, appeared on the surface of the insecticide solution: some match not put out by some nearby smoker, after having lit his tobacco. It was never known what happened. The case was that the liquid in which the laborers were submerged burned rapidly; the water did not put it out, and for a few seconds, perhaps minutes, the Mexicans heard in a foreign language orders to get out, which instinct had already told them. Their hair was burning; flames came out of their wet skin. Seventeen died. So goes the story.

Pancho Villa gave a yell when the version got to him, increased in the telling from mouth to mouth, that thirty-five Mexicans had been burned alive, "intentionally", in El Paso. Pancho had many faults, but he always
loved the people, feeling himself a part of them, and they a part of himself. The rebel, whose rage was touched off by the slightest spark of contradiction or defense, seemed to have gone crazy. His closest lieutenants never saw him so frightfully tragic as that night of the eighth of March. Perhaps in that moment he actually would have enjoyed tearing the heart of one of those hated men with his bare teeth. Had he planned the attack on Columbus? Had he abandoned his plan when he left for Sonora, understanding the uselessness of provoking the foreigner? Was it only a pretext that he found to convince his men, to excite them against the Americans? Or was it, in reality, a flash of crazy blindness that drove him across the frontier to kill? Only he knew, and he is dead. That night when he spoke to his men and told them what had happened in El Paso, he gave this tragic order:

"Muchachos! Let's kill ten for one!"

***

The calculation was made at dusk: the column was about thirty kilometers from Columbus, to the west, on the road from Palomas to Sonora. Pancho assembled his men and spoke to them in the picturesque fashion which was his custom; he related the death of the Mexicans burned alive in El Paso, and after exciting everybody with "Collect your debt in the Chinese way—beat it out of them!", he ended with those words, "The United States wishes to swallow Mexico. Let's see if we can't run this thorn in their windpipe. We're going to Columbus to kill as many Americans as we meet up with."

Pablo López was Villa's second-in-command that night, a mestizo with wide, angular cheekbones, lemon-colored, with a dozen stiff hairs
at either side of his mouth. He was cruel and decided, and had a past: he had "suppressed" seventeen Americans on assaulting a train at Santa Isabel. It was Pablo López who made the sign of the cross over everybody for the march which was commencing with "Death to the Americans!"

There had been a heavy, oppressive cold since night fell. On that plain, the track over which the winds galloped hour after hour from one direction to another, turning as if they were playing some happy game, a hundred circles of silence embraced the Villista column, center of a cyclone that hours later was going to move the world. On the horizon, where the darkness of the sky met the blackness of the earth, masses even blacker than the shadows rose up: mountains that looked like gigantic clouds, and enormous clouds that looked like mountains. On cutting through the air and shifting dirty sand, the reflections of the stars seemed to grow weak by their positions. Pancho Villa indicated the way to the north! And with Pablo López at his left, and Leobardo Marques, the old guide, at his right, he rode at the head of his column; the trot of his horse brought him to a square column, a four-faced pyramid, based in a block of cement.

"The frontier, muchachos! From here on we have to fight our way by main force. But listen to what I tell you; let's not stay here all our lives. We'll give them a real 'arrival' and then back to Mexico! In such a way that whatever happens, before dawn you are prepared to get together again."

"In Palmas?"

"No. It's best that we go at once to the south, to the bank of the river."
The party crossed the line. Without witnesses, in the sheltering
arkness, in the helping silence, the concealing night, the violation was
recorded, without a shout or a shot. Five hundred men passed close to
the pillar, possessed of an aggressive curiosity. "To see what they'll
do to us?" Sixteen mules, with four machine-guns and seventy boxes of
ammunition, which were traveling in the rearguard, were brought up to
the center of the column. Groups were formed, each with its own leader,
to receive instructions, and after a halt of ten minutes to organize the
arch, the invaders made a swerve to the right. They were two or three
miles from the frontier, near a railroad line, "El Paso & Southwestern".
Here they were following on a parallel in a uniform gallop. In three
ours half the distance to Columbus was put behind them.

At midnight a train passed from east to west. It was undoubtedly a
right, because the cars were all dark; only the bright headlight
fierced ahead, driving all danger from the track, which seemed to shatter
the weight of the cars. Not one clear gleam of light, nor the red
sent of the sparks that escaped from the engine passed the ball of black-
ess that covered the Villista column. The whistle sounded, throwing up
plumes of whitish steam, and its shriek split the night. That train
as like the line between two days: its passing tore a leaf from the
almanac. And the secret signs of the constellations marked the new
ate: Thursday, March 9, 1915.

"On, muchachos; spur your nags! We have to get there while they're
still amorous!"

As if it were slipping downhill like a snowslide about to bury a
city, the Villista army hurled itself toward Columbus, with greater
velocity at each spring.

"Like this, we'll get there fired up for starting in..."

"Let's see how many we can eat for breakfast!"

"Or how many eat us..."

Behind the machine-gun section was riding the trio of Tiburcio, his son, and Balboa. The boy, accustomed now to the restless marches of the Villistas, had received his carbine, and his infantile chest was bent under the weight of the crossed bandoleers. He was going into his first battle, and in the night favorable to the memory, he heard the echo of his father's words, "Someday he'll come, and we'll go at his side and never be afraid." He was not afraid! Of what? Combat, fire, flight, death? He knew none of them; in his childish ignorance, in the fatalism that his life had given him, he did not understand or appraise "to be or not to be". Like him, hundreds of boy soldiers had fought for the social revolution of Mexico, by instinct only, by the vague presentiment that they were in themselves a symbol: the child people, who hardly understood why they go to war. The vagueness of his ideas was concentrated, and as if from the shadows the fascinating vision of his mother emerged, he smiled.

"Father..."

"What?"

"Are you going to be near me?"

"Yes."

"Wherever I go?"

"Wherever you go..." Tiburcio, absorbed in thought himself, did not understand. Only the child.

***
At two in the morning they ceased to feel the cold. In the open
country men and beasts warmed themselves in galloring, and in the city,
citizens and soldiers had shut themselves in their houses to sleep un-
til dawn. Electric lights, which seemed to have shrunken into themselves,
too, were-isolated on the intersections of the streets, staining the
darkness of the city with their countless yellowish spangles. Huddled
up in the depths of the sentry houses, half a dozen sentinels were
sleeping, feeling the current of air that came through the loopholes
pass over their heads like a saw.

Sad solitude, that of a town folded down by cold; neither human
voices, nor burst of music escaping at intervals, like birds on the
wing, at the opening of a window; neither barks of watchful dogs nor
lowing of restless cattle. No steps of night-watchmen were heard on
the cement sidewalks, nor the sound of wheels on the dirt streets. The
City Hall clock, striking the hours and half-hours, let its strokes
slip to the edge of the plain, without finding even an echo.

Only in two houses was any light seen on the inside: the railroad
station, where the telegraphers were sleeping in their chairs, with
their feet on top of the table, and in a two-story frame building that
a projecting signboard announced to be the "Commercial Hotel". Below the
sign was a smaller one, with no light inside it: "A. L. Ritchie, Pro-
pritor". Through the glass panes of the door could be seen a vestibule
in whose center a big stove, red and big-bellied, gave forth an inces-
 sant roar.

Time seems to be dragging its feet. It is longer than thirty min-
utes since two o'clock sounded when it strikes half-past, and more than
a half-hour since that stroke was submerged in the night, and still
three o'clock cannot decide to leave the bronze bed in which it reposes.
The silence thinks, "I am eternal," and believing itself to be a god,
smiles beatifically and clasps its hands on its stomach.

A shot went through it, deflating it like a child's balloon.

The signal

Like water throwing itself over a steep and rocky course, when the
dam breaks which has held it back, and it goes roaring and smashing to
flatten the little trees that had grown in its old bed, and the houses
built on its bank, and cattle, and men, to cover all with the foamy
surface of its waves—thus was dashed over the town a flood of men, at
the firing of the shot that they were waiting for to break loose. Through
the streets formerly silent and deserted, the masses of riders and horses
made a frightful noise with their yells and shots, the striking of hooves
on the sidewalks, and the breaking of glass in windows pierced by bullets.

In a minute the city was in the dark, for all the street lights were shot
out by the unerring bullets of hunters, as if they were birds in flight.
And for a long while no lights were to be seen but the flash of shots,
until a red blaze, wrapped in smoke, spouted from the center of town:
it was the Commercial Hotel which was burning, converted into a funeral
pyre for the corpse of "A. L. Ritchie, Proprietor".

Obliged to leave by the blow of the bell-hammer, three o'clock fled
from the bell, timorously, without being heard by anybody, and fled to
take refuge in the desert.

Every minute a new fire broke out: after the hotel went the drug-
store, where "C. C. Miller, Druggist", was surprised asleep with his
clothes on, ready to fill a prescription.

In the adobe houses that could not burn easily, the Villistas broke in the windows with the butts of their guns, and once a gap was opened, they shot up the interior. Each man wanted to fill his quota: "Ten for one". Bodies of persons who were outlined at the windows, drawn there by the curiosity of the riot and fire, were run through; men who came forth from among the crackling houses, half-undressed and crazy with fright, fulfilled their destiny of paying a debt which they had not contracted. The sentinels gave up their lives when they raised their Springfields through the slots in the sentry boxes.

For half an hour the Villistas rode up and down through Columbus, with their wide hats on the back of their heads, stimulated by the burning of the houses and the fever of combat. They heard no shots but their own, nor more racing than that of their own horses.

It was because the American soldiers, surprised within the fort, hardly got ready to fight. It must have been a moment of cruel uncertainty for old Colonel Slocum, veteran of the Cuban campaign, where he spent three years, from 1899 to 1902, resisting the surprises of the revolts in the jungle. What should he do? Go out to fight in the streets with an enemy whose number he did not know? Stay inside the fort while the town burned, and leave the inhabitants who were still alive exposed to the fury of the invaders?

He reviewed his forces, ordered the machine-guns manned, gave the command for his cavalry troops to distribute themselves in different sections, loaded his heavy pistol, and went out to fight at the head of his men. He was a brave man, and whatever else it was, it was rather
an honor to fight face to face with Pancho Villa. Four o'clock...

The fires commenced to die down, the fuel being consumed; the city was once again in darkness in great patches; only sudden blazes that sprang from some not yet exhausted bonfire threw a subdued light through the deserted streets. Cautiously, with their guns before them, buried in long blue coats, the American soldiers advanced.

Not far, because from the first corner the fire of the invader began to oppose them. At each street intersection there was a skirmish, and of the hundred that there were, not all turned out in the favor of the Americans. Nevertheless, the Villistas began concentrating on feeling the enemy in front, at the left, at the right. Only at their rear, toward the Mexican frontier, did they know themselves free from danger. Like the hero of the legend who regained his strength touching mother earth.

It was not a battle; there were five hundred duels. Every Villista fought with an enemy—or with several. From the corners, from the doorcases, breast to earth, face to face, by shots, by blows, by abuses! In all ways they fought! Each man had his own episode. For many it was the last. And the rest, where have they been since, to report it? Pablo Lopes left, wounded. Leobardo Márquez, prisoner.

A machine-gunner having been killed, Pancho Villa got off his horse, to seat himself in the triangular seat, and leaning his head over the rapid-fire gun, stopped the advance of a crowd two squares away. But under the protection of the shadows, as if he had glided along the walls, came a gigantic American officer toward him, perhaps without knowing who he was. While the machine was shaking with Villa, who was looking only ahead, the soldier hoisted his heavy rifle like a club, and let it fall,
to crack the skull of the machine-gunner...

But it missed its mark: another head interposed itself before the butt could descend with its greatest force; the blow denounced the aggressor, and Villa, before he could raise his gun again, shot him in the head. "Who is this that put out his head?" A Villista lay motionless, stretched on the pavement, and toward him went Pancho, leaving his machine-gun silent for a moment. He wanted to see who it was who had saved him from a blow in the back. Almost by touch he recognized him: "Tiburcio..."

He put his face down to that of the fallen man, hoping to perceive a movement or a faint breath that would indicate that the old man still lived. And then he heard the crackling near him, a meter and a half away, of the machine-gun which he had left. Only the shots were not continuous, nor the time uniform, but uneven and slow. He turned his head; the boy. "What a race!" He straightened up and, understanding that Tiburcio was only unconscious, raised him in his arms and took him toward the horses. Other men bandaged the old man's head.

"Papa! Papa! Come with me..."

The rebel went back to the machine-gun, now silent once more; while the father, senseless, was taken to the south, the son had fallen on his face over the weapon. His loose arms were hanging at the sides of the iron tripod, and his shattered head stained his cartridge belt with blood.

"You, too, tried to save me? If I had been here..." Villa did not dare to move him. To stretch the body on the ground, like any other, was to take from him the beauty of his death. He preferred to leave him
there, on the machine-gun, so that his enemies might see him. He was a monument.

He took off his hat; under the heavy sombrero, the dark thatch of his hair was damp with sweat; the rebel breathed a faint sigh; several bullets passed near him, as if looking for some man to hit. He felt his cheeks wet, and his mustache; that was not sweat, nor water.

Around him the howling of the shots increased; from three sides, uniform voices of machine-guns, manned by expert hands, announced that the enemy was closing in on him. The stars were fading above him, like unwatered lilies. Dawn was near.

"Let's go! We gave them theirs!" A long cry, heavy and continuous, like the lowing of a cow looking for her calf, rose over the chattering of the shots. It was the order to march.

And the Villistas passed the frontier again, this time toward the south. After them entered the first squadrons of American cavalry, but returned after a little while. The invader had been driven back; there was time to get ready to follow them, if orders came to do so.

Besides, when Pancho Villa ran, nobody ever caught up with him.
in the midst of his men who were arrogantly riding along the sandy plain
midday drunk with sun and full of warm air, the great bandit went hap-
py. He had pushed back his hat hardened by rains and crusted with crystal-
sand, and let it bump against his shoulders, hanging from the chinstrap,
such spring of the gallop of his black horse. His kinky, untrained hair
wet with sweat, he let dry in the wind and the caress of the sun, taking
reddish tones from the sunlight, like a flame encircling his shining face.
At his sides a hundred or more men galloped in a spread-out line, their
ones idle and their pistols in their leather holsters, all faces happy,
quarters of their wounds which they had received from the red-hot salute of the
scant bullets. And behind, in disordered confusion, full of noise, sing-
and jovial voices, the rest of the invaders of Columbus jammed together
at nearer to their chief, to look at him, to listen to his jokes, to give
bringing "Viva!", or, at least, a glance of admiration that, like the sun
the wind, formed a glorious halo around him.
Villa became again in those moments the powerful dominator of men, cap-
of multitudes that he revealed himself in the first combats of 1915, and
to the peak of his splendor in the bloody campaigns of Torreon, of San
de las Colonias, of Zacatecas, when the constitutionalists went to the
place with their blood boiling and their throats pulsating in a uniform
which was at the same time wild enthusiasm for their cause, and fervent
pianza to their invincible chief. From the minds of those men were erased
dark days of flight through the deserts, the marches over the snow-covered
snow, the useless crimes, the sordid and inexorable revenges. And for them
was once more the beloved leader, for whose triumph and whose glory
was a small thing to give. They wanted to embrace him, to raise him on
their shoulders, higher than the trees, higher than the mountains, so
the world could see him, thunder-struck at that very moment before the
incredible deed, the incomparable audacity, and perhaps also before the
lack of conscience that violated everything human.

A thousand voices rose from the triumphant cavalcade. The men dis­
cussed with each other the action they all had witnessed; they praised
themselves; they got drunk with the indelible memory of those three
hours in which they had under the soles of their feet the pride of a
nation before inviolate, and always considered as inviolable. It was a
sexual satisfaction which they had experienced since they passed that
imaginary line that seemed to brandish itself like an arm that wished
to stop them, between the dauntless columns that marked the frontier;
blood completed the illusion of a forced hymen. All those who set foot
on foreign soil preserved the satisfaction of that sacrifice similar to
war and to the flesh, to death and to life.

Villa was speaking aloud in disjointed phrases, interrupted by the
intense nervous outburst of laughter from men possessed by an immense
happiness; in excited, picturesque speech, diffuse and incomplete, he
was expressing ideas that were only half-heard, cut short by laughter
that was as noisy as a torrent flinging itself down a mountainside.
He was speaking abstractedly, his glance lost in the reflections of
the horizon, at times blue as polished steel, at times as orange as the
ray of the setting sun. The tremolo of the shouts, the galloping of
the horses, the constant pounding of the metal parts of the saddle,
passed close to him without penetrating his mind, and he lost himself
in the clear waves of the day. He was experiencing nothing but his
own voluptuousness; he had his eyes open to the infinite and his ears
submerged in the silence of an inviolate spiritual solitude. His words
were directed to his own being, and when they were interrupted, his
thought completed them in the profound mystery of his brain.

"Of all men there is nobody ahead of Francisco Villa. Mountains
may be against me—they run me to the wall—but they do not hold me
down. When I got tired of looking for a rooster my own size around
here, I went to stir one up in another corral, and I tore his crest with
the first stroke of my beak."

Confused phrases that expressed the boiling of ideas within his big
broad head. What satisfaction was bubbling there for having been able
to snatch down with his bold hand the highest flag in the world, for hav­
ing conquered in a fight with men of a different race, a new enemy, for
having challenged a might that seemed to be superhuman?

"Let's see if they come out now and confirm that fact that Pancho
Villa was dead. Twenty times the pale-faces have cooed that finally
my hide has been stretched out; or the Carrancistas had bottled me up;
and said that I am nothing but the rag-tail end of an army."

He laughed like a boy who realizes he has been successful in a
piece of mischief that attracts all eyes to him. He was satisfied with
his exploit, not attempted in a moment of blindness, of madness, of
suicide, but premeditated even to the smallest details from many months
before, so that the entire country and its neighbor would shake at the
same instant with fear and fright before his name alone.

"Right now everybody is talking about Pancho Villa. And in case
of doubt, I'll do twenty more just like it! The Carrancistas who are
looking for me around Durango will stop with their mouths open, and the old man will pull his chin whiskers and curse me..." He broke out in his heavy laugh, which, infecting his nearby subordinates, brought him back to reality, made him sit upright again in his saddle, galloping on his nervous colt that also, from time to time, raised its voice in a neigh of savage joy. Then he spoke to his men, fraternally happy.

"What did you think of the uproar? I wonder if anybody thought I had been planning it for a long time..."

"For a fact, General, nobody but you can do things like that. Maybe somebody else may think of it, but when time comes to do it, his very ears wrinkle up in fear."

"It's like a drum—whenever plays it..."

"But one has to be very daring to play it."

"You see, I noticed you were going along planning a good one..."

"A little while ago? When did you think that?"

"I had a presentiment from the time old Tiburcio came along, because we had enough for the Carrancistas, but not one too many for the Americans."

"You hit it exactly. I had the idea, too. And now you'll see if it was a mistake to bring the old man, because if it weren't for him, I'd be with one foot in Mexico and the other with the Yankees right now..."

Ringing peals of laughter rose up making circles and covering the cavalcade with an invisible mantle of happiness.

"And now that I remember, where is the old man?" With a sudden tug, he reined his horse to a standstill. The column stopped as at an order.

"Old man! Old man! Hey, Tiburcio!"
A chain of shouts rolled back to the rear. With his hands pressed on the pommel of his saddle, his back bent, his legs limp, the old man was being left behind little by little. His head had been wrapped up with a filthy rag, heavy as a towel, and he seemed to be wearing a grotesque turban with a bloodstain like an enormous red stone on the front.

"Are you getting tired, old man?"

"Liven up—the General is talking to you; he's going to give you your reward."

"I see you're doubling up from that blow on the head."

The Villista raised his head. His long beard looked as if it were frozen in a plaster of sweat and dirt. Blood had clotted over his eyebrows.

"I am like that Juarista fifty years ago: I am bent, but I am not doubled up. The only thing is that I fear we have done the worst fool stunt..."

"What was that? What was that? A little while ago you were bragging of having defeated the Americans."

"Go on, get on up there; the General wants to talk to you..."

"Now, old man, ask him for something good."

The column split in two halves to let him pass at a trot up to the front rank. There were shouts and cheers for him. Pancho came out to meet him in the middle of his men, and from his horse gave Tiburcio such a fierce embrace it almost pulled him from the saddle, holding him in the air for a few seconds.

"Old man, I've known for a long time you were a rope that wouldn't break with the first pull on it. From this minute on you're going to
be part of the Military Staff, where my best men are. You'll take orders from nobody but Nicolás and me. Come on!"

They galloped to the head of the column, which they left behind a few meters. Villa went on talking of the fight, with the same explosions of joy as a few moments before; at times he seemed possessed by a delirium or a fever. Then he directed a word to Tiburcio, surprised that the latter was also absorbed in thought, even though not contentedly as he himself was, but rather, the contrary.

"What snake has bitten you, old man? You should be happy with the fight and with your promotion. It is true that your boy stayed behind, but here we are not fighting for ourselves, but for our brothers. Someone has to die..."

"It's not that, General. The boy, after all—he missed his mother. What I'm thinking about is that, when least expected..."

"When least expected, what?"

They looked at each other.

" Haven't you thought about it?"

"What? What do you mean?"

"That they'll follow us here."

"The pale-faces?"

Tiburcio made a sign of assent with his head, while Pancho held back a laugh.

"Let them come, after the licking we gave them!"

"A little later—do you think they'll stand for that very long?"

Villa thought a moment. "Really, maybe you've hit on it..."

Then, the two were silent.
In front of the cavalcade the country was beginning to roll in little rocky hills, and the march became slower. The Villistas separated into various small groups that rode around the high places, dividing to rejoin later on the other side. They needed a rest, and at the sides several explorers rode off to look for some ruined where there was water and good shade to take a siesta.

"Listen, old man, and if they do come after us?"

"Well, what shall we do?"

Finding a little knoll in their path, they did not go around it, but went straight to its top; instinctively their horses stopped, and all around the chief the little army halted.

"Why ask? We'll choke them! We gave it to them once, and we can do it again! Look!" In a wide sweep, his right hand took in the horizon. In the distance the mountains, some rising above the others, seemed to come closer in the transparency of the afternoon. The near: hills were deserted, on which some stone circles of old pastures made lines like trenches. Strong rock formations dotted their sides with reddish color, and lower down, clumps of trees showed their crowns of clear green.

"There is not a tree, nor a rock, nor a circle of stones that I do not know. I know where there are caves, and where there is good drinking water. You can blind me, take me and leave me in the middle of a canyon, and if I can't see more than a hill on one side and another on the other side, I can tell you where I am. There isn't a trail where I haven't walked, and when I get off them, nobody can follow me."

"That's right."
"And as I know the country like this, the country knows me. The trees speak to me when I pass, to warn me if I am in danger; the trails show me the tracks of animals or men whom they have upon them; the forest gives me meat, and the springs give me water. When it freezes or when it snows, the mountains give me shelter. During the winter, have you ever seen me shiver?"

"Never."

"I know the herbs. I know which ones feed and which ones cure: "coyote tail" to close wounds, the sironillo when you are bilious, and corn silks when the kidneys hurt from too much horseback riding; the flower of the tabashín cures a cough, and the root of the "cowboy-tumbler" strengthens the heart; there are herbs that put you to sleep, and others that make you happy, like liquor. After a sunstroke, if blood comes from the nostrils, look for leaves of the princess. And I also know when it is going to rain, and when there is going to be a wind. I know the stars, and at night I know where I am going."

"That's true."

"There is nobody who can follow me on horseback or on foot, on the desert or through the mountains. They'll never take me alive with a trap, either, as they do wolves. And anybody who comes with me and knows how to gallop as I do—they'll never get him, either."

"No."

"What are we risking? There are thousands of Carrancistas, and they've done nothing to us. They'll need a million men to close in on Francisco Villa! Let them come after us; when there are many in a single column, they won't be able to see our dust, and when there are few, equal in
umber to us, we'll confront them and rout them. We can't lose. Wait..."

With a gesture he assembled his men around the little hill. In silence and in a circle they listened to him.

"Muchachos! I've been thinking for sure that the enemies of our people and of our brothers will want to get revenge for their defeat; they'll come over into Mexican territory, but we'll never let them be at ease. The land is ours. Good patriots will help us defend ourselves against our enemies, who are also those of the people. If the Carranistas will not fight against the Americans, we alone will punish them. Or more than ever I urge you to be good Mexicans and to shed your blood to defend your country, because it is threatened. Death to Carranza! Or to the Americans!"

The Villistas answered the brief speech with shouts and shots fired into the air. Immediately they understood that after them was being raised already the powerful claw of the Eagle of the North, trying to clutch them. Maybe at this very hour over their tracks in the sand of the Chihuahua desert the reddish horses of the American army were trotting; perhaps foreign banners were waving in the wind from the Sierra Madre, and the echoes were repeating the bugle calls ordering the advance.

"Nicolas!"

A tall, bony man with big black mustaches, who for six years had been the inseparable companion of Francisco Villa, came close on his horse.

"At your orders..."

"Send somebody to Guzman City and all the way to Casas Grandes, somebody who knows something—who even speaks English—so he can find out what he wants to know. Tell him to see the American ranchers to
find out what they know, and meet us again in five or six days over
toward Nemiquipa."

"I'll send 'Four-Eyes'."

"The Federal?"

"He is clever..."

"All right. If they discover him, tell him to say he was going to
surrender; and if they capture him, nothing is lost."

In a little while a rider without weapons was detached to the left,
where shone the silver spot of a little lake, like frozen moonlight.
"Why are you so late, Balboa?"

"General, I thought it would be preferable to bring you complete information, and for that reason I spent two days in Janos before going to Casas Grandes, and then I was a week there. Last night, as soon as I found out about the advance of the gringos, I came to warn you, but as I'm not used to this part of the country..."

"And even if you were—do you think anyone can find me here? If I had not sent two boys to the Namiquipa road to bring you back, you would never have found me."

With a smile of satisfaction the rebel chief showed his strong, stained teeth; squatting on a stony ledge, surrounded by his men, he felt himself to be invisible in the tiny valley, so small it looked like the crater of a volcano, covered with pines, enclosed by high mountains in which enormous caves opened their mouths, where the hundreds of Villistas had installed themselves with their horses and supply mules. Among great jutting rocks fell a little stream of ice-blue water. There was not even a trail leading to that refuge, and the climb up the hanging cliffs was wearisome and difficult. At a distance the circle of peaks seemed one single mountain of the Sierra de la Culabra, and nobody would imagine the existence of the little valley. For that reason Villa considered himself safe there, and had decided to wait for the news of what happened after his assault on Columbus, now convinced that, as Tiburcio Maya feared, American soldiers were following him.

"Let's see: start talking and tell me what you found out."

"I'm bringing you everything that could be noticed, General."

He loosened the cinch on his saddle, and putting his hand between the
saddle and saddle-blanket, he drew out a bell the size of a grain of corn, which he unrolled into a sheet of paper. Then, holding it close to his myopic eyes, he read: "On March 15 two columns of American troops, one under the command of Colonel Dodd, and the other under the command of General John J. Pershing, who appears to be in supreme command, passed the international frontier east of Columbus. There are close to two thousand cavalrymen with machine-guns carried on mules. Some red-skin Indians from the American side are serving them as guides. They passed near Palomas, and yesterday (March 18) they arrived at a ranch between Janos and Guzman, from which point they dispatched a courier to Lieutenant-Colonel Refugio D. Davila, commander of the garrison at Casas Grandes, announcing that they would spend the night at Casas Grandes. Davila sent for orders from Juarez City, but when I left, they still hadn't answered him."

"But what is it the Americans want?"

"A newspaper from El Paso, Texas, says that before he left Columbus, General Pershing declared he would return to the United States with you, dead or alive..."

Pancho Villa interrupted his informant with a guffaw that resounded throughout the valley. His face grew red from congestion, while his thick mouth opened up like the main gate of a hacienda.

"Oh, what a buzzfly! My friend, Pershing, who used to call me the 'Mexican Napoleon', who took me one time to review his troops at Fort Bliss, and seemed happy to have his picture taken with me—now he's going to catch me dead or alive! He is going to take me—I can't stand it! Don't they say whether they're going to catch me with a trap or a lasso,
or put salt on my tail?"

"No, General."

The chorus of laughs was growing like a cascade. All the men of the little army grew braver when they saw how little fear the news of the American pursuit inspired in their chief, and their cries rose into the air:

"Let's go over there again! To see if they can catch us!"

"Listen, Balboa, what did you find out about Saniquipa?"

"Colonel Salas is there."

"With how many men?"

"I don't think there are more than a hundred and fifty."

At a signal, the Villistas threw themselves into the coves, and in a quarter of an hour they came out again, mounted on their horses and leading the pack mules with their equipment. In front, Pancho Villa, Martín López, Pablo López, Nicolás, the two Ríos boys, Michel and the entire dorados guard, in which Tiburcio Maya now figured solemnly.

A terrible cold had settled down, and the rebels, with their hands stiff, loosening the reins of the horses, galloped down the mountain. In a loud voice and at full speed Villa gave orders to his seconds: where Pablo López should enter, and with how many men; where Nicolás, and with how many; where the Ríos boys should go with theirs; and then, each one of the latter went about forming his groups, instructing the men one by one, and all on a dead run. After a little galloping they got onto the main road, and turned directly south toward Saniquipa. Hourly, below the slope, crept the indolent waters of the Santa María.

"Tonight we'll sleep in houses," they shouted, "and good and warm!"
They rode cutting telegraph and telephone wires without breaking their gallop. The horses soon covered distance with their powerful limbs and hard-choed hooves, and a white splotch that was seen on the side of the mountain went on getting larger. The stragglers heard the first shots that did not stop the march by so much as a second, and minutes later, in the main plaza of the town, near a Japanese pavilion with iron columns, Francisco Villa, conquerer of the Carrancista garrison, greeted the people.

"My brothers of blood and race: I am the persecuted Francisco Villa. Now, not only the Carrancistas are after me, but also the Americans say they will catch me..."

That night the Villistas slept in houses, and very warm; but on the following morning they left hastily. Spies informed Pancho that an American column was coming at full speed from the direction of Casas Grandes, and that the Carrancista, General Cano, was also coming, from over toward Temosachic.

The Villistas met the latter upon their departure, and exchanged a few shots; having better horses and wanting to escape more than the soldiers wanted to follow them, they didn't fight long; the skirmish was brief. Three of four of the rearguard remained stragglers forever, and the Federal column entered Namiquipa to pick up the spoils of the soldiers of Colonel Salas, defeated the evening before. The members of the Social Defense, who had left the plaza, reassembled and buried the dead in a hole on the bank of the river.

The first American soldiers arrived in the afternoon; twenty or twenty-five, trotting on long-legged horses, and guided by an Apache
Indian from New Mexico, who spoke Spanish badly. After the vanguard came Colonel Dodd, second-in-command of the Punitive Expedition of the American army, stuffed in a heavy gray-blue overcoat.

"Do you know where Pancho Villa is?"

General Cano smiled slightly under his mustache. It was something he never knew; maybe not even Pancho himself knew, because he was like that: suddenly he would seem to remember some forgotten trail, some almost effaced path; then he would change direction, turn back, and by a surprise defeat some small garrison which had news that the rebels were fleeing in the opposite direction fifty kilometers away. But the Mexican officer had to answer something, so with his right hand he pointed south.

"Over there."

The American commander stood up in his stirrups to see if he could see even some dust, but he saw only quiet and green in the mysterious forest.

* * *

They spent the night in San Jerónimo, up the river; before unsaddling they had taken reckoning: twelve men were missing since they left the Sierra de la Culebra.

"The scare that we gave them in Nemiquipa came out cheap for us," said Pancho Villa; then he called all his generals and chiefs to a council of war, as he called it, trying to be solemn.

"I have always been accustomed, and you know it very well," he commenced telling them, "to take the best ways for the campaign; many of you never know where we're going, and whether we're in flight or going to surprise some Carrancistas. But this time the situation is different;
we have to fight an international war, and I want you to tell me what you think of the matter, and what we're going to do. I will listen to you, and then I'll tell you what we agree upon definitely and unanimously."

"I think," said General Chávez, from Sonora, "that we should go south. Because the farther we are from the American side, the harder it will be to find us. They would have to come a long way inside the country."

"And if we reach Durango, even better," added Martín Lópes.

"It seems to me that we should divide parties here, and meet again far south; by not attacking anybody, nobody would know where we were, and we can get to Parral."

"By no means should we turn north, because there must be many, many pale-faces."

Nobody else expressed an opinion. Villa, with his eyes fixed on some spot on the ground, and his hands on the butts of his pistols, spoke slowly. His voice, commanding and strong, paralyzed all reply. He seemed to be speaking with his fists.

"It's the simple truth: it's best to leave for the south. If some gringos are ahead, we can lay an ambush for them; while the more strung-out they go, the easier it will be to break off some of their column. And so we leave for the south. Have you thought of anything else?"

"Will you permit me to speak?"

Pancho raised his head. "Let loose, Tiburcio; don't swallow it!"

"In the lower hills there is no strong fortification of Carrancistas; only when they are attacking us on one side and the Americans on the other should we divide the column. Rather, we can rout all the garrisons
from here to the border of Durango. Then, when the rumors find out
that the Americans are coming, they could join up with us, even though
they might not equal the soldiers. Who knows if we might be able to
get to Torreon again..."

"Not so many illusions, old man. The first part is well enough.
Let’s go on together and defeat all the Carrancistas we can; but we
shouldn’t leave the state of Chihuahua, because they will say we were
afraid of the Punitives. When the gringos spread out, we’ll commence
guerrilla skirmishes on all sides, as we have been fighting for a year
against the Carrancistas. We shouldn’t stop fighting against them, even
though it may cost us much blood. And how many times we may be able to
repeat what we did in Columbus!"

"Will there be many men around Guerrero?"

All eyes turned toward Rios, who had been there several days before
the assault on the American side.

"When I went north, General Cavacos was there with five or six
hundred..."

"We’ll give it to him!"

"Sure..."

"We’re not going to go skirting around any longer, as we used to do
around Cusi; if they even move a muscle, we’ll fall on them."

Everybody nodded his head in approval. Their eyelids were all
drooping from fatigue, after having galloped eighty kilometers. They
left to catch some sleep and Villa, as was his custom, mounted his horse
so that nobody would know where he slept.

"Good night, General."
"Good night, Tiburcio. You are brave and you have good sense. Some day I'll make you a general..."

His horse gave a jump and broke into a gallop. His hooves struck a wake of sparks from the stone pavement of the little street.
DIALOGUE

On March 27, very early in the morning when there was still frost on the green branches of the weeping willows and crusts of ice on the pools, Villa and his men fell on Minas, shaking the quiet air with their yells and shots. They surrounded the barracks of the Carrancistas, in front of a half-destroyed station, and captured officers and men in their underclothes, half asleep, shivering from the chill of that climate so severe for them, as the majority were spindly little men brought from the mild temperate zone.

There were about two hundred who put foot to earth and tumultuously entered the barracks, in whose patio, in a corner, they herded the prisoner soldiers, whom they kept quiet with a Besaer machine-gun which the Villistas had rapidly set up on its three iron legs on a block at the door. The bells of a nearby church rang out, and in their vibrating seemed to tear away the morning mist.

Villa rode in, the hooves of his horse slipping on the damp flagstones. After him, pushed along by rifle-butts, stumbled a half-dressed boy with long uncombed hair and terrified eyes.

"Carrancistas!" shouted Villa. "I come to talk to you like a brother, in hopes that you will pay attention to what I tell you and see that I am right. I do not come fighting against you now, who are all of my race, all persecuted by the Americans from the other side. Behind me are coming who knows how many thousands of Yankee soldiers, to seize me like a wild beast and take me dead or alive to the United States. This just suits Carranza, but the rest of the Mexicans should be ashamed of having the Americans in here. Look at this paper which I took away from the telegrapher: it is a message for Cavazos, your general, informing
him that the gringos are coming against me. Listen: 'The troops of the
PUNITIVE EXpedITION have been augmented to twelve thousand men, with
cavalry and artillery numbering twenty-eight pieces, including mortars
and cannon of different calibers, two hundred machine-guns, and a body
of engineers; the advance guard is two hundred fifty miles south of the
frontier..."

Addressing the boy shoved in with rifles and who was fixing his
panic-dilated eyes on him, he asked, "Who sent this telegram?"

"Colonel Salas, from Namiquipa."

"How do you see? It's the truth that the Americans are after me.
They say two hundred fifty miles: I don't know to an exact point just
where that would be, because I don't measure that way, but the fact is
that they can't be very far away, because they're riding good horses.
I don't wish to do you any harm, but ask you if you're going to stand
there with your arms folded in front of the Americans. All the ranchers
from Chihuahua are going to fight, and even though all of you are not from
here, you have the same obligation, no matter where you're from. I invite
you to come with me to defend your fatherland. Let's see what you have
to say."

The prisoners remained silent. It was noticed that they were trem-
bling, not from fright, but from cold; they pressed their bodies against
each other to keep warm. Not one dared to speak.

"Listen, monkeys! Don't you hear that I am speaking to you? Are
you coming with me or not?"

From the heap came one clear voice. "We won't go with bandits,
not even to eternal glory!"
The mass broke into shouts: "Viva Carranza! Viva the Supreme Government! Viva General Cano!"

The soldiers became excited, raising their arms, and some advanced to the center of the patio, cursing the enemy chief, who backed his horse to the door, behind the machine-gun resting on its gray foot like a long crane flying against the wind.

"Viva Carranza!"

"All right, wipe them out!" With a flashing glance he gave an order, and the Rezar commenced its rapid chattering. The soldiers who had come forward to the middle of the patio fell covered with blood on the stone paving squares. For an instant there were shrieking outcries which momentarily diminished with the shots.

Villa went toward the station, followed by Tiburcio Maya, who, on his horse, had been near him for those five minutes. Behind him the continuous, uniform functioning of the death-dealing gun went on putting out the screams.

In front of the station depot he stopped. A soldier handed him a steaming tin bucket. "The coffee's a little hot, General."

"Give it here." He drank in great gulps, his enormous mouth open, and when he finished, wiped his mustache with the back of his hand.

"It's a shame about those Federals," he said to Tiburcio, "because there were a good many of them, and even though they aren't worth as much as our own men, they would have been good for something. How many do you think there were?"

"I counted them one by one while you were talking, General, including General Cano..."
"What! Was he there?"

"Yes, it was he who shouted that he was not going, not even for eternal glory."

"With bandits, wasn't that what he said? Well, how many were there in all?"

"One hundred seventy-two men."

"You lie. There were one hundred seventy-two, but not men! Traitors!"

"They believed that they shouldn't join up with us. If Carranza had attacked the Americans, would you have placed yourself at his orders?"

"And you, are you defending them?" He looked suspiciously at Mburcio. If the old man was going back on him, he wouldn't live another minute.

"I shall be a Villista until I die..."

"Then, shut your mouth."

The Remar had finished, and from the barracks came only heavy silence.

"Up, muchachos! On your horses, brave men! Let's go abreast!"

A symphony of shouts followed the Villista column in their departure through the wide dusty streets, toward the heart of the District, Guerrero City, which Villa had learned was to be found at that time without any Carrancista garrison, guarded only by a few members of the Social Defense. In a half-hour of galloping they were in sight of the old mountain city, sloping gently toward the Papigocho river. And shooting into the air they rode through the paved streets, keeping in the shade of the sycamores and the trozos. At his presence the scarce and surprised "defenders" took to the mountains; another ringing of bells and another
....

After noon, Villa found out that the Carrancista general, José Cazacos, who was at a ranch near Guerrero with the main body of the troops which constituted the garrison of that zone, was advancing rapidly toward the city, with intention of striking at the rebels. As soon as they heard it, five hundred horsemen left to meet him; before them the desert with scanty vegetation extended under a gray fog which hid the nearby mountains. The grass, still dry, was about a meter high, and above it the posts of the railroad line indicated the direction of the tracks. Facing Guerrero City, a broad table-land rose up, covered only with rocks and small dry bunches of plants. At one side, to the right, could be seen the Papigochic river behind the green curtain of weeping willows that bent their branches to touch the gentle ripples of the blue water.

Two riders came down from the bench like an avalanche and reined their horses toward the group where they understood the general-in-chief might be found, whom they informed: "Here come the Carrancistas!"

"How are they coming?"

"On foot. At the most, there can't be more than fifty on horseback."

Making a gesture with his right hand, Villa ordered his men to dismount. They all advanced on foot, carbines in hand, arranging the crossed bandoleers heavy with ammunition on their shoulders. Others took the horses to the bank of the river, where they tied them up. The chief
himself with all his generals, his do\_\textit{rados}, his officers of the Military Staff advanced on foot, rapidly climbing the slightly sloping side of the \textit{mesa}. His broad Texan sombrero, which he kept squarely on his head, was the first that showed itself on the surface. In the distance, about two kilometers away, was seen the dark line of enemy soldiers.

"Keep your heads down. Don't show until I fire!"

"Throw yourselves on the ground; don't shoot until General Villa gives the signal." The order was shouted down the Villa line, and all the men flung themselves to earth, seeking the protection of the great jutting rocks. Above their heads the mist was thinning out, and after a little while the sun shot yellowish rays on the dark plateau.

With his glance as keen as that of a bird of prey who distinguishes snakes crawling among the rocks below him, while still in the clouds, the chief took in the entire enemy line with one look, divided it by the space between columns, judged the size of the groups, calculated by the dust they were raising, which confused itself with the last remaining wisps of fog. He added the number of riders who were carelessly advancing three of four meters from the infantry, and said to those around him, "There aren't more than five hundred. We are one for one. I don't believe they'll beat us, but if so, we'll fall back toward Guerrero and wait for them there, if they dare to come after us."

His officers sent the word down the line.

"If they push us, we'll fortify ourselves in the first houses."

Near, between two masses of whitish rock, a \textit{bazooka} rapid-fire marked its long line parallel to the ground. It was still warm and smelled of burnt powder, for that very morning it had fired six of its curved belts
that seemed to come out of its side like a parenthesis opening up. Other machine-guns were placed in line clear to the railroad tracks that bordered the table-land, all pointed in the same direction, impatient.

"The General must be coming in that little group of riders."

"I don't think so, but if he is, I'll bet I'll put that eagle in his hat in a little while..."

"Sure---he won't fly off."

"Shall we shoot at them now?"

"Don't get excited! While they're not shooting, it's because they haven't seen us. Better scare them when we can reach them with our bullets."

The advancing infantry was some little distance behind the fifty horsemen who were coming on at a trot. They must have been about four hundred meters from the rebels stretched out on the ground, when Villa raised his carbine, and putting the butt to his shoulder, aimed for an instant and fired. Immediately all his men opened fire, which suddenly died down. The machine-guns began to fill in the gaps, and sounded like the transmission of a telegraphic code in a somber message. They seemed to say, "We Villistas are here, having to fight against our own countrymen, when behind us is coming a wave of men from another country, flooding our territory."

"That doesn't make any difference to us," they answered in the same language, even though more slowly, the guns of the distant Carrancista infantry barking while the riders who had not fallen withdrew at a gallop to protect themselves behind their lines. "We are upholding the Supreme Government, which has not provoked that invasion, and which does not wish
to carry the country into an unequal and foolish international war.
We are fighting bandits who challenged a friendly country, and when we
have annihilated them, we know that the invaders will leave without
firing at us."

The action became general throughout the two lines, even when they
were still far from each other, and the bullets did not reach enemy
territory.

Rapidly, its words trampling on one another, the Reman said,
"Those are fools. If they had any sense of shame, and were men enough
to wear pants, they'd be shooting at the Americans now."

"That's right," confirmed the Villista rifles in brief second.

Over the mesa, now in the full light of day lighted also by yel-
low flashes and red sparks, by the hum of bullets and yells, came the
reply.

"We're men enough. Villista bullets kill as well as American
bullets. We're not worried about escaping with life, or losing it. There
is something worth more than man: his country. True patriotism must not
be blind. We know how to get out of this situation with dignity, without
fighting the Americans, but also without overlooking them. Justice will
do what force cannot do, and the soldiers of the United States will have
to go back to their own country."

"Up, miskachos! Let's surround them..."

The Villista line rose up, and the men went to meet their enemy.
The machine-guns were silent, carried aloft by their operators, and with-
out firing a shot, as in maneuvers, the rebels went straight ahead on
their course. Now it was too late to make speeches. It was kill, now.
They never could agree, and it was better to end everything now. One side or the other: the state of Chihuahua wasn’t big enough for both Villistas and Carrancistas.

Half across the mesa the line stopped, three hundred meters from the enemy; the men were beginning to drop, shot down. Again the rapid-fires began to thunder. Now they sent no messages, but death. Like them, without shouting, the ranks were fighting. Not an insult, not a “Viva”, not an inarticulate cry from those who were heating their blood in battle. Kill! Kill! They threw mud at Mexican fraternity; forgot race and identical blood. They were irreconcilable enemies fighting face to face. “You or we, and let’s get it over with!”

A shout rose above the din.

“Here is your papa Villal!”

Everybody heard it, on both sides. It sounded like a creak of thunder rolling over the countryside. And the line of soldiers began to fall back. That single cry was reinforcement for the enemy. Fighting anybody else, as equal to equal, is not the same as fighting the Intangible Scourge. How one might wish to destroy him, but, at the same time, how difficult!

“Today isn’t the day we can kill you,” said the Carrancista guns, speaking with long intermissions. “Another time will be better.” Their voices went on drawing away more rapidly.

On the Villista side, the yells of triumph began, shouts of praise for the powerful chief, and the roar of their guns went on dying down, too, until they finally ceased. The curtain of dust, which before the battle rose up behind the dark enemy line, changed position and covered
it. The mist itself dissolved in the afternoon. Under the brilliant
sun a V of herons slipped by, as if they were skating on the blue sky.

"Now, muchachos! Get your horses, and we'll follow them until not
one is left..."

Villa and his officers stopped on the prairie. The man took off
his wide-brimmed hat and fanned his flaring face. He gave another man
his carbine, warm from a hundred shots. He could not express the thought
that was boiling in him. What would be the first thing a triumphant
leader would want to say? If it were for official recognition, or a
phrase for History, he would say, "One more time the courage of my val-
iant soldiers..." But it wasn't worth the trouble. Before that op-
portunity he had had another hundred to make a speech.

"Let's see—who has the water?"

Eight or ten hands held out as many canteens, and then the circle
formed about him opened up to let pass through a beautiful mare found
hours before in a stable in Guerrerco, and which now bore on its round
back the embossed saddle trappings of the General-in-Chief.

"Now, everybody on his horse, and let's go!"

Each one went toward his horse. In front of Villa the plain was
clear and unobstructed. He grabbed his reins, put his left hand on the
saddle horn, stuck his foot in the stirrup. He then started to mount,
but stopped. Something had hit him in the calf of the right leg, and he
saw that it had gone on in. He put down the foot that he had raised, and
on touching ground, he felt a pain. He looked at himself. The leather
puttee (masterpiece of Francisco Tallabas) which enwrapped his leg had a
black bullet hole exactly on the ridge that marked the shin-bone. He felt
something was dripping down his calf, and the round hole seemed to be
widening in a red splotch.

For a moment he remained with his hands pressed to the saddle, and
his head bent over, looking at his leg. The mare, restless at seeing
the other horses now beginning to gallop over the plain, became impatient
and began to paw the ground.

"They got me," said Villa in a low voice. "Where the devil must they
have been shooting from, to get me in the leg?"

His generals surrounded him immediately. Tiburcio put one knee to
the ground, and began to feel the wounded leg.

"Don't squeeze so hard, animal..."

"I want to see if it broke the bone..."

"It doesn't hurt you!"

The old man opened the buckles of the puttee, took off the spur, and
unwrapped the leg. The corduroy trouser leg was soaked with blood. Gently
he felt the leg up and down.

"Tender-easier..."

"It didn't do much harm, General; it must have been a cold ball that
ripped through on a rock, because it didn't have force enough to break the
leg-bone."

"By the looks of this, we'd better go back..."

Nava bound the leg with a dirty handkerchief and helped him to mount
the mare. Without resting in the stirrup, the right foot swung in the
air, and as a walk the victorious troop turned back to Guerrero City.

Nobriga Nava was crying, as he had not done when Villa killed his
wife and daughter, or when his son died calling his name.
All the fickleness of the character of Pancho Villa, incomparably abnormal, displayed itself like a sail in the wind that afternoon. In the big old house of a rich Guerrero citizen, where the rebel stopped, he spent several hours in the most complete uncertainty; at times, he blamed Tiburcio for the swelling of his leg and for the fever which was taking possession of him, and then he asked for his pistol, which the far-seeing Nicolas had removed from him, "to shoot the heart out of that imbecile old man". Tiburcio approached him meekly, touched his brow as he would a child's, and on feeling the boiling blood, spoke to him in a fatherly way. "Be quiet, Don Pancho. By dusk, the heat will have left you." And then Villa softened, broke into weeping. Without the slightest protest he let the wound be washed with warm water, and his voice became pleading on asking, "Will they have to cut if off?"

A few moments later he was ashamed of his weakness, and tried to stand up and run. "I'm going to run till the leg spits out the bullet." It was difficult to make him go to bed again in the bed with the large gilded posts. From his forehead the sweat ran in streams, and dampened the virgin forest of his shock of hair. From being red as the flash of a gun, he turned pale as a ghost. And then he again became irritated with his quasi-doctor, reproaching him for his lack of skill in not having tried to take the bullet out before the flesh swelled.

Everybody was around him in the bedroom, his closest confidantes surrounding the sumptuous bed; some spoke to him affectionately, trying to convince him that he would soon be well; others limited themselves to looking at him in silence, as if they were trying to guess from the looks of the wound what his future luck might be. Outside, in the five-
arched corridor, the dorados were bunched together, whispering. They said an escort had left for Minana to look for Doctor Steelte, a gringo who was good for "healing Christians", and he was to be brought at full speed to see if he was good enough to cure the Old Man. But that plan didn't work out so well; when the doctor learned that the Villistas were looking for him, he thought they were trying to seize him because he was an American and wanted to take revenge on him for the incursion of the troops into their country. He fortified himself in his house, and when the dorados came, he fired at them. No other Americans were with him; one by the name of Lindsay, and the other, Benjamin Snell, all three shooting. There was no other way but to answer them in the same way, because they understood no other method. The three were killed, and likewise two Villistas. And the German, Hermann Blackenberg, who owned a hardware store, whom they also considered American, and who answered, "No," when they asked him if he could cure a wounded Christian---they beat him up.

"In short, it looks as if the Old Man will have to get along with nobody to heal him..."

"Send somebody to look for the herbs that he knows about..."

"And tie up his leg so it won't bleed..."

In the wide patio, under the heavy, waxlike, shining leaves of the trones, another forty of the picked men were waiting, sprawled on the ground in small groups among their motionless horses. And outside in the broad paved street, bordered with acacias, the rest of the column, in three lines, were waiting for orders.
Night fell. Lamps were lit; behind the glass chimneys burned wax sealed in oil. In the pine the yard started a bonfire, but the wind was blowing steadily, and the cold from the mountains came settling down.

And in the bedroom where Villa lay feverish, all the chiefs were assembled. The voice of the wounded man again became heavy and hard.

"This isn't going to finish me off—-it's only going to keep me down," he said to all standing around the bed. "I'm going to have to be quiet, if I don't want them to cut off my foot. So I am going to leave you, but not for you to surrender yourselves to Carranza; you're to go on fighting while I am getting well. Don't think that this thing of mine is a matter of days. I have felt the bone over well. I'm not going to be able to travel on foot or horseback for a long time. Don't expect me to come right away. Now listen to what I say to you: do you all know where San Juan Bautista is, in Durango?"

"Naturally..."

"We've been there with you."

"And if we don't, we can ask..."

"All right. Let's let all of April go by, and all of May. So that we don't make any mistake, I say once and for all that we'll see each other the first of July. If you have to, separate from each other, always saying where you'll meet again. Above all, keep on fighting!"

"Whatever you say."

"You will not know where I'm going, and to the people there you go say that the 'monkeys' killed me. That way, their fright will be even bigger than they see me again."

"But, are you going alone?"
"I'll take a few."

"Me!"

"And me, too!"

"And me?"

"I'll tell you after while who is to go with me. First let's see who stays as chief. Somebody has to be in command while I'm down. Nicolás Fernández, who has been with me since we joined up with Don Francisco Madero..."

"If you will permit me, General..."

"Go ahead and speak."

"I prefer to go with you."

"I have another plan now. Only two boys will stay with me."

"But only two won't be able to carry you where you want to go."

"That's true. Who goes, then? You say."

"I."

"Nicolás Fernández, one."

"Ernesto."

"Ernesto Ríos, two."

"Tiburcio."

"Tiburcio Maya, three."

"Reynaldo."

"Reynaldo Mata, four."

"The two Alvarez boys."

"Juan and Joaquín, six."

"Bernabé Cifuentes, Maroos Torres..."

"Eight."
"No more."

"No more. Let's get back to the other point. Again I tell you that a chief must be named, somebody that everybody will obey until I come back..."

In the shadow of the room the twenty men assembled there looked into each other's faces. Who wanted the position of second-in-command, and who were ready to obey?

There was a Yaqui Indian, with a face as red and shining as a copper kettle. Between his curved shoulders and his thin neck, two bandoleers were crossed. In his cartridge belt, a double one, not one more cartridge would fit; he looked like a walking fortress. His name was Francisco Beltrán, and he was a general.

"Do you want to be second, Pancho Beltrán?"

"The Indian will do whatever General Villa orders." His face remained expressionless as a fire-reddened mask. Not a flicker or pride for being the one chosen, not a glance of superiority over the ones under his orders.

"I like you because you talk little and do much. You never boast, and you know Chihuahua as well as Durango, and the two as well as your own mountains of Sonora. And if, for any reason, you cannot be at San Juan Bautista on the first of July, you have men to let me know where you have gone."

"If the Indian cannot bring all the men, the Indian will be alone in Durango, waiting."

"Everything's settled, then. Is there anybody who opposes? You all accept?"
Every man raised his hand.

"Will you sign an agreement?"

"Certainly."

"Let's see, then, write: 'We, the undersigned, recognize the authority of General Francisco Beltrán as second-in-command of General Francisco Villa, and agree to respect him and obey him.'"

"To—obey—him. That's all. Period."

"The date..."

"Guerro City, Chihuahua, March 27, 1916."

"Go ahead and sign it, all of you, in front of me."

One by one they passed by, and then saluted the stone-faced Indian. They left the room. There was a quiet cold, because the wind had died down in the ramparts of the mountain ridge. Over the footrail of the bed, facing the bedroom door, Mars looked like a cannon that captured by the night in the infinite net of stars. The rebels slept wrapped in their blankets, and in the nearby corral was heard the restless kicking of the horses.

Nicolás and Ernesto called all the eight men on their list, and in one corner of the five-arched corridor informed them of everything. Miburocio then left to look for a light wagon.

"See if you can find a good one at Chávez' house."

"Or at Casavantes'."

"With mules and everything."

"We'll be waiting for you here."

They sat down to smoke, each one thinking where they were going to go with the wounded chief, because Villa had told nobody the direction
that they would take on the following morning.

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Dawn passed rapidly, flying over the silence. From the time that the roosters began to crow, old Pancho insisted that it was time now. He had awakened without fever, and then Nicolás put back in its holster the pistol which he had hidden from him the evening before.

In front of the house stood a wagon, with a clean awning of white canvas, and two roan mules. Tiburcio in person was sitting in the driver's seat. And between Nicolás and the two Alvarès boys they brought out the Old Man with his leg wrapped in a blanket. Bending the wagon, they laid him on a mattress stretched inside. The Villistas pressed close around the little wagon with frightened eyes and Villa had to half sit up, supporting himself on his elbows.

"I won't be getting around for awhile, until my foot is all right. You are all to say that Pancho Villa is dead, and you saw how they took me to bury me. Your chiefs know where we're to meet again, and exactly when. You're to go on fighting, as you are well commanded."

All the generals said goodbye, pressing the strong hand of the wounded man.

"Hasta luego, until we meet again. Don't forget where!"

"No, General."

"Nor when!"

"That, neither."

"Where are we going?" asked Tiburcio, letting go the brake.

"It makes no difference, old questioner. Go straight ahead, and when I tell you, 'Turn,' you turn."
Tiburcio clucked to the mules, and they trotted off over the paved street. An explosion of shouts and shots into the air broke out, that lasted until the wagon took the road to Mina and climbed the mesa.

Seven men rode at a trot beside it.

And when Guerrero City emerged from the mist of the dawn to receive the first rays of the sun, Villa spoke to the driver. "Now, old man, so you'll know: you go without touching town, all day and all night, until we get to Los Alamos."

The wagon rolled along the smooth, bald prairie at the gallop of the Chávez cane mules.
CRAGS

They reached Los Alamos after trotting all day and night; their route was more or less the same as the column which they defeated had followed hours before. Who could guess that Pancho Villa, wounded the day before near Guerrero City, would venture in the direction where his enemies were gathering, laid out in a wagon and escorted by only a half dozen men?

The Carrancistas had passed by there so rapidly that they did not even take time to warn the members of the Social Defense of the presence of Villa; the reins were, calm and peaceful; passed the little group on the plain, and believing that some family was in the little wagon, did not even come near to find out for sure, going on by eight distances, without casing themselves. Better for them, because Villa had ordered that anyone who approached, not being a friend or acquaintance, must be silenced by the simplest method.

It was a hard trip, that of the Villistas: the last gusts of March winds were blowing across the open spaces, dragging down from the mountains heavy clouds of snow. The march became fatiguing and slow. With a high temperature and wrapped in several blankets, the wounded man felt cold, as if were bathing in water than ran by night from the sierra. He, who never touched liquor, asked for alcohol to moisten his lips; at first he grew colder, then chilled to the very bones; but at noon, between jolts of the wagon along the uneven road, he went to sleep.

Another march to the Hortero ranch, situated a little way from the line of Gusulurries, where the recently defeated Carrancistas were reorganizing, with the help of fresh troops. In the darkness of the mist battling with night, the little red points of the lights of the
Nine were seen above the sierra. All night long the rebels heard the
whistles of locomotives and the rolling of trains: the enemy was near
and on the watch. Villa and the men of his small guard, tired and
drowsy, passed the night half asleep around a bonfire of burning cow-
dung. They had put the wagon in a little draw, and listened to the Old
Man complaining without end; they put their blankets over him and
shivered without covering themselves.

It was hardly breaking day when they continued their march south.
At their right, the waters of the Mexicanos lagoon lay nearby, with a
crust of ice on its banks. At noon a short rest in San Bernardo, then
on again along the bank of the river. Another day of travel, and an-
other. At times the wagon crossed through chaparral thickets where
never before had there been a track; at others, crossing several of the
many tributaries of the San Pedro river, the wheels stuck in midcurrent,
and all the men in the guard pulled the wagon with their roestes, while
the pair of mules splashed in the water.

On the night of April 5, the rebels felt silent snow falling on
them. Villa told Torres and Mata to look for some big branches and hang
them behind the wagon, in such a way they would drag on the ground, mak-
ing a big broom to sweep away the snow. "If they know now that you're
taking me away in a wagon, don't let them find our tracks." On the fol-
lowing day Villa had a raging fever; he grew delirious, pouring out his
hate for the Carrancistas who had wounded him, and for the Americans who
were following him on foreign territory. Only one thing did not become
distorted in his feverish brain: the route. When the wagon stopped, and
the face of one of his companions showed inside, Villa asked one question,
"Where are we?"

"Dato's is about a league away, to the left."

"Good. We cross the river below Vinata de Anoeces, and go to the Porvenir ranch. Tell Tiburcio."

"Very well, General."

In Porvenir a little old man, very Villista, joined the group; he was the father of the dead general, Jose Rodriguez. Villa told him where he wanted to go, and then the little old man called to his grandson, got on the wagon seat, and went along guiding Tiburcio. They couldn't go no farther now in the wagon, because they had reached the foothills. Everybody dismounted, put the wounded man on a stretcher made of poles and branches, and alternating four by four, carried him up the mountain, leaving the boy to take care of their horses and the draft males.

It was the mountain range of Santa Ana, wild and lonely; on top, tall spire-like pine sentinels; halfway down the slopes, evergreen oak with twisted branches. Deep gorges and lofty crags and hills, without one trail or footpath to follow.

"Eight years since I've been here, since I was with my friend, Urihina."

Nicolas, Ernesto, and the two Alvarez boys were carrying the stretcher. Behind, Tiburcio, Cifuentes, Mata, and Torres were carrying everybody's guns, some sacks of rice and dried meat, and two earthenware water-jugs. They were walking slowly, careful of each step, and tired from the weight that they had to support. They climbed to the top of a hill, and descended to the bottom of a ravine. Suddenly, on turning through an arroyo which carried little water, they saw the place,...
chosen by Villa: a landslide with three vertical sides, and at the foot of the second, the round dark eye of a cave.

"Is that it?"

"I'm not such a blockhead—whatever you can see, anybody could see. Look farther up. What do you see?"

"A solid wall of rock."

"And on the walls?"

"Oaks, nothing else."

Villa smiled wearily, leaning his head on his pillow of fresh grass.

"Haul it on up farther."

It seemed that there was no way to climb those reddish rocks, covered in great patches by clear green moss. The setting sun lighted them, vigorously marking the vertical ledges of the crags. Then came the moment when they could no longer go circumvying their chief on his stretcher of branches; they had to clamber up rocks the height of a man, where perhaps before only the mountain goats had traveled; then, between two that climbed up first, they raised Villa by the arms; then the other two climbed up, and again the ascension of another stair of rock. It was the labor of an entire afternoon, because Villa complained and became furious when he felt a sharp pain in his hurt leg.

They left below the cave whose entrance was visible, and came to the second side of the steep slide; there was an aperture a meter in diameter, which two oaks grown together with their long roots in the rocks like human arms, had made almost invisible. A horizontal ray of the setting sun entered the hole, lighting a cave of a high arch, and a floor of dry sand which showed no trace of ever having been trodden by man or...
beast. On it they laid Villa on his red quilt.

"Now go on doing what I tell you."

"Say what..."

"Leave me all the rifle ammunition that you brought, carrying no more than that for your pistols."

"Here it is." Everybody stripped himself of the ammunition in his cartridge belt, throwing twelve hundred cartridges in a sack.

"Now, put all the rocks that you can carry up in front, and make me a barricade facing the cave. Leave no opening except a little place where a Christian and a little sun can get in. And then leave me the food that you carried, and the water-jars."

They did everything; they made an embattlement on an angle, which completely covered the mouth of the cave. By squeezing himself to half his size, a man could hardly get through. They left their knapsacks with food, and gathered around the wounded man to receive their last orders. The sun was beginning to hide itself, and the cave was in half-darkness.

"Of all of you, no more than five are to stay here; not a leader, because you, Nicolas, and you, Ernesto, are needed more out there than in here. Joaquin Alvarez and Bernabé Cifuentes are to stay here with me all the time; Juan Alvarez and Marcos Torres are to station themselves a little outside the mountains with six horses, for when we come out. And Tiburcio stays to go in and out for whatever is needed. The rest are to go right now, and are not to tell where I am, or I'll twist your necks! You, can go knowing that they won't take me alive. If they discover me, I'll kill all I can; if they hem me in, I shall expect you to come to free me; if they try to kill me by thirst, or smother me with smoke, it's best that
I kill myself. Now, go, as it's almost night, and you can get around
if you go down in the dark..."

The ones who had to leave knelt in front of him, and bending over,
embraced him.

Goodbye, Nicolas; goodbye, Mios; goodbye, Reynaldo; goodbye, little
old fellow. Don't forget where we are to meet: the first of July in
San Juan Bautista, Durango."

"No, señor; adiós."

"Marcos, take care of the horses..."

"Sí, señor."

"Come back tomorrow."

"Sí, señor."

They went out one by one through the narrow gap, and the men in the
cave remained silent. Outside where the reddish twilight. Over the
landslide was extending the first dark strip of night; below, in the
bottom of the gorge, darkness was rising like smoke, and in it were
swallowed up the men who were going down.

"They didn't even leave us a candle..."

"Neither would I let you light it, fool. Do you want them to see
us out there?"

Tiburcio covered Villa with his blanket. The cave was cold as the
lair of a bear, and dark as a coffin. The wounded man began to nod, pos-
sessed by the fever, and the other four sat squatting, leaning their
backs against the smooth walls. When the shadows inside met the dark-
ness outside, all were sleeping silently. Only the injured man, in
dreams, was moaning.
After ten days of being holed up there, the fever returned to the Old Man, because he wanted to stand up and walk on his livid leg. None of the five knew what to do with him: if they damaged his forehead, he felt cold; if they covered him, he perspired copiously. He called them all.

"I'm beginning to think now that this is the real thing. I've seen others with bullet wounds worse than this, and it wasn't the same as with me. I am very weak, and I don't think I'm going to come out of this very well. I am going to make my last request of you."

"General, you are not going to die; you will get well..."

"No, Tiburcio; my knees are already doubling; I see the end coming very close. I ask only one thing of you: that you don't tell anybody that Francisco Villa died now. My boys will know it when I do not present myself at San Juan Bautista, as I have never lied to them, and when they don't see me there, they will say, 'Our chief is now dead; and there is nobody left to defend the people,' and they will do whatever suits them best. But listen well to what I'm going to tell you."

"Say whatever you want to, but it is not because you are going to die.

"If I do not die, it's best for everybody; but if it happens to me, I am going to ask you to make me an oath: that you won't bury me, but make a pile of dry branches, put me on it, and set fire to it. When it is finished, look over it well to see that there is not one little piece of my body left, because I don't want the Americans to take it to the United States, and say, 'Here is Pancho Villa. He took him alive, but a bullet got him, anyway, and how he is rotting.' They are capable of selling my body and looking to see what my head was like on the inside."
So, right now, swear to me that you will cremate me if I die. Tiburcio...

"Command me...

"Will you swear to me by your wife who is now in glory, and by your little daughter and your son, that you will burn my body as soon as I am dead?"

"If you die before I do, I shall burn you."

"I ask you to swear it."

"I swear it."

"Juan Alvarez..."

"I swear..."

"Joaquin..."

"I swear."

"Marcos Torres and Bernabe Cifuentes..."

"We swear."

"Oh, how I wish I might die before you, so that my body would never leave Mexico!"

***

Twenty days later, Villa still was not entirely cured; he was very feverish one week, and then when the heat left him, he wanted to stand up; then the flesh burst; it began to bleed again, the leg became inflamed, and once again he was stretched out. The men did almost no talking among themselves; only when Juan Alvarez or Marcos Torres, or the two, came back from where they had the horses, the chief asked if anybody had passed the feet of the mountains.

"Not a soul."
They were quiet again. During the day they took turns being at the entrance to the cave, between the two oaks, watching. They also took Villa outside for an hour, because inside it now smelted very bad from so many things that had collected on the sand. Joaquín Alvarez and Tiburcio Maya, first one, then another, went down every night to the arroyo to bring back fresh water in the two jugs. They were eating cracked corn and soaked rice, and every two or three days, a bite of dried meat. They never lit a fire, so that the smoke would denote them.

One day Maroos and Juan Alvarez, taking care of the horses, saw an unbranded head of cattle pass, an animal that was probably lost, who knows how long, from the pastures of some hacienda, and they shot it, split the hide down its back with a knife, and took out nothing but the tenderloin, with hide and all. They couldn't resist the temptation, and lighted a fire to roast the meat. They ate some of it, and took a good piece to Villa and his three companions.

The chief was angry.

"Imbécili! What if someone saw the smoke? How the pale-faces will fall on us in here one of these days! And then, what did you do with the carcass?"

"We left it over there."

"The crows will come down to eat it, and they'll see them fly up, and come to look at it. They will know that there are very few of us here, because we took no more than the tenderloin, and they'll come to look for us. Go right now and bury the cow."

Tiburcio Maya went with the two to help them. They came to where they had left the dead animal, and with some sharpened sticks they scraped a
hole where they could put it; they lowered it with much labor, because
the animal was very large, and pressed dirt down on top of it; it made
a little mound, that they covered with stones, and to lead anybody still
farther off the track, they put a cross at the head of the pile, like so
many other tombs scattered about the country.

When Tiburcio returned, Villa was still like a crazy man.

"Now you'll see, old man, how soon they'll be on top of us. I be-
lieve right now there are many enemies looking for us around here. Now
they'll know that I am wounded, and that you brought me here in a wagon.
They will already have searched everything to the north, and are proba-
ibly around here seeing if they can catch me."

"I don't think they'll come to this range of mountains."

"Why not? There are many of them, and they're not fools. No more
than somebody might have seen those who went down the pass, and it would
be enough for the Carrancistas and the Americans to suspect that I am
around here somewhere..."

It grew dark again, night entered the cave, and everybody became
silent.

A week passed, and when they had been in the cave twenty-seven days,
Juan Alvarez and Marcos Torres, who every morning used to pass through
the arroyo below to make signals that there was nothing unusual, did not
appear. Afternoon came, and still not a man crossed the ravine.

It was a day of restlessness, augmented by strange noises that came
at times toward their refuge. Sounds like human voices, and other times,
like barks. Some rocks broke loose from the edge of the slide, and went
rolling to the bottom of the gorge, destroying shrubs and starting off
showers of stones. At times, also, mysterious echoes repeated entire incomprehensible words. During the whole day nobody ventured forth to the oaks. They lay in bush inside, peering point for point at everything visible of the gorge and mountains facing. At nightfall the words that the echo repeated, the barks, the rolling of rocks, the indistinct sounds all went away, as if dragged off by the light, or fearful of the shadows.

"General..."

"What is it, Tiburcio?"

"Do you think something may have happened to the boys?"

Villa, seated on the ground and leaning against a wall, with the wounded leg extended in front of him, and his carbine across his stomach, in the same position in which he had been all day, ear and eye attentive, did not answer, limiting himself to moving his head from side to side.

"And if I go?"

"Where?"

"To look for them."

In the semi-darkness Villa's glance flashed, as if the spark which crossed his mind had found a way out through his eyes.

"Why them? Aren't you going to look for the others?"

"What others?"

"The gringos!"

"What for?"

"To give me away..."

Surprised, Tiburcio was slow to answer. "I'm not that kind, General, thank God! If I had wanted to hand you over, I would have had many chances:
to escape from here when I went down at night for water. I would not
tell where you are, not even if they made mincemeat of my body. And if
you doubt it, here and now, in this cave, you can kill me. I have neither
wife nor children who would miss me."

"It's all right; shut up. It was just something that occurred to me,
nothing more, without even knowing how. Afterwards, I saw that it couldn't
be. Go on then, and look around for the boys. If you see anybody else
and think that they can follow you, don't come back, but join me like the
rest, in Durango. And if they catch you, say that you've never seen me
in your life."

"I think I'll come back, my General."

"If you don't come back, try to forget where I am."

"Don't worry, Don Pepeho..."

"Go on, then."

He went.
Distrustful, Tiburcio moved forward through the dark; by feel he knew when he passed the mouth of the cave, and turned his eyes toward the sky; the milky way stretched out over his head, like a river of worlds that ran exactly in the center of the crags of the ravine. Between the two oaks that hid the entrance to the retreat with their trunks and foliage, he paused a moment, wishing to pierce the black vapor that enwrapped the things of earth. On feeling himself blind, he backed up a step, as if he were ready to drive himself beyond the expanse of the darkness. He fears that the night is watching him; that the silence, nesting in the branches of the pines, is treachery waiting to fall upon him like a nocturnal bird. If it were not for the push of the wind, he would think himself still in the cave; such was the blackness.

Having decided to go on, he slips among the jutting rocks and the holes of the vertical slide, in the route that Juan Alvarez and Narcos Torres have used since the day of their arrival in the sierra. The plants that he has trampled seem to complain behind him on recovering their position, and feeling themselves newly free, the branches of the shrubs and grass which he has grasped to hold him in his descent lash back against the rock wall. He makes a false step and launches a piece of rock rolling toward the mystery of the chasm. He distrusts the echo of the gorge, which makes a pendulum of a sound between the cliff sides.

He realized that the jumbled sound had entered the cave, and guessed what the wounded man must think: "That old imbecile Tiburcio--I wish I had flattened him like a tortilla against the rocks once and for all!" He smiled and kept descending. The silence, which returned when the echo ceased, seemed a protector to him then, and he imagined that it
old him there was nothing but emptiness in the darkness. And he went
down more rapidly. He reached the cave in the first wall, and from there
the way was easier, as there was a path used at times by the wild goats.
Below he could now hear the sound of the water in the arroyo, monotonous,
as if it were breathing rhythmically in its sleep. "I must be turning
into a cat, because now I can make out things in the dark. I can see
there the ledge ends in front, the silhouette of the pines, and even some
reflections of the stars in the water down in the gorge." He walked on
without many precautions, and even sang in a low voice a tune from the
beginnings of the Hadero days, when Rivero and Saraico defeated the Revo-

dutionaries in Aldama and captured the chief:

"Said Pancho Portillo,
'Fear I don't know--
Pascual Orozco will avenge
The blood that I let go.'"

"The blood that I let go--the blood that I let go--who will
avenge mine? If I don't come back tonight, or tomorrow, or some other
way, the chief will believe I have betrayed him and that I abandoned him
again. He will believe it because I left him before. And even though
they may have killed me for him, he will not know it, and when some
Christian goes to die, I am sure there won't be one to say, 'This pays
for the death of Tiburcio Maya.'"

Again his spirit was caught like an animal in ambush, and he wanted
to go back to the cave. "But what will I say to the Old Man? That I
was afraid? That it is better for us to wait and see if Torres and Juan
Ivarez come tomorrow?" He preferred to go on. After all, if they caught
him, he was bearing no arms, nor papers, nor did his clothes have blood
stains; they would ask him who he was and let him go, like any other rancher.

He reached the bottom of the gorge, threw himself on his stomach to
get a drink of water, and then went following the bank of the arroyo to
where the hills divided and several currents met. The mountains went on
getting lower and more level, and Tiburcio’s eyes felt, rather than saw,
the plain. "I have cat-eyes, and if I am a cat, I have seven lives."

To the right there was a grove of poplars where Martin Torres and
Juan Alvarez should have been with the horses, on the bank of the arroyo.
He thought he smelled the odor of manure, and he seemed to be walking on
ground recently stirred up by the feet of men or animals; he went along
making noise, for if he met anyone in the grove, undoubtedly it was some-
one lying in wait of him.

"It is I, Tiburcio."

He paused to wait for an answer, certain that they had heard him, in
spite of the fact that he spoke in a hardly natural voice, so that his
words wouldn’t carry too far. Not being answered, he went on walking
toward the trees. Under their branches the presence of ambush was even
stronger. He sank his feet in a soft matting of leaves and branches, and
fresh grass. He stopped, leaning on the trunks of the poplars. "Those
scoundrels have already pulled out." In fact, not a sound of men or ani-
mals, and there were two men and six horses which should have been there.
"Had they seen enemies hovering around here? Had enemies seized them and
taken them to Parral or to Ballesa? Had they killed them if they could not
get out of them where the chief was? The best thing is for me to wait here
till dawn, and figure out what is best to do then?" He decided to look for
a place where the cover of leaves and bushes was even thicker, to lie
down, and he walked feeling ahead a moment, taking touch-steps in the
grass.

Arrrrrck!

"They've got me!"

Immediately he realized what had happened, as if he had seen it:
his foot had touched the center of a heavy trap, of the kind that Ameri-
cans use for bears, and the two jaws of triangular teeth had closed with
a clash on his leg. He felt the teeth bury themselves in the flesh, through
the heavy leather puttees.

"What an idiot I am!"

He felt around the ground and tried to open those steel jaws that had
bitten down on his leg. With the strength alone of his arms it was im-
possible; he wanted to move to another spot to look for some heavy pole,
but he found that the trap was chained to a tree. In groping he found a
heavy padlock that made the chain secure.

"I have fallen into a trap like the most stupid animal of all animals,
and they've caught me." He knew that an iron crowbar was necessary to
open those semicircular jaws, and he understood that he was at the mercy
of whoever set the trap. "Will it be a hunter, or—the gringos?" A
trapper would not have been a motive for Juan Alvarez and Martin Torres
to go off with the horses and everything. They could have "pacified" two
or three with bullets. "There are no two ways about it; it was the Puni-
tives." His leg was starting to hurt him, weighed down by the tremendous
pressure of the trap; it was probably bleeding from at least one tooth on
each side.
"I have no more chance than a man dead and buried. And now, when will they come? Undoubtedly, in the morning, because they must have gone to bed in some fortified place where they are protected in their sleep by a cordon of sentinels and some intrenchments.

"And, finally, I don't even have a pistol in my belt. It wouldn't have been so bad, because they would have found a dead bear in their trap. But I am such a fool that I didn't even think of that. Everybody uses a pistol around here, and it wouldn't have seemed strange to anyone that I was carrying one. -the chief's right when he thinks it would have been better for me to have mashed myself like a tortilla down in the gorge."

So, talking to himself, he heard the noises of the night pass through the forest. Stretched on his back on the grass, he felt the wet dew. He exhaled a long yawn; his eyes hurt and his eyelids were heavy. He stretched his arms in a lazy gesture and went to sleep.

Barking at his head awakened him; two animals with sharp noses, yellow as coyotes, were leaping with excitement near him, producing a half-hostile clamor, giving long barks toward the plain, and again jumping around the prisoner, growling and pawing him. "No more nor less than if I had been a wild beast; now I only need to be taken out, and my hide stretched to dry."

Lying on the ground as he was, he heard the trembling of the earth as of a crowd approaching. The police dogs went running off and then came back to take a turn around the trap. On hearing a human whistle, Tiburcio sat up on the mat of grass. "Here they are. I'll be satisfied as long as they don't try to make me talk like a dog..."

The little grove was shaken by the trot of horses. Human voices called the dogs in a language almost unknown to Tiburcio, who remembered
it from the only three hours of his life that he had ever been in foreign territory, that early morning in March.

"Oh, little dogs! Come on..."

"The Punitive!"

The dogs disappeared for a moment and returned with the mass of men: American soldiers dressed in yellow, with their olive-colored palm hats pushed forward and the chinstraps fastened at the shaved napes of their necks. Among them, two or three redskin Indians, with palm sombreros turned down to their shoulders, and long lank hair. They were the guides and interpreters of the Punitive Expedition. And then a huge sergeant made his way through his curious soldiers.

"Say, old man, who are you?" he asked in his strange language.

"Hable en cristiano—you'll have to talk to me in a Christian tongue, so I can understand you..."

"He says, 'Who are you, old man?'

"Well, here's one I can understand. It's a fine thing when Indians come over here to steal cattle..."

"Who are you?"

"Let go my foot, and I'll tell you."

"Oh, hell!" interrupted the sergeant. "Ask him if he's a Villista."

"You first let my foot out," said Tiburcio, when he finally understood the officer, "and I'll tell you what my name is, you freckled gringo..."

"All right! You fellows free him!"

Two soldiers opened the jaws of the bear trap, and Tiburcio was able to stand up. Hopping on one foot, he went to a nearby tree and leaned
against the trunk. In an instant he had formulated his plan. His gray
eyes became lively, and he jovially and rapidly answered the questions
put to him by the Indian interpreter.

"What is your name?"
"Juan Perez."
"Where from?"
"From my ranch."
"And where is your ranch?"
"Down the river from Guerrero."
"Where were you going?"
"To Parral."
"On foot?"
"No, on horseback."
"Where's your horse?"
"I got off yesterday near an arroyo to get a drink of water and do
something else that isn't important for you to know, and when I wasn't
noticing, the horse ran away and I couldn't catch him."
"Are you armed?"
"My carbine was on the horse."
"Why were you going to Parral?"
"To look for work."
"Why did you leave your ranch?"
"Because I have no seed to plant this year."

The red-skin began to grow impatient. If the old man was lying, it
was going to be work to get anything definite out of him. The sergeant,
who only half understood the questions and answers, butted in.
"Do you know Pancho Villa?"

"I? God save me from dealing with that bandit!"

"You don't know where he is?"

"He should be in hell, roasting in oil."

Nothing doing with that line of talk, either. How difficult these cunning Mexicans were when they proposed to pretend ignorance! The same trouble every day. Old men and children, women and men, all answered the same thing: nobody seemed to like Villa, but nobody gave the slightest hint of his whereabouts; not even rumors that ordinarily wouldn't be lacking...How difficult it was to locate Villa! It was well known that he was wounded, that he had passed in a wagon through the Mortero ranch, toward the south. After him were detached many flying columns, with instructions to capture him dead or alive. On April 12, Major Tompkins, with his soldiers, arrived in Parral, having been attacked, and with a bullet hole over his heart which was about to kill him. Major Robert L. Howze, riding parallel to Tompkins, had a skirmish in Balleza, April 13, with the Villistas, who got away without leaving a prisoner or a wounded man who could give them information. And it did no good to round them all up in Santa Cruz de Villagás, and hold them all night in a big corral. Not the slightest good. Where would Pancho have gone? The wagon was not seen south of Parral; then it must have gone in this direction.

"You son of a gun! You tell me where Villa is, or I'll break your head!"

Tiburcio answered with a shrug of his shoulders and a scornful grimace; he was becoming weary. "The devil take these little soldiers! They're wearing out my patience." He tried to take a step, but the
wounded leg doubled. He was lost. Any attempt at escape was absurd.

Nevertheless, if he managed to head off the Americans about his identity as a Villista, they would set him free sooner or later. He took a cigarette from his pocket, and was going to light it when the Indian slapped it out of his hands.

"Coming from your ranch, did you pass through San Antonio de los Arenales?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Three days ago."

"Were the American troops there then?"

Tiburcio saw himself in a difficult situation. It was almost certain that they were, as it was their route. He stammered.

"Americans? Do you mean American soldiers?"

"Yes, Soldiers like us."

"Yes, there were."

"Many, or a few?"

"The truth is that I did not count them."

"Oh, you damned greaser! If you were in San Antonio, you couldn't have left without a passport. You, red, tell him General Pershing is there."

"The sergeant says to tell you that General Pershing has been in San Antonio with the General Headquarters of the Punitive Expedition since April 4. If you went through there, you should have your passport."

"They didn't give me any."

"How did you get out, then?"
"At night..."

They were getting annoyed. This old man was worse than a mule. Evidently, they weren't going to get anything out of him. The Apache knocked his sombrero to the ground, leaving his head bare and his wild untrained hair uncovered. He scratched his head, as if to stir up an idea. Nothing occurred to him but to use torture, and he consulted with the sergeant, who answered, "We have orders not to molest peaceful Mexicans."

"But this one must be a Villista; I'm sure of it."

"Well, then, we'll take him along as a prisoner."

"I'll make him tell what he knows."

"Oh, don't bother me any more! I hand him over to you. You're not a part of the American army, so you can do what you please with a Mexican." He gave a half-turn and walked off, again opening a way through the circle of soldiers. He left the Indians to do whatever they felt like. If they got some information out of the Mexican, good, and if not, he had no responsibility whatever. If they accused him of cruelty to the natives, he would hand over the Apache guides, and accounts. Satisfied with his skill, he took a bite from his plug of chewing tobacco.

Behind him, the Indians had handcuffed Tiburcio to the trunk of a tree. Rapidly they took off his puttees and tégus, leaving his dark feet bare. The old man guessed.

"Accursed dogs, you deserve to be treated like slaves! You may enjoy tormenting me, but it will never do you any good—you won't see me get limp! I know where General Villa is, but you'll never find it out!"

"Sergeant! Sergeant! He says he knows where Pancho Villa is!"
The petty officer was half a kilometer away, riding indifferently on his chestnut horse. With yells and motions they made him come back at a gallop. When he returned, one of the Indians had skinned the soles of the old man's feet with his broad hunting knife. The rebel was screaming, "Sons of bitches! Cowards! Your whole race must be traitors! Foot-lickers, spies, dogs! Kill me and get it over with!"

"Where is Pancho Villa?"
"Sleeping with your grandmother!"
The Indian struck him.
"Where is Pancho Villa?"
"With your old woman!"

Furious, the Apache beat the prisoner with closed fists; the sergeant intervened, pulling him away.

"This won't get you anywhere, brute! Look, old man. You know where Villa is. We'll cure you; we'll give you fifty thousand dollars if you'll tell us..."
"Go to the devil!"
"You know where Villa is, you told us. Tomorrow, or the day after, or some day..."

He gave orders to his soldiers, and two of them, taking their handkerchiefs to wet them in the arroyo, washed his feet and wrapped them in the damp cloth. Then they put him on a horse, with his legs hanging. The soles of the old man's feet were paining him horribly. It would have been a favor to kill him. "But he wants to take me before that pair of prairie dogs..." The sergeant matched his horse's pace to that of Tiburcio's.
"Old man, I'm sorry. Apaches are always like that; we Americans will cure you; we'll give you money; you won't need to work. Just tell us where Pancho Villa is..."

He did not answer. The pain! The pain! He felt that each foot was as big as the world. They weighed him down and numbed all his muscles up to his neck. The handkerchiefs had stuck to the live flesh, and clinging there, he felt as if he were standing on knives. A continuous sickness was creeping over him, an interminable pain, as if they were cutting off his legs in slices. Then he felt as if everything were pouring down out of him; his stomach and everything inside it seemed to him to be falling down inside his legs. "Santo Nino de Atocha." There came to his mind the image worshipped in the church in the village, after so many years of passing by the church without glancing inside it, and clapping his hat on his head in a gesture of scorn. He felt the pain in his stomach like an enormous hunting knife being twisted around in his intestines. Why should it hurt so high up, if nothing more than his feet were wounded? He reached up to hit the muscles with his clenched fist, but he felt the blow only in his hand. His legs, numb from pain, had become insensible and rigid at the sides of the saddle. "They say a man's legs hurt after they've been cut off, but I can't feel my legs, and I still have them." He shut his eyes and lost all sense of direction. He imagined that the horse was doing nothing more than balancing itself backwards and forwards, without advancing or backing up. "The horse—what horse?" He felt himself floating; he was in the middle of a river, pulled along by the current, and he had to swim in order not to drown; he moved his arms awhile, but then he could no longer, because his arms
were pinioned. He also felt his breast pressed as if by a long arm.

"I'm sinking..." He opened his mouth to give a great scream, and his eyes. He gave only a rattle in his throat, and saw over his head only a dirty mist that went on fading away. "Adios..."

He leaned forward in the saddle, not falling, because the soldier who saw the martyred Villista swimming in his delirium had mounted behind him, and was holding him up.

"Fainted?"

"Yes, sergeant."
FAITHFUL TO FRANCISCO VILLA

In three days of march they took him to San Antonio de los Arenales, where the General Headquarters of the American troops of the Punitive Expedition were located. All along the road small detachments of soldiers dressed in yellow were met, and they spoke to the sergeant of the patrol in their language. They were points of the net which General Pershing had thrown out over mountain and prairie to capture Francisco Villa alive or dead, as he had promised. But it was an unlucky net that dragged in only the little fish, while the big one stayed outside in deep water.

"We'll know where Villa is pretty soon," the sergeant went on repeating on the road. He had a plan to get a confession out of that fever-stricken man wobbling on the horse, held in his saddle by an American soldier seated behind him.

The sergeant saluted all the officers he met on the way with a kind of affectionate familiarity, satisfied with the great success that was almost his. He rode without stopping long enough for anybody else to more than speak to his prisoner, fainting from fever. He had left his regiment behind, and was following no orders but those of the General-in-Chief, with whom he had communicated by telephone from San Geronimo, telling him his plan and obtaining permission to go to San Antonio de los Arenales.

"I'll come back by here with Villa prisoner in a little while," he said to the Mexicans. "Boys, we'll be back home pretty soon," he said to his own fellow-countrymen, who would be able to return to their own land upon the capture of the bold rebel who had challenged them. When he met a good-sized troop in which there was a military doctor,
he asked him to examine the prisoner and do something for him.

"Is he very bad?"

"Oh, no!"

"Will he live till we get to San Antonio?"

"Certainly. He has a fever, but it won't last long when he gets some rest."

"All right!"

When he saw the extensive encampment of canvas tents around San Antonio, he broke into a gallop, after advising his men to take special pains with Tiburcio. And when the caravan reached the sentinels, he was already returning with very ample orders from General Headquarters. He started for the schoolhouse, where the Medical Corps had installed their hospital, and were then caring for six soldiers of Major Tompkins' column, wounded in Parral, and three others from Colonel Dodd's column, wounded April 22 in Temochic in an encounter with Rios, Acea, and Domingues.

A dozen very clean beds were lined up in one of the classrooms; attendants dressed in white were waiting on the wounded men, and from a nearby room, improvised into an operating room, came the warm, heavy odor of anaesthetics. Tiburcio was wheeled from the big room to the operating room on a little cart about the size of a coffin, which an attendant carefully pushed along; at the door, two doctors in long starched aprons were ready and waiting to operate.

"Remember, he deserves every attention."

Surely he did deserve all the medical attention possible: not so much for being a prisoner and victim of savagery, but because he now
constituted the only hope of the Punitive Expedition: a man who knew exactly where Pancho Villa was! The pain of the torture to which the redskins had subjected him, far from persuading him, had encouraged him against his captors, steadying him like a rock in his plan not to reveal where his chief had hidden. Another method was going to be put into practice with him: kindness, consideration. The surgeons unwrapped those swollen feet, washed them, covered them with sedative preparations, and bound them with perfect, sterilized, white bandages. On the second day, with new treatment, the fever disappeared, and they brought food to Tiburcio on a heavy tray: cereal with cream on it, fresh fruit, tea,... The nurses passed by him continually, feeling his forehead with a soft touch to judge his temperature. They smiled at him and said a few words to him in bad Spanish. The doctors exerted themselves to improve him; his companions in other beds called to him and chatted with him from a distance, making use of their scant knowledge of his language: "Mucho gusto---I'm pleased to meet you, Mexican." "Buena mañana---good morning, señor." After all, he was also wounded, and, besides, he was a prisoner, beaten.

When it was time to eat, the sergeant who had captured him came and sat down at Tiburcio's side to talk to him. He helped him take his cereal, peeled his fruit, and told him of life in the United States, where there were many Mexicans working. A good house, an automobile...

"Have you a wife? Have you any children?"

At the unexpected tracing back of memory, Tiburcio's spirit became wrapped in smoke; it darkened, and from the depths of blackness emerged hate and the voice of vengeance.
"Wife, children? What had Francisco Villa done with them?" For the first time, the monstrous crime made his blood boil. Never before had he thought of punishing the criminal, in spite of the many times he had had him in range of his bullets. He had been faithful to him, served him, cured him, perhaps saved his life. Why? What did he owe him? He owed him the loss of his wife, of his children, his suffering torture that would prevent him from walking on his feet the rest of his days. "Accursed Old Man!" What good would his silence repay him? Because it was certain that if Tiburcio said one word, Villa was lost. In six hours the whole Santa Ana sierra would be surrounded by thousands of men, and that very same night, without resting, the dogs would smell their way to the cave, and finally to the men.

"Wife, children? Pancho Villa killed them."

The sergeant sat with his mouth open, not sure he understood.

"Pancho Villa killed them? And yet you follow Villa?"

"Yes."

"You obey Villa? You defend him?"

"Yes."

"Then, you're crazy..."

"Crazy—yes."

"Oh, I don't believe you; you've got a fever again! If a man killed my wife, I'd kill that man. I wouldn't defend him."

"I would."

The surprise of the sergeant, his astonished eyes, his spirit of revenge banished in an instant the hate of martyrdom. "I would." In those two words was his moral triumph. Insurable, condemned never to
walk again, prisoner, old, hearing his tomb being dug, he took the assurance of superiority over the sergeant, doctors, and nurses, over the hundreds of soldiers he could see through the windows roaming among their lines of identical tents; over the whole army...

"I would."

So and the Americans had equal motives for hate. Villa had outraged them, had murdered their nearest and dearest, had provoked their wrath, had defied them; the other he had crushed making him serve him, cure him, hide him. Of the Americans he had made fun, seeing them pass in front of his refuge, desperate at not being able to find him. And the Americans wanted to take him dead or alive to exhibit him in their own country, according to their promise. With his death and ignominy they would be avenged.

"Not I."

He had one sole way of taking revenge; man to man. He would have said to the chief, "Pancho Villa, you are the worst bandit I know. You have murdered my wife and daughter. You carry a pistol in your belt, and so do I; let's see who can shoot first, both at once." But he never would have murdered him from behind, nor would he have taken advantage of the fact that he was wounded to break open a vein and let him bleed to death. He would never denounce him, so that ten thousand men with cannons, machine-guns, and airplanes might lay siege to a cave where there were only three men in hiding, with their minds made up not to be captured alive.

"You tell where Villa is, and we'll avenge you; we'll reward you. Fifty thousand dollars, a hundred thousand dollars we'll give you if you
tell where he is. You can go and live in the United States, with police protection, and nobody can do anything to you. What do you say?"

"Not I."

"If we find Villa alive, we'll make him ask your pardon. We'll take a picture of him asking Tiburcio's pardon for having killed his wife. You are the only man in the world that Villa will kneel to. You can humiliate him..."

"Not I."

"We'll give you whatever you ask for—ranch, horses, fine cattle. We'll cure you; you'll be able to walk; you can live happily, as you used to do, but rich. You'll punish the murder of your family."

"Not I."

From a pocket of his uniform, the sergeant took out an enormous map which he spread out on the bed. A square of a hundred kilometers was minutely detailed: hill by hill, arroyo by arroyo, town by town, forest by forest. A red-pencilled cross marked the spot where Tiburcio Maya had been captured, in the center of the map. Francisco Villa must be hiding within a radius of fifty kilometers.

"Look, Mexicanos; you don't have to say one word; nothing but just point your finger. If you have sworn not to tell, you don't have to; but you didn't swear not to point your finger. Where is Pancho Villa? Tell me! Show me!"

"No!"

Enraged, he seized the map and tore it up in an instant. The sergeant lost control of himself, and with his two hands he clutched Tiburcio by the neck, yanking him out of bed.
"You dumb fool! You get out of that bed and let some wounded
American soldier have it! You're going to hell to wait for Pancho Villa..."

They took him in a truck which rolled all night along roads rapidly constructed by the Punitive in less than two months of invasion. The headlights lit up an abandoned prairie; only the telephone poles along the road linked the desert to life. Tiburcio did not know where they were taking him; stretched under the canvas top of the dray, he could not see the stars or mountains. Were they going to kill him? Then why take him so far? The motor roared along for five or six hours up and down. Three men in the front seat, and another three sitting with their legs hanging out in the back, bouncing at every rut in the ground. The prisoner was lying in the middle of the truck floor.

At dawn the automobile stopped at the edge of a mesa. The soldiers lifted Tiburcio out and laid him on the ground.

"Adiós, Mexicano. We'll leave you to your own countrymen..."

The truck turned around, the soldiers got in, and it went off with the spitting of the motor getting farther and farther away.

The Villista, lying on the ground, sat up. Below the mesa a dark line of listless trees, wrapped in their garapes of motionless branches, and three or four kilometers away, a group of houses. Beyond, the sierra which seemed to send him a moist breeze as a salute.

Tiburcio recognized that plain, made out the river that was running behind the trees, and knew what town it was. "Guerrero City. But why the devil have they left me here?"

He noticed a movement; a group of riders who had left the town were coming along the mesa. "They saw the lights of the car, and they're
coming to see what's going on. They must be Carrancistas, and I'm not going to go crawling off, because I'm not a snake."

After looking around a little while, they found him.

"What did you come here for?"

"I didn't come; they brought me."

"Get up."

"I can't."

"What the devil's wrong with you?"

"They skinned my feet."

"The Villistas?"

"We're not so savage!"

"You're a Villista, then."

"Yes!"

"What did they bring you here for?"

"For you to kill me."

They put him on a horse and took him to Guerrero City. There some women identified him; he was the one who had bandaged Villa's leg; he had taken the wagon from Chaves' in which they had carried the wounded man away, and he himself was driving the mules.

"Where is Villa?"

"He died five days after we left here."

"Where?"

"Over by San Gerónimo."

"Did you bury him?"

"No, we cremated him."
It was useless to go on talking with that stubborn old man. They took off his bandages and made him walk to the river. The Villista bit his hands to keep from crying out; heavy tears escaped from his eyes, which were the color of ashes. At times he fell, and a soldier raised him up and held him so he would have to go on mangling his feet as he walked. He left a trail of blood in the middle of the street, through the grove of poplars, along the rocky bank...

"Where did you bury Villa?"

"We burned him."

"Well, ask him how he is for us..."

They hanged him on a willow whose branches hung over the sleepless river, and his body swung back and forth at the end of a noose, two or three meters from the bank.

The rope twisted round and round, pulling the branch over, and the feet of Tiburcio Maya were still bleeding when they were kissed by the sobbing waters of the Papigochio.

THE END
"General Villa was not discovered by the Americans. He stayed in the cave thirty-three days, and once the fugitives passed through the bottom of the gorge. Joaquín Alvarez, who had gone to get water, saw them coming and hid the jars near a tree, covering them with branches, in order to be able to climb back up to the cave more rapidly. The Americans searched the ravine for six days, and the three men could not leave the cave to get water. Finally, they went away, and Joaquín went down for the jars.

"As General Villa now had no fever, they made a saddle of their hands and lowered him from the cave, carrying him to the El Guaje ranch. There they found a burro, and with one of their sarapes they made a sling for the bad foot. He couldn't walk, because when he stood on it, the wound opened, and hurt him severely.

"On the burro they took nine days to get to a ranch near Santa Cruz de Herrera, where Gorgonio Beltrán lived, who with his two sons and other men, ten in all, joined Villa. And three months exactly after we left Guerrero, he appeared in San Juan Bautista, where we were waiting for him.

"Again in the state of Chihuahua, six months later when the Americans had left, the General complained a good deal of his leg, because it would open every so often, and then I told him that it was because the bullet had not been taken out better. He told me 'Yes', but he didn't want me to take it out. He wanted us to call an Italian named Enriqueti, from over near Hermiquipa; he said that he didn't have anything with which to
take out the bullet, and as there wasn't anything else, I gave him some branding-irons, which are very wide, so that the Italian had to open the General's leg with a knife.

"Then, Enriqueti did not wish to operate while the General had a pistol; I asked him for it, and he gave it to me willingly, knowing why I asked him for it. The Italian was very much afraid, and looked at the General more than at the bullet, so he did not hit the exact spot to take it out. Then the General began to bite a rag, because his leg was hurting him terribly, and turned his face; the Italian took out the bullet, which was only a fragment, because before hitting the chief, it had struck a rock."
BIBLIOGRAPHY


