

For a day and a night on board the *Santa Ana*, don Adrian Pulido Pareja, indomitable soldier and knight of the order of Santiago, by the will of the Council of the Indies new governor and captain general of the province of Altagracia, had been violently sick.

All of a sudden the ocean had tired of seeming a vast piece of blue silk; it had shrugged off its immobility as dogs shrug off water and one wave after another had risen to its knees, and from its knees to its feet, and from its feet onto the tips of its toes, ever higher and more frightening. Swept by the winds, its rollers opened avenues of shadow into which the *Santa Ana* plunged recklessly; the ship's timbers had taken on the colour of a wet chestnut and, apparently, the weight of a chestnut too, plaything of that world's end into which the astonished and wet don Adrian believed himself to have fallen, until Captain De Urquia forced him to go below to his cabin, where it took the best part of an hour and a large glass of wine for the governor's face to lose its expression of almost infantile stupor, a disbelief which wanted to go back on deck to get even more soaked in order to understand such frenzy.

Meanwhile the ocean continued to seethe, intent on opening a breach in the *Santa Ana*. It tried everything, from above, from below, knocking, pushing, seeping then surging, feigning indifference all at once to launch itself then again against the ship's sides. At every failed attempt the ocean, mad with rage, seized the vessel and flung it here and there; it was then that don Adrian, having clenched his teeth on the sheets for a period of time which he thought befitting to his station in a vain attempt at resistance, flooded the crisp white linen as he gave up the pointless struggle.

For hours, now, in the sticky warmth, he had stared at the ceiling, oblivious of himself and of the world; made fast to the edges of his bunk, his arms tense from the effort to balance himself against the pitching of the ship, he hoped that no-one would come down to disturb him, not even his servant Felipe, though the latter's help was badly needed in this cabin which bore the signs of an unequal battle, lost but not yet ended.

Twelve months previously, Captain Pareja's candidature for the Cross of Santiago had been championed by no less a personage than the Duke of Medina Sidonia, not for any love he bore him, quite the contrary. He had seen him in action more than once, in divers victorious encounters in Flanders and against the Catalan rebels, and the Duke thought that with that cross around his neck the captain turned knight would become an even more obvious candidate for posting to the Indies and hence very, very far from himself and from certain plans for rebellion which could thus be left peacefully to come to fruition. He was not mistaken: perhaps he had added a few words, some gifts or many pesos, but in spirit at least the Duke too went to Cadiz to wave goodbye to the *Santa Ana* as she bore off a threat to his plans, her sails bellying in the breeze as she carried that threat to somebody else. Don Adrian, stifling in his cabin, would not have believed in such a humiliating promotion if he had been made to read it in black and white, in the Duke's own handwriting, and he brooded over his new glory as well as he could, and waited for better times.

A clean handkerchief on his forehead assuaged the thoughts of abandonment which had flowered with the smell of his sweaty body.

‘Excellency, how do you feel?’

There was anxiety in his servant’s eyes, but don Adrian was in no mood for pretence.

‘I feel like shit, Felipe, like shit. Bring me some water. What’s the verdict on the weather, above?’

‘They say that this sea cannot last but that it will not settle in any case before morning.’

Don Adrian turned to the wall so that Felipe would not see the veil of sadness which had fallen over his face. It might be difficult to believe, but his poor relationship with the sea had managed to sap even his enthusiasm for becoming governor. Only his awareness of his role kept him from falling to his knees and begging for mercy, pleading for help. He resigned himself.

‘Let no-one down here. If Robledo and the captain ask after me, tell them that I am feeling recovered and that they may see me tomorrow morning; even better, tell them that tomorrow morning I wish them both to report to me. Now bring me some hot water and then get out of my sight!’

Don Adrian waited for the sound of Felipe’s footsteps to be swallowed by the stairs before heaving himself out of his bunk, to be rewarded with a wave of intense dizziness. His long hair fell over his eyes as he stared at the floor, trying to bring his boots into focus, and felt his locks slapping gently against his three-day beard, first on his right then on his left, with the rocking of the *Santa Ana*. He collapsed onto his bunk, smelling the stale air and at the same time an exhaustion which boded ill, because it was undermining him even before he applied his victor’s spurs to the lands he was to govern. The servant came back in quietly, left a basin of water on the table and disappeared without a word.

As he dried his face, don Adrian caught his own image in the mirror and for a moment did not recognise himself in that sagging face. Looking at the stranger who was himself, he felt an understandable nostalgia for dry land, but his thoughts reached back to what he had left behind and as yet he could not imagine how much greater the beauty of that new land was than that of Spain, a beauty for which his European vocabulary had no words. He put these thoughts from him and stretched out as comfortably as he could, in search of the little sleep which he could scrape together between one wave’s surge and the next. He found it, and with it a strange dream, almost a nightmare.

A flowered swing sweetly accepted his weight. Its slow sway, always constant though nobody was pushing it, left him free to look about him. The tree which rocked him stood on a low, lonely hillock and there must have been a river somewhere nearby, even if he could not see it but only deduced it from the dampness of the grass. He heard two distant voices deep in conversation but though he looked all around him he could see nobody; there was nobody there. He attempted to stop the swing, but its movement was decided by forces which would not be modified and in the attempt to anchor himself to a branch the seat slid from under him and he found himself stretched on the grass with a sharp pain in his ankle. He limped in search of the two voices drifting to him intermittently on the wind. They were sometimes close and then terribly far away, which made his search difficult until he saw them perching like two great crows on the

highest branch, twenty feet above the swing, unmoving. He thought they must have seen him and tried to call them, but the two ignored him and did not deign to look down even during the pauses in their conversation; impossible that they had not heard him, which meant that they were being intentionally rude, and he felt entirely insignificant. But because he knew he was nothing of the sort, he was seized by rage, by a wish to kick them down off the tree and drag them in front of his name to unnerve them at least a little. Trying not to think about his twisted ankle, he began to climb the tree, determined to have satisfaction for this outrage. When he was so close that not to answer and not to turn around would have been the sign of the most deliberate insolence he greeted them once more, but again nothing, just as though he were invisible. He did not understand. He looked at them, seeing them properly for the first time. They were both clad in black and wore opulent-looking jewels and rings. The nearest to him was young, his long oval face so pale as to be translucent; a thin fair moustache nearly touched his ears. The other seemed slightly older because of his bulk and his dark face, made more threatening by a thick black goatee. He stared at them, trying to recognise them, because he was sure he had seen them somewhere before, but he could no longer remember where and when; for a moment he was disturbed by the idea that the younger of the two could in fact be the king. Almost immediately the two of them began to climb down from branch to branch with an ease which seemed to him unnatural, sliding towards the earth unimpeded by any obstacle, moulding themselves to the tree's irregularities while he felt terribly precarious and off balance. Once on the ground they set off towards the stream which from that height he too could see winding across the meadow. He stayed still, and from his perch saw a wonderful galley coming towards him with banks of oars painted gold and red. It floated in that stream, which was far too small, as though on a great river, and though its oars struck the grass they still propelled it effortlessly forward. The ship stopped, took the two on board and moved off into the distance, its outline blurring with the onset of dusk. It was too much. He climbed down onto the grass and fell to his knees, searching for marks of the keel on the grass, but he saw none and was not surprised. As he sat on the bank, he saw a glimmering of torches, approaching from the same direction from which the ship had appeared, becoming gradually brighter until they assumed the shape of another ship, smaller than the first but still too large for the tiny trickle of water on which it floated. He climbed to his feet and thought that this time he would understand, that somebody on board would explain to him what they were doing in this place. The oars were shipped as the vessel arrived in front of him, coming to a halt as though the anchorage had been decided leagues before. In the light of the torches, he saw assembled on the deck no less than the entire Council of the Indies, the very same which had voted his posting three months earlier. He recognised them all, even if he could no longer remember their names but it was they, he was not mistaken: might they have thought twice about the matter and tracked him that place to take away his mandate? He knew that all his papers were in order, but he was agitated by the sight of them all before him, surrounded by desks, benches and clerks, as though the entire Council chamber had been taken apart, with all its ebony and marquetry, and reassembled on the ship. The chairman began to ask him the same questions which he had asked him three months earlier, and the clerks began to write down the same answers which he had already given, one by one; perhaps they suspected him of lying and had come to check, before letting a man depart for the Indies who was unworthy of such a trust. He wanted to tell

the eminent Council that he had already left, that nothing could now be done... A secretary rose and came towards him carrying an enormous book; at a sign from the chairman he opened the book at a page which contained all at once a passage from the Bible, the royal arms of Spain and the map of Altagracia. The secretary asked him to swear and he did so, exactly as he had done the first time, and he had not yet finished speaking when the book snapped shut and all the torches went out in a strong wind which filled the sail of the ship and made it set off sharply, throwing him overboard, onto the grass.

The dawn, coming through the large window in the stern, cleansed the cabin of nightmares. Don Adrian sat up seeking Felipe's face in the reflected light of a wave which shone full on him. The servant stood there.

'Are you quite well, Excellency? I heard you shouting in your sleep and I came down straight away; I hope I did not wake you.'

Don Adrian had ceased to be unwell a little after dawn, and got out of his bed of nocturnal visions with a piercing desire to urinate, a sign of returning vigour; without further ado he heaved the necessary out of his unmentionables and offloaded the excess in the chamber-pot in which Felipe had run to catch it before it was too late.

'What the devil was I shouting?' he asked as he buttoned himself up.

*"Let me alone!"* and then *"I swear, I swear!"* and then I didn't hear anything else.'

Don Adrian felt naked.

'Well done, boy! You have your ear to the door even when I sleep – well, forget it all and keep quiet, understood?'

His voice was once more the voice Felipe had learnt to fear, and as he recognised it, harsh and conspicuous by its arrogance, he was happy that don Adrian was feeling better, really much better.

'Which suit would you like, Excellency?'

'Whichever, you choose from the trunk. Give me the blue shirt, then bring me a razor and some hot water, and get a move on.'

The boy disappeared.

The feel of his bare feet on the bare boards was pleasant, He stretched out in his chair to wait for Felipe and felt happy. He had been in a state of continuous happiness since he had been made to take the oath, in a situation very different from that in the dream, but until this moment he had never been alone enough or near enough to his destination to comprehend its importance. In the silence of his cabin he listened to the ocean, quiet now eight feet below him, the muffled voices from the deck, the shouted orders, and he felt nearly there, very near to the power which awaited him.

Don Adrian emerged from two days of darkness to feel the Caribbean sun full on his face, stunning him as effectively as a blow from a halberd. He leaned on a confused mass of colours which had the height and smell of Felipe and succeeded in masking his surprise only after realizing that nobody else was taking any notice of that terrible light. His lieutenant Alejandro Robledo was already on the poop deck and as soon as he saw him, deathly pale and unmoving in the sunlight, he came to meet him with Captain de Urquia.

'Good day, Excellency,' they said in unison.

Robledo received a piercing glance of a type with which he was well acquainted, while de Urquia received the answer:

'Your boat holds water like my stomach, Captain,' which could mean a number of things which don Adrian did not bother to explain; the distance between the two was made of awareness of each other, and nobody on board could speak to the captain as he did.

'How long must we still roam the ocean?' he asked again and without waiting for an answer added: 'I have been waiting for a week and as far as I can see there is not a sight of land' – even though he had absolutely no idea where they were. De Urquia chose his answer carefully, between the awkwardness of the question and the nautical certainty of their position as revealed to him by the sextant.

'I apologise for the delay, but in this season the storms do not obey even Your Excellency. If the wind holds, we will be at Atacama tomorrow morning.'

Don Adrian was relieved. Only a little longer; one more effort and then he would never look at a ship again, not even from a distance. As the galleon ploughed forward, seeming to stand still in the succession of deceptively identical waves, reflecting the light as blindingly as looking-glasses placed on that vast sea like melted lead, don Adrian descended to the deck, making the balustrade squeak at every step, so that all would see him unsupported and steady on his legs. The sails cast a cooler shadow, and the governor, bareheaded and free of uncertainty about his future, breathed deeply leaning against the mizzen mast, watching the activity around him and at the same time forward where the lookout lay at the figurehead, embracing her briny beauty, eyes fixed on the blue line which would yield the profile of the teeming and barbaric Indies.

He stayed in the shade on the foredeck all morning, as though he felt his presence to be a necessary encouragement to the forces of nature which, seeing him there still in one piece, would quickly do what was necessary to unload him where he would like already to have arrived. Every now and then he watched bits of wood and algae floating past the hull of the *Santa Ana*, little signs with which the earth announced its presence along with the daring flight of a pair of birds, better guarantees than the captain's words. Only the lunch bell distracted him from that labour of support and observation: by now he was hungry, and followed instinctively the odour of pork spreading across the deck, true cause of the vessel's indefensibility. Yes, because the *Santa Ana* was a merchant vessel and all she boasted on board was two cannons but only one ball, which, as they all agreed, could not be fired because it was used to grind pepper to flavour the dried pork which was the only dish on offer for the whole crossing.

In the dining room the officers and the two capuchin brothers destined for the souls of the Indies rose to their feet and waited for the governor to be seated before returning to their conversations, more or less unchanged for nearly three months. Don Adrian usually preferred to eat in his cabin, where his limited enthusiasm for etiquette could have free rein, allowing him to vent on his food the excess of virility which could find no other outlet. After two days of suffering, however, he wished to be with the other passengers and greeted all with great cordiality, in the hopes of giving them no time to ask after his health. But he could not stop the two holy fathers, whose sweating faces bulged from their cowls like strange reddish protuberances. Padre Antonio blessed the few dishes on the table and directed to don Adrian a smile twisted by pyorrhea.

'Excellency, how do you feel today? You look extraordinary well!'

The other father chimed in, thanks perhaps to their long experience of singing motets:

‘Padre Antonio, don Adrian has scented land, it is for that you see him so jolly; is that not so, Excellency?’

‘Reverend Fathers,’ don Adrian cut them short – ‘to get off this ship will be a relief for all of us and I am sure that you cannot wait to begin the work of Christ.’ Then he placed a napkin over his shirt and poured himself a drink. A moment later the various conversations began to weave once more about the corners of the table. Two officers were discussing ways of repairing the only damage caused by the tempest, namely the disappearance of the numbers and letters chalked on the disassembled oak barrels which they carried in the hold. The water had erased the instructions for reassembly and the merchant who was waiting for them to fill them with cane wine would certainly find all his patience wasted in efforts which had no hope of success. Captain de Urquia and Robledo were listening to a merchant describing the money-making prospects which lay just around the corner. He was going to put back to sea as soon as he had sowed the city with the merchandise he had brought with him from Spain, sleeping on top of it all the way. The captain was giving him advice about the return journey, and this haste to return which was not permitted to him almost caused Don Adrian to drop his glass. He sought in the importance of his post the antidote to use when homesickness began to infect his days with the dull scratching that he knew so well. He told himself that he was not one of the many who threw themselves into the boiling basin of the Indies to seek their fortune. As soon as he set foot on land he would become a guide for the land of Altagracia which, somewhere out there, awaited a new era. He began to eat again hungrily, his enjoyment sharpened by the fear that each and every mouthful would present itself again where it entered his body as soon as the *Santa Ana* decided to spend one more night bucking around on that interminable liquidity in which even his sangfroid only met defeat.

The whole day was spent in this spurious movement.

He was woken the next morning by the ship listing heavily to starboard, after six hours straight sleep, finally horizontal, which refreshed him thoroughly. The wind had picked up and the *Santa Ana* was giving thanks to God as best she could by eating up the remaining miles in a frantic dance of sails and rudders. Don Adrian was preparing to shave when he heard a sharp cry, just one, the one he had been waiting for since Cadiz, a clear chorister’s treble which pierced through the planking to reach him:

‘Land ahooooooy!’

He burst out of his cabin half naked, and only when he found himself squinting in an effort to make out at a distant indistinct line did he realise the indecorousness of his appearance. He saw the red and yellow oriflammes fluttering from the yard-arms, throwing martial shapes in the direction of the coastline and felt shaken by the collective emotion, standing on deck with the celebrating crew, with the passengers who smiled at each other as one does after an averted danger, with the two priests who stood a little apart, intoning fervent prayers of gratitude. The wait was drawing to an end, taking on the appearance of a savage landscape where patches of mist drifted among the tall trees.

He went down to his cabin to finish dressing, and as he was putting on his best clothes, redeemed from the darkness of his trunks, he went over in his mind the things that he would have to do as soon as he landed: the letters of introduction, the

unloading of his belongings, of his escort and his horses... He had gone over this so many, many times that it seemed to him that he had already done them all. Felipe helped him to don his armour and the insignias of his rank and when he was ready he went up on deck with a very different dignity, to be met by Robledo and his escort, standing to attention. Don Adrian moved to stand beside him and waited for the coastline to come and greet him.

Standing motionless in the sun he sweated in his ceremonial cuirass, not so burnished that the sun did not try to draw Caribbean designs on it. He sweated in his feathered hat, which stood immobile in the leaden heat which had descended after they had shortened sail to dock. Even his hands sweated in the gloves which he regretted having donned so early.

Captain de Urquia had already circumnavigated the crowded decks at least twice in his efforts to complete a manoeuvre worthy primarily of his skill but also of the public on the piers, who would enjoy its perfection and exquisite synchrony, but the lack of wind close to shore tangled the sails in themselves, causing the ship to give violent heaves which were answered by the horses in the hold with a clattering dance of iron-shod hooves. The rudder would not answer and the captain realised that he feared the moment when don Adrian, although uninstructed in matters maritime, would understand that something was wrong. It did not take long.

'I have not borne this crossing to die a hundred yards from shore! Lower a boat!'

'Excellency, surely you would not humiliate me so in front of everybody!' de Urquia said quickly. 'I beg you, have a little more patience and I will see that you tread the earth of the Indies in a manner worthy of a great military leader and not a shipwrecked sailor.'

The captain congratulated himself for having found, in the glare of that gaze, the right words to tickle the man's vanity, for he fell silent and looked up at the sails in an attempt to make them do his will, as he so well succeeded in doing with human beings.

Slowly the *Santa Ana* drew closer to the harbourside at Atacama, bringing into view the complex web of cordage made fast to the great cables which raised and lowered, in the confusion of colours and voices which crossed the distance to alight like seagulls on the spent sails, true sign of land rediscovered. Two warships greeted them with a twelve gun salute and don Adrian's escort responded by firing their arquebuses up into the sky. On the main pier all activity had ceased and given way to a stillness as of plaster figurines in the quivering heat, glued to the backdrop of intensely green forest. In the carnival of banners don Adrian tried to identify the procurator general and the councillors who should have been there to welcome him, carried at top speed down from the hills to the sea as soon as the news of the sighting of the *Santa Ana* had crossed, at a gallop, the distance which separated the city from the port, made up of gorges and generous valleys which separated the riches of Villaroel from the sea.

As soon as the *Santa Ana* was lashed tightly to the Indies, don Adrian descended the gangplank and took a few steps before thanking heaven that he had decided in advance not to bend down and kiss the Altagracion soil. After all that time spent on board, if he had made the attempt he would never have got up again unassisted, because land-sickness seized first his legs and then his stomach, forcing him swiftly to greet the personages who came forward, each with a name and a position which he failed to catch, and then to walk on to the next, looking at the carriage which awaited him with its steps down, longing for the coolness inside it to escape the smell of rotten

fruit, excrement and dead fish which was the true, unique scent of the Indies. Those present guessed at everything but the truth. One thought that he was a real soldier, hard and taciturn; another that he was merely full of himself and arrogant, because of his cross of Santiago. You only had to look at his face to reject out of hand the hypothesis that his retreat was due to shyness, but somebody else suggested it, just to have their own opinion. In all cases don Adrian's very limited tolerance of undulatory movement of whatever kind passed unnoticed, to the great advantage of his past and future reputation.

There was a climb before them of more than four hours before the carriage found the security of the horizontal and only then, even though their movements were dangerously similar to those of the *Santa Ana* in a gale, did don Adrian recover completely, enough to make him draw to Robledo's attention the absence of guard posts along the road, which was an important one for the city. The lieutenant took note of it and was pleased by this first initiative. He knew him: now it was their turn.

From a height they looked down upon the city through the windows of the carriage as it descended the mountains which ringed Villaroel like a green garland, covered with vegetation which the sunlight turned to light blue, slightly out of focus. In the valley light green, almost yellow patches distinguished the cultivated places on whose edges the thick down of the forest exploded again. Palm trees nodded here and there, between violently coloured flowering trees, the white walls and the red roofs: the ground covered by the city was very little, a square bisected by straight lines, an unimaginative plan broken only by the timid nodding of a couple of church towers. A calm, a feeling of peace and at the same time of smallness came over don Adrian: was *this* Villaroel?

When they began to roll through the streets the impression of smallness disappeared, thanks to the splendour of a few houses whose showy gardens could not be contained within their walls, full of life to the point of transforming some streets into little tunnels between the vegetation. Felipe, excited by the novelty, did that which don Adrian and Robledo could not on account of their age and their rank: he thrust his head and shoulders through the window of the carriage, open-mouthed, unable to count all the magnificences which his child's eyes saw in that world as different as the shining moon: strange animals, strange faces of all colours, strange smells and strange languages met them on every corner.

They came into the main square, site also of the cathedral. The effect was of the approximate achievement of a dream of imitation: Villaroel seemed thirsty for impossible similarities with Madrid and deceived herself that it was enough to wish for it for the spire of a new Escorial to rise between her wrinkled hills, created to redeem her from her Indianity. They crossed the width of the square and finally passed through the wide outer gate of the governor's residence, where they were greeted with quite a different theory of bows in a frenetic babble of people and their respective voices, trunks unloaded from carts and horses in search of stables, which immediately made Don Adrian tense and nervous. He needed order, discipline, damn it! Robledo thought the same thought and interrupted:

'Who is the head chamberlain?' His voice rose above the confusion, 'Come forward!'

A little man in the final stages of losing his hair made his way over to them. Robledo overwhelmed him with a list of instructions so long, complex and precise that

the butler, frightened by this chaos descended upon his house after five months and eighteen days tenantless, continued to nod even though from the second instruction onward he took in nothing. In the course of a few hours the governor's residence was shaken out of the sleep which had fallen over it like ivy. The staff understood immediately that the music had changed, because don Adrian, as a precautionary measure, sent a storm of anxiety over every cellar, stall, garden, terrace, kitchen, hall and attic, distributing to everybody he met a hail of criticism without foundation, in keeping with his never-contradicted theory of 'Better for them to be scared of me from the start' which worked so well, in general, with human beings.

He took possession of his apartments which Felipe had already succeeded in transforming into something better than the crypt of furniture and chairs shrouded in dustsheets which his predecessor had left behind him. In the largest room, which he had chosen for his office, the table on which Felipe had placed a jug of water and a bottle of wine also held a pile of documents, his letters of introduction, his mandate and most importantly Robledo's glance which asked what to do, as though they could begin to govern immediately from that table, on their own, at their pleasure. Don Adrian said nothing, but he was not displeased by the slightly naïve hostility of his lieutenant; he would learn in time. While they were both bent over the table, the city's representative, the Procurator General del Castillo, appeared at the door, unsure whether to enter to or disappear, not wishing to disturb. He fidgeted with the hat he held in his hand, taking a step forward and then returning to the corridor, where he risked being run over in the coming and going. In the end he propped himself against the doorjamb - which was not inside, but nor was it outside - in the hope that they would notice him and let him say what he had come to say. Don Adrian had noticed his movements, counted to fifteen in his head and then could only turn around and greet him:

'Come in, please: are you señor Soto?'

'No, no, excellency.. My name is del Castillo, we met down at the port...'

'Please, señor del Castillo, excuse this confusion. We will have time to speak calmly and to get to know each other as soon as everything is in order: speak.'

The Procurator General bowed flamboyantly.

'I wished to let you know that this evening a reception will be held in your honour. The city will be glad to welcome you in a manner fitting your reputation...'

'Of course, of course, thank you.' Don Adrian cut him off. 'But must it be tonight? We have so many things to do that I do not think it is appropriate...'

Del Castillo squeezed his hate wrung and gazed at him as though he had said that he would not be attending Mass at Easter. Then he pulled himself together.

'But Excellency!' he exclaimed. 'We have been ready for a week! They have only just slaughtered the animals and the kitchens are in tumult! We wish to welcome you in a manner worthy of your name and, with respect, I really cannot go back and order them to cancel everything...'

Don Adrian understood that to refuse would be to offend the whole community immediately and he dismissed the procurator, who ran out clutching to himself that already hard-won 'yes.' The rest of the day was ruined for the governor by this reception and by the thought that he had to take time out to take a hot bath from the mountain of things he had to do, which in reality came down to one: make a list of those very things to do so that they would not, all together and in a mess, overwhelm him. By mid-afternoon Robledo was already copying out a dense rosary of things to do on a piece of

paper which had seemed at first glance too large, but which after an hour he decided would just about contain the manifest enormity of the task which awaited them.

Before sunset they stopped working and allowed themselves some not unwelcome attention after that voyage of approximate hygiene. Don Adrian's bedroom was large and very light, or at least so it appeared to him after three months of boredom on board the *Santa Ana*, open to the east to receive only the weakest part of the sun through windows which were now open on to the bustling terrace. The bathtub into which he let himself sit, thick with a rust which seemed the rust of ages, was marked with neglect. Half submerged to his ears in still water, Don Adrian let the sounds echo in the stillness of the house, gazing at the beams of the ceiling and astonished that they, too, were still.

Robledo and the governor met again in the corridor between their respective rooms. The vision of whoever at the reception had wished Spain and Honour on the young land of Altagracia was appeased: the tall figure of the lieutenant vanished beside don Adrian's elegance, which was made of the dark velvets of his coat which left uncovered the embroidered sleeves of his shirt and was cinched by a pink sash just under the glimmer of the cross of Santiago, hanging from a gold chain. In all the empire there was not another man like him, more proud and splendid, and he was this only because he did not know he was. Robledo, looking at him, was proud to be his lieutenant until don Adrian pointed to the stairs and said:

'Come on Robledo, let's go and see what the next few years have in store for us.'

Robledo was struck dumb by the brutality of this remark, or perhaps by the truth hidden within a soldier's colloquialism. He followed him, envying his confidence and realising once again that his own confidence, a lesser thing, would always have a place to lay its head.

Just at the final chime of the bell, as a cyclopic sunset tanned his world, don Adrian came down the stairs which led to the terrace. The carriage's springs awoke, whining at the weight of his boots, and when he was comfortably seated, with two thumps of the hilt of his sword he commanded it to set off.