

PEDRO PARAMO

By Juan Rulfo

I came to Comala because I was told that my father, a man called Pedro Paramo, was living there. It was what my mother had told me, and I promised I would go and see him after she died. I assured her I would do that. She was near death, and I would have promised her anything. "Don't fail to go and see him," she told me. "That's what his name is, although they sometimes called him something else. I am sure he would want to know you." The only thing I could do was to tell her I would do it and, after saying it so often, it became such a habit that I continued repeating it, even after I managed to remove my hands from her lifeless hands.

Before she died she also told me:

"When you go, don't ask him for anything. Demand that he give you what is ours. What he should have given me and never did... Make him pay dearly, my son, for the way he has neglected us."

"Yes, I'll do that, mother."

I never really intended to fulfill my promise. But now I have started to dream about it and be filled with illusions. After that a new world began to take shape, based on the hope of a man called Pedro Paramo, the husband of my mother. And that's why I came to Comala.

It was during the dog days of summer, when the warm August air was filled with the rotten smell of the soapwort plants.

The road was rising and falling. A man I saw told me, "It rises or falls, depending on whether you're coming or going. For someone who is going, it rises; for someone who is coming, it falls."

"What did you say is the name of that town you can see down there?"

"Comala, senior."

"Are you sure it still is Comala?"

"Yes, I am sure, senior."

"And why does it look so sad?"

"It's the times, senior."

I had imagined how it would look, based on my mother's memories, and moments of nostalgia filled with longing. She always longed for Comala, to go back there. But she never returned. Now I am coming in her place. I am bringing the eyes which she used to look at these things, because she gave me the view seen through her eyes: "Just as you pass the gate of Las Calimotes there is a beautiful view of the green plain, tinged with the yellow of ripe corn. From there you can see Comala whitening the ground, and illuminating it during the night." And her voice was secret, almost silent, as if she were talking to herself... My mother.

"And why are you going to Comala... if I might ask?" I heard the man say.

"I am going to see my father," I told him.

"Ah!" he said.

And we were silent again.

We were traveling down hill, listening to the bouncing trot of the burros, their eyes filled with the torpor of sleepiness, during the dog days of August.

“They will be very happy to see you,” said the man by my side. “They will be happy because it has been so many years since anyone has come there.” Then he added: “Whoever you are, they will be glad to see you.”

In the glow of sunlight the plain seemed like a transparent pool, broken into vapors through which you could see a gray horizon. And behind it there was a line of mountains, above which was an empty remoteness.

“And what can you tell me about your father, if I may ask?”

“I don’t know him,” I said. “I only know that his name is Pedro Paramo.”

“Ah!, you don’t say.”

“Yes, that’s what they told me his name was.”

Again I heard the mule-driver say “Ah!” I had met him in Los Encuentros, where there are several cross roads. I had been waiting there, until this man finally came.

When he got there I had asked him, “Where are you headed for?”

“I am going down that way, señor.”

“Do you know of a place called Comala?”

“That is where I am going.”

I followed him, trying to keep up with his rapid pace, until he must have realized what I was doing and he slowed down a bit. After that we were so close to each other that our shoulders almost touched.

“I am also the son of Pedro Paramo,” he said to me. A flock of crows flew through the empty sky over us, screeching: “Caw, caw, caw.”

After we rounded the hills, we descended even further. We had left the warm air up higher and we were sinking deeper and deeper into the heat, without any wind to cool it. Everything seemed to be waiting for something.

“It’s hot here,” I said.

“Yes, and that isn’t the worst of it,” the mule-driver said. “Take care. You will feel it even more when we get to Comala. That place sits on the coals of the earth at the very mouth of hell. I can tell you that many of those who die there come back to get a blanket after going to hell.”

“Do you know Pedro Paramo?” I asked him. I dared to ask him that, because I saw a look of confidence in his eyes.

“Who is he?” I asked again.

“A living malice,” he answered me.

He pounded his stick against burros for no reason, since they were already far enough ahead of us, guided by the descending road.

I felt the photograph of my mother in the pocket of my shirt warming my heart, as if it were also sweating. It was an old photograph, with rough edges, but it was the only one of her I had. I had found it in the kitchen cupboard, hidden in a pot full of herbs: leaves of lemon balm, Castile flowers, and sprigs of rue. I had kept it ever since then. My mother never liked to have anyone take photographs of her; she said that photos were a tool of witchcraft, or black magic. And she seemed to be right, because hers was full of pinpricks, and the largest one was at the center of her heart, where one might be able to touch her soul. That was the photo that I had brought with me, thinking I could use it so that my father would know I was his son.

Just then the mule-driver stopped and said to me: “Look there. Do you see that ridge that looks like a pig’s bladder? Well, right behind it is Media Luna. Now look over here. Do you see the brow of that hill? Look at it. And now look in this direction. Can you see that other ridge that you almost can’t see from this far away? Okay, all that is part of Media Luna, from

one side to the other. As one says, all of the territory you can see with your eyes. And all that land belonged to him. The truth is, our mothers gave birth to us in very poor circumstances, although we were sons of Pedro Paramo. And the craziest thing is that he even had us baptized. The same thing must have happened to you, no?

“I don’t remember.”

“Well go fuck yourself!”

“What are you saying?”

“That we’re almost there, senior.”

“Yes, I see it. What happened here?”

“A roadrunner, senior. That’s what we call those birds.”

“No, I was asking why that town looks so empty, like it has been abandoned. It looks like no one lives there.”

“It’s not just that it seems that way. It is that way. Nobody lives here.”

“And Pedro Paramo?”

“Pedro Paramo died many years ago.”

It was the time when children usually played in the streets of the the town, filling the afternoon with their shouts, while the black doors still reflected the yellow light of the sun.

At least, that’s what I had seen in Sayula yesterday at this same time. And I had also seen the flight of doves rushing through the quiet air, flapping their wings, as if they were chasing away the day. They flew over and perched on the rooftops, while the shouts of the children spread around and seemed to keep the sky blue.

Now I was here in this town without any noises. I heard my footsteps on the cobble stones with which the streets were paved. My hollow footsteps with their sound echoing from the walls brightened by the setting sun. Then I was walking down the main street. I looked at the empty houses; their battered doors covered with moss. What did that fellow tell me this moss was called? “La Capitana, senior. A blight that only waits for people to leave to invade the houses. And that’s what you will see.”

Passing by a side street, I saw a woman wrapped in a shawl who disappeared, as if she did not exist. After that, I started walking again, and I kept looking at the empty doorways until once again the woman in the shawl crossed in front of me.

“Good evening,” she said to me.

I followed her with my eyes, and I shouted at her:

“Where does Dona Eduviges live?”

She pointed with her finger: “There, in the house that is next to the bridge.”

I realized then that her voice was made by human strands, that her mouth had teeth, a mouth that opened and shut as she spoke, and that her eyes were like those of people who live in this world. By then it had gotten dark.

She told me good evening once more. And although there were no children playing, no doves, no blue roofs, I felt like this place was alive. And if I kept listening to the silence it was because I was not used to it; perhaps because my mind was filled with voices.

Voices, yes. And here where the air was thin, I could hear them better. They were located inside one. I remembered what my mother had told me: “There you will hear me better. I will be closer to you. You will find that the sound of my memories is closer to you than that of my death, if death has ever had a voice.” My mother... when she was still alive.

I would have liked to tell her: “You were mistaken about the place where you lived. You sent me in the wrong direction. You sent me to “where this is,” and “where that is.” Now here I am, looking for someone who does not exist.”

I found the house near the bridge by following the sound of the river. I went to knock on the door, but my hand only hit empty air, as if the air had already opened it. A woman was there. She said: “Come in.” And I entered.

I had stayed there in Comala. Before the mule-driver had left me and gone on ahead, he said to me:

“I am going a bit farther, over there where you see the the top of those hills. That’s where my house is. If you want to come, you will be welcome. But if you want to stay here, that’s fine.” And that is what I did, since that is why I came.

As he was leaving I asked him, almost shouting, “Where can I find a place to stay?”

“Look for Dona Eduviges, if she is still alive. Tell her I sent you.”

“And what is your name?”

I heard him say “Abundio,” but by then he was so far away I couldn’t hear his last name.

“I am Eduviges Dyada. Come in.”

It seemed like she had been waiting for me. She told me she had everything ready, and I followed her through a long series of dark rooms that seemed to be empty. But then I saw that was wrong since, when I got used to the darkness and the narrow thread of light that followed us, I could see shadows on both sides of us, and I could tell we were passing through a narrow passageway, between different objects.

“What is that stuff there?” I asked her.

“Just some odds and ends. The house is full of them; people used it to store their things before they left, and they never came back and got them. The room for you is in the back. I always keep it ready, in case someone comes. So you are her son?”

“Whose?” I answered.

“Of Dolores.”

“Yes, but how did you know that?”

“She told me you would come. And in fact today, that you would come today.”

“Who, my mother?”

“Yes, her.”

I didn’t know what to think. Nor did she tell me anything else to help me understand.

“This is your room,” she said.

It had no doors except the one we came through. She lit a candle and I saw it was empty.

“There’s no place to sleep here,” I said.

“Don’t worry about that. You must be quite tired by now, and sleepiness is a good mattress. Tomorrow I’ll prepare your bed. As you know, it is not easy to set things up in a hurry. In order to do that you need to have a warning, and your mother didn’t tell me until just now.”

“But my mother is already dead,” I said.

“Then that is the reason her voice was so weak, as if it had to travel a long way in order to reach me. Yes, now I understand. And how long has it been since she died?”

“It’s now been seven days.”

“The poor thing. She must have felt abandoned. We made a promise that we would die together. That each of us would go to give the other courage for the journey, if it was needed, in case there was some difficulty. We were good friends. Didn’t she ever talk about me?”

“No, never.”

“That is strange. Of course, we were just young women then, and she had just gotten married. But we were fond of each other. Your mother was so beautiful, so tender, and everyone wanted to love her. So she got a head start on me? But you can be sure that I will catch up with her. Only, I know how far away heaven is from us; but I know how to shorten the paths. All you have to do is die, God willing, when one wants to, and not when He has proposed. Or if you want, make it happen ahead of time. But forgive me for speaking to you in this familiar way; I do it because I feel like you are my son. Yes, many times I have thought: ‘The son of Dolores should have been mine.’ Later, I will tell you why. The only thing I want to tell you now is that I will catch up with your mother on one of the paths through eternity.”

I believed that woman was crazy. And then I no longer believed anything. I felt like I was in some distant world, and I let myself be swept along by the current. My body felt weaker and weaker, like it had loosened its ties, and now anyone could have rung me out like a rag.

“I am very tired,” I said.

“Come and have a bite to eat. A bit of something. Anything you want.”

“I will. I will later.”

The water was running off the tiles toward a hole in the sand on the patio. It made a drip, drip, and then another drip, on top of a laurel leaf that was bouncing and spinning in a crack between the bricks. The storm had ended. Now, once in a while the wind shook the branches of the pomegranate tree, making drops of water cover the ground with bright splashes that then blurred together. The chickens that had been hunched down as if they were sleeping, suddenly shook their wings and rushed out into the patio where they quickly pecked the worms unearthed by the rain. Once the clouds were gone the sun filled the stones with light, and the air with colors, swallowing the water on the ground. “What are you doing in the toilet all this time, Boy?”

“Nothing, Mama.”

“If you keep staying in there so long, a snake is going to come and bite you.

“Yes, Mama.”

(I was thinking of you, Susana, when we were up on the hill, flying kites in the wind. Below us we heard the sounds of the town while we were up above it on the top of the hill, and the wind was pulling on the kite string. ‘Help me, Susana.’ And some soft hands pressed against mine. ‘Let out more string.’ The wind was making us laugh, connecting the view of our eyes, while the string was running through our fingers until it broke, making a soft crack as if it had been broken by the wings of some bird. And, up above our own paper bird began falling in circles, dragging its tail of thread, until it disappeared among the green branches below it.

Your lips were moist, as if they were kissed by the dew.)

“I told you to get out of the toilet, Son.”

“Yes, Mama. I’m leaving.”

(I was remembering you, when you were there, looking at me, with your aquamarine eyes.)

He raised his eyes and looked at his mother standing in the door.

“Why do you wait so long before you come out? What are you doing there?”

“Just thinking.”

“Can’t you do that somewhere else? It’s harmful to spend so much time in the toilet. Besides, you ought to be doing something useful. Why don’t you go and grind some corn for your grandmother?” “Okay, Mama. I’m going.”

“Grandmother, I’ve come to help you grind corn.”

“Sorry, we’ve already finished and we’re going to make some cocoa. But where have you been? We have been looking for you ever since the storm began.”

“I was in the other patio.”

“What were you doing? Praying?”

“No, Grandmother, just watching the rain.”

His grandmother looked at him with grey eyes that were half yellow and seemed to be able to look at what was inside you.”

“All right then; now you can go and clean out the grinder.”

(‘There, hundreds of meters above all the clouds, and farther away than everything else, you are hidden, Susana. Hidden in the immensity of God, behind His Divine Providence, where I cannot reach you, or see you, and where you cannot hear my words.’)

“Grandmother, the grinder isn’t working, one of the blades is broken.”

“That Micaela; she must have been grinding corncobs in it. You just can’t get her to stop those bad habits. But I suppose we’ll just have to put up with it.”

“Why don’t we buy another one? This one is so old now it doesn’t work most of the time.”

“Yes, you’re right. But with the all expenses we had when we buried your grandfather, plus the amount we had to pay the Church, we haven’t got a penny left. Nevertheless, we will have to make a sacrifice and get another one. It would be good if you would go and see Dona Ines Villalpando and ask her to give us until October. We will pay her after we finish the harvests.”

“Okay, Grandmother, I’ll do that.”

“And while you’re there, tell her to loan us a sieve, and a pruning knife. At the rate that the plants are growing, we can hardly get them into the barns. If I had a big house with the large barns I used to have, I wouldn’t have to worry about it. But your grandfather left all that behind when we moved here. Well, that’s the way it is; things never turn out like you want them. Tell Dona Ines we will pay all we owe her when the harvest is finished.”

“Yes, Grandmother.”

There were humming birds this time of the year. You could hear the sound of their wings whirring among the jasmines that were loosing their petals.

He walked over to the shelf of the Sacred Heart where he found twenty four cents. He left four cents, and took twenty. Before leaving, his mother stopped him:

“Where are you going?”

“To Dona Ines Villalpando to get a new grinder. The one we have is broken.”

“Ask her to give you a yard of black taffeta, like this,” and she showed it to him. “Tell her to charge it our account.

“Okay, Mama.”

“On your way back buy me some aspirins; you’ll find the money in the jar in the hall.”

He found a peso. He took the peso and left the twenty cents..

“Now I’ll have enough to buy something else, if I want to,” he thought to himself.

“Pedro!” someone shouted at him. “Pedro!”

But he wasn’t able to hear it, since he was already too far away.

That night it started to rain. The sound of rain falling was heard for a long time. Then he must have fallen asleep, because when he woke up there was only a light drizzle. The windows were dark, and streams of water were flowing down like tears on the other side of the glass. "I was watching the drops illuminated by lightning flashes, and with each breath I sighed, and each time I was thinking I thought of you, Susana."

The rain had transformed into a breeze. He heard: "The forgiveness of our sins and the resurrection of the flesh. Amen." It was inside, where women were saying the end of the rosary. They rose up, they locked up the birds, they closed the door, and they put out the light.

All that remained was the dim light, and the sound of rain, like the chirping of crickets...

"Why didn't you go to say the rosary? It's now nine days after the death of your grandfather."

There was his mother in the doorway holding a candle in her hand. Her shadow stretched up toward the roof, very long, and spit in two. The beams of the roof separated it into two different pieces.

"I am feeling sad," she said.

She turned around, and she blew out the candle. Then she closed the door and her sobs were heard, mixed with the sound of the rain.

The clock in the church struck the hour, again and again, sounding as if time had somehow contracted.

"Yes, I was almost your mother. Didn't she ever tell you about that?" Eduvigis asked

"No, she only told me good things. I heard of you from a mule-driver who brought me here. He said his name was Abundio."

"Ah, Abundio. So he still remembers me? I used to give him something for every traveler he would send to my house. We got along very well. Now, unfortunately, everything here has changed because, since this place has become so impoverished no one thinks about us any more. So then, he told you to come to see me?"

"Yes, he told me to come and see if you were still here."

"Well, I can only thank him for that. He was a good man, and very helpful. He was the one who brought the mail, and he continued doing that, even after he became deaf. I remember the terrible day when he had his misfortune. We were very sorry, because we all liked him. He used to bring and take our letters. He told us how things were going there, in the other part of the world, and he surely must have also told them about us too. He was quite a talker. But not later; after his accident he stopped talking. He said he didn't feel like saying things he couldn't hear, things that for him had no sound. It all happened after he shot off one of those rockets we use here to scare away water moccasins very close to his head. After that he became mute, even though he wasn't a mute, but he never stopped being a good person."

"The man I talked to could hear just fine."

"Then it must not have been him; besides, Abundio has already died. He must have died, surely. Do you see? It couldn't have been him."

"Yes, I agree."

"Okay, getting back to your mother, I was telling you..."

Without stopping to listen to her, I started to look at the woman who was in front of me. I thought she must have gone through some difficult times. Her face was white, as if she had no blood, and her hands were withered and covered with wrinkles. Her eyes were sunken so deep

into her face they were almost invisible. She was wearing an old white dress, and hanging from a cord around her neck was an image of Santa Maria del Refugio, with an inscription that said: "Refuge of Sinners."

"...This person I am talking about was a horse trainer at Pedro Paramo's ranch, Media Luna. He said his name was Inocencio Osorio. However, we all knew him by the name of Saltaperico, because he was so light and agile in his movements. My friend Pedro said he was not even fit to train colts, but he also had another occupation: that of 'provocateur.' He was a provoker of dreams. That's really what he was. And he tricked your mother, just like he tricked others. Among them, me. Once I felt sick he came and said to me: 'I am going to massage you to see if that makes you feel better.' And what that amounted to was squeezing you, first your fingertips, then your hands; after that your arms, and finally fooling around with your legs so provocatively that you soon become angry. And while he maneuvered, he would talk about your future. He would go into a trance, rolling his eyes, invoking and cursing, covering you with globs of spit, like gypsies do. Sometimes he was stark naked, because he said it was what we wanted. Sometimes he was right; he hit on so many different things, that something had to give."

"The thing is that this man Osorio went to see your mother and he told her she shouldn't sleep with any man, because that night the moon was full."

"Dolores came to me in a big hurry, telling me that she couldn't do it. That it would be impossible for her to sleep with Pedro Paramo that night. It was her wedding night, and there I was, trying to convince her not to believe Osorio, that he was only a duplicitous liar. 'I can't' she told me. 'Please, you go in my place. He won't be able to tell,'"

"Of course I was much younger than she was and didn't have such dark hair. But it would not have been noticeable in the darkness. But I still told her, 'Dolores, you have to go yourself.'"

"At that time your mother was a young woman, with humble eyes. If there was something really beautiful about your mother, it was her eyes. They were very persuasive."

"Please go in my place," she asked again.

"And I went."

"I took advantage of the darkness; and something your mother wasn't aware of was that I also liked Pedro Paramo."

"I slept with him, with pleasure and desire. I held him tight and pressed against him, but the revelry the day before had left him so exhausted that he went to sleep and snored all night long. All he did was squeeze his legs in between mine."

"Before it got light I got out of bed and went to see Dolores. I told her:

"Now it's your turn. This is now another day."

"What did he do to you?" she asked me.

"I don't know yet," I said.

"The year after that you were born, but not to me, even though that was something that almost happened. Perhaps your mother never told you, because she felt ashamed."

"...Green prairies. Seeing the horizon rise and fall as the wind moves the corn stalks, the afternoon rippling as the heavy rain falls, the color of the ground, the smell of alfalfa and bread. A town that smells like spilled honey..."

"She always hated Pedro Paramo. 'Dolores, didn't I tell you to fix my breakfast?' And your mother always got up before dawn. She lit the stove. The cats woke up when they smelled the fire. And she went everywhere, followed by the cats. 'Dona Dolores!'

"How often your mother heard that call! 'Dona Dolores, this is cold, this is no good.' How many times? And although she got used to this treatment, her humble eyes grew hardened."

“...She was not able to smell any other odor except that of the blossoms on the orange trees in that hot weather.”

“Then she began to sigh. ‘Why are you sighing, Dolores?’

“She had gone with him that afternoon. He was in the middle of the field, watching a flock of thrushes fly over them. There was also a solitary vulture flying around.”

‘Why are you sighing, Dolores?’

‘I would like to be that vulture so I could fly to the place where my sister lives.’

‘Of course, Dona Dolores. You can go and see your sister right away. Of course. Let’s go back to the house so they can pack your bags.’

“And your mother departed:

‘I’ll see you later, Don Pedro.’

‘Goodbye, Dolores.’

“But she didn’t see him later. She left Media Luna for good.”

“I asked Pedro Paramo about her many times after that. ‘She loved her sister more than me. She must be happy there. Besides, she drove me crazy. And I do not want to know about her, if that is what is worrying you.’

‘But what will they live on?’

‘May God watch over them.’

“...Make him pay dearly, my son, for the way he has neglected us.”

“She told me you would come to see me, but since then we haven’t heard anything from her.”

“Lots of things happened,” I told her. “We were in Colima with aunt Gertrudis, who was taking care of us: ‘Why don’t you go back to your husband?’ Gertrudis asked my mother.”

‘Has he ever asked me to return? I’m not going back unless he asks me to. I came here because I wanted to see you. Because I cared about you, that’s why I came.’

‘I understand how you feel. But now things have changed, and now it’s time for you to go.’

‘As if it were up to me!’”

I thought Dona Eduvigis was listening to me, but I noticed that her head was turned as though she was listening to something farther away. Then I said:

“When are you going to take a rest?”

“The day you left I knew I would never see you again. You left covered by the red light of the afternoon sun, by the bloodstained twilight. You were smiling. You were leaving behind the town of which I had heard you say more than once: ‘I love it because of you, but I hate it for everything else, even for having been born there,’ Then I thought, she will not ever come back, she will never return.”

“What are you doing here now? Aren’t you supposed to be working?”

“No, Grandmother. Rogelio wants me to take care of his son. I am taking him for a walk. It’s hard to take care of two things (the child and the telegraph) while he spends his time drinking beer in the pool hall. Besides, he doesn’t pay me anything.”

“You’re not there to earn money, but to find out when you have learned something; then you can be more demanding. For now, you’re just an apprentice; perhaps tomorrow, or the day after, you will be the boss. But for that you need to have patience and, more than anything, humility. If they ask you to take care of a child, do it for God’s sake. You must resign yourself.”

“Let others resign themselves, Grandmother. Resignation is not for me.”

“You and your bad habits! I’m afraid that they are going to come back and haunt you, Pedro Paramo.”

“What are you listening to, Dona Eduvigis?”

She shook her head, as if she had awakened from a dream.

“It’s the horse of Miguel Paramo that is galloping out there on the road from Media Luna.”

“Then someone is still living in Media Luna?”

“No, nobody lives there now.”

“Then, what about the horse?”

“It’s only the horse that runs back and forth. They were inseparable. It runs all over the place still looking for him, especially at this hour. Perhaps the poor thing is plagued by remorse. Since even animals realize when a wrong has been done, isn’t that so?”

“I don’t understand. I haven’t heard the sound of a horse.”

“You didn’t?”

“No.”

“Then it must be my sixth sense. A gift that God gave me; or perhaps a curse. Only I know how much I have suffered because of this.”

“It all began with Miguel Paramo. I was the only person who knew what happened to him the night he died. I was in bed when I heard his horse coming by on the way back to Media Luna. I was surprised, because he never came back that early. He usually arrived when it was beginning to get light. He was going to see his girlfriend in a town called Contla, some distance from here. He left early, and was late coming back. But that night he didn’t come back... Do you hear it now? I can definitely hear it once more. The horse is now coming back this way.”

“I don’t hear anything.”

“Then it must be me. All right, as I was saying, the idea that he didn’t come back was just a rumor. His horse had just gone by when I heard someone tapping on my window. God only knows if it was just an illusion. The truth is that something made me go to see who it was. And it was him, Miguel Paramo. I wasn’t surprised to see him, since he had sometimes spent the night in my house, sleeping with me, until he met that girl who swallowed his brains.”

“What’s going on?” I asked Miguel Paramo. “Did she leave you in the lurch?”

“No. She still loves me,” he said. “The thing is, I couldn’t find her. The town had disappeared. There may have been some fog, or smoke, or I don’t know what. But I know now that Contla does not exist. I went even farther than I planned, but I could never find it. I came to tell you, because you understand me. If I told anyone else, they would say I was crazy, like they always say I am.”

“You’re not crazy, Miguel. You must be dead. Remember, they told you the horse was going to kill you someday. Don’t forget that, Miguel Paramo. Or maybe you did something crazy, and that is something else.”

“I only jumped over the stone wall that my father had ordered them to build. I made my horse, Colorado, jump over it, in order to avoid going a long way around until I reached the road. I know I jumped over it and kept going but, like I told you, after that there was nothing more than smoke, and more smoke.”

“Tomorrow your father is going to be very upset,” I told him. “I feel sorry for him. Now go on, and rest in peace, Miguel. I’m grateful that you came to say goodbye to me.”

“And then I closed the window. Before it got light, a servant from Media Luna came to tell me: ‘Don Pedro needs you; his son Miguel has died, and he wants you to come and see him.’”

“Yes, I know what happened,” I told him. “Did they say you should cry when you told me?”

‘Yes, Don Fulgor told me I should do that as I told you.’

“Okay, tell Don Pedro I’ll come. How long has it been since they brought him back?”

‘Only a half an hour ago. If they had brought him sooner, they might have been able to save him. Although, according to the doctor who examined him, he had been dead for some time. We knew something was wrong when Colorado came back by himself and was so upset that he woke everyone up. You know how he and the horse cared for each other, and I think the horse suffered even more than Don Pedro. It hasn’t slept or eaten, and all it does is run around like someone who is broken and shattered inside.’”

“Don’t forget to shut the door when you leave.”

“And the servant from Media Luna went on his way.”

“Have you ever heard the way a dead person mourns?” she asked me.

“No, Dona Eduviges.”

“It’s just as well you haven’t.”

The drops of rain are falling into the filter one after another. After that one hears the drops falling into the pitcher. One hears noises: one hears feet scraping the ground as they walk, coming and going. The drops of rain keep on falling without stopping. The pitcher overflows, making the water run over the wet ground.

“Wake up!” someone tells him.

The sound of the voice is familiar. He tries to think who it might be, but his body slackens and he falls back to sleep, sinking into a deep slumber. Two hands lift the covers, holding on to them, and his body still feels their warmth, searching for peace.

“Wake up!” someone says again.

The sound of the voice startles him, making him rise up and open his eyes. He hears drops of water falling from the hydrant into the open pitcher. Footsteps are heard, and weeping.

Then he heard the weeping. That woke him even more: a soft, thin weeping that, perhaps because it was thin, was able to slip through the thicket of sleep until it reached the point where the shock was able to startle him.

He rose up slowly and saw the face of a woman who was leaning against the doorframe, her body darkened by the night as she was sobbing.

“Why are you crying, mama?” he asked, because as soon as he rose up, he recognized his mother.

“Your father has died,” she told him.

And then, as if the source of her pain had opened even more, she turned around, again and again, until he was finally able to grab her shoulders and stop the movement of her body.

Through the doorway one could see that it was getting light. There were no stars, only a cloudy, gray sky still not illuminated by the sun. A dark light, not like the start of day, but as if it were the beginning of night.

Outside in the patio he heard the sound of footsteps. Quiet sounds. And here in the doorway was the woman, her body blocking the light of day; between her arms traces of sky were visible,

and under her feet were trickles of light, as if the ground beneath her had been covered with tears. Then a sob, after that more weeping, and pain that made her body writhe.

“They killed your father.”

“And who has killed you, mother?”

“The air is clear, there is sunlight, and there are clouds. Up above the sky is blue, and perhaps behind it there are songs, and perhaps also voices... In short, there is hope. There is hope for us to heal our sorrow.”

“But not for you, Miguel Paramo. You have died without forgiveness, and you will receive no mercy.”

Father Renteria turned around and ended the Mass. He finished as quickly as possible and left without giving the final blessing to the people who filled the church.

“Father, we want you to give us a blessing!”

“No!” he insisted, shaking his head. “I will not do that. He was an evil man, and he will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. God will punish me if I intercede for him.” He said that trying to hide his hands, not wanting to reveal how they were shaking. And he left.

The sight of the body weighed heavily on the spirit of everyone there. It was on top of a dais in the center of the church, surrounded by candles and flowers, and his father who was standing behind it, waiting for the end of the service.

Father Renteria walked up next to Pedro Parano, trying not to touch his shoulder. He raised the hyssop, sprinkling the holy water higher and lower, murmuring something that might have been a prayer. After that he kneeled, and all the others kneeled with him.

“Have pity on your servant, Lord.”

“May he rest in peace, amen,” their voices responded.

And as he began to feel his anger again, he saw that everyone was leaving the church, taking with them the body of Miguel Paramo.

Pedro Paramo came to him and kneeled at his side:

“I know you hated him, Father. And with good reason. The murder of your brother which, according to rumors was committed my son, and the case of your niece Ana who you said was violated by him; these offences, and the lack of respect he showed for you at times, are all motives that anyone could appreciate. But let it go now, Father. Forgive him and pardon him, like God must also have forgiven him.”

He put a handful of gold coins on the prie-dieu and stood up.

“Take this as a gift for your church.”

The church was now empty. Two men waited in the doorway for Pedro Paramo, who joined them, and together they followed the coffin that was being carried on the shoulders of four men from Media Luna. Father Renteria picked up the coins and went to the altar.

“This is yours Lord,” he said. “He is able to buy salvation. You will know if this is sufficient. As for me, Lord, I place myself at your feet to ask for him whatever is just, or unjust, which is all we can ask for... But I ask you, Lord, to condemn him.”

And he closed the sanctum.

He entered the sacristy and he went into a corner and began to cry, with shame and sadness, until his tears were gone.

After that he said, “It’s all right, Lord, you win.”

“Anita, do you know who they buried today?”

“No, uncle.”

“Do you remember Miguel Paramo?”

“Yes, uncle.”

“Well, that’s who it was.”

Ana bowed her head.

“You’re sure it was him, right?”

“I’m not sure, uncle. I never saw his face. He grabbed me at night when it was dark.”

“Then how do you know it was Miguel Paramo?”

“Because he said so, ‘I am Miguel Paramo, Ana. Don’t be afraid.’ That’s what he told me.

“But you knew he was the one who killed your father, right?”

“Yes, uncle.”

“Then, what did you do in order to get away from him?”

“I didn’t do anything.”

They were both silent for a while. One could hear the warm wind blowing through the myrtle leaves.

“He told me that was why he had come to see me: to apologize, and ask for my forgiveness. Without getting out of bed, I told him: ‘The window is open.’ And then he came in. He started hugging me as if that was his way of apologizing for what he had done. And I smiled at him. I remembered what you told me: that you must never hate anyone. I smiled to show him I didn’t, but afterward I realized he couldn’t see my smile, because I didn’t see him either, since it was so dark that night. I only felt that he was on top of me, and that he was beginning to do bad things to me.”

“I thought he was going to kill me. That’s what I thought, uncle. And I even stopped thinking, so I would die before he had a chance to kill me. But evidently he did not dare to do that.”

“I knew that for sure when I finally opened my eyes to see the light of day coming in through the window. Before that I felt like I had ceased to exist.”

“But you must have had some certainty. His voice. Didn’t you know him by his voice?”

“I didn’t know him by anything. I only knew that he had killed my father. I had never seen him, and after that I never saw him either. I couldn’t have done that, uncle.”

“But you knew who he was.”

“Yes, and what he was like. I know that now he must be in the depths of hell, because that is what I asked all the saints with all my heart.”

“Don’t be sure of that, child. Who knows how many are praying for him now. You are all by yourself here. One voice amid thousands of others. And among them, some that are much stronger than yours, like the voice of your father.”

He was going to say to her: “Besides, I have now forgiven him,” but he only thought that. He did not want to disappoint the partly broken soul of the poor girl. Instead, he took her arm and told her:

“Let us give thanks to our Lord God because He has removed him from this earth, after he has caused so much harm. And it doesn’t matter if He now has him in His heaven.”

A horse was galloped past the intersection where the main road crossed the road to Contla. No one saw it. However, a woman who was waiting in the outskirts of the town said she had seen the horse running with its legs bent, as if it were going to collapse. She recognized the sorrel of

Miguel Paramo and thought to herself: “That horse is going to break its neck.” Then, she saw it had straightened its legs and, without slowing down, it was galloping with its neck turned around, as if it were frightened by something it had left behind.

Her story spread through Media Luna on the night of the burial, while some men were resting after the long journey they had made to reach the cemetery. They were chatting like men often do before they are going home to get some sleep.

“Carrying that corpse really hurt me,” said Terencio Lubianes. “My shoulders are still sore.”

“Me too,” said his brother, Ubillado. “My bunions even got larger. And then his father made us carry the coffin on foot. It’s not as though it was a day to celebrate, right, Toribio?”

“They can say whatever they want. I think it was time for him to die.”

After a while, there was even more gossip from Contla. It came with the last wagon coming from there.

“Some are saying that his soul is still wandering around out there. They have seen it knocking on a woman’s window. It looked just like him, with leather chaps and all.”

“And do you think Don Pedro, with the temper that he has, is going to let his son keep chasing women? If he knew that, I can just imagine him saying: ‘Okay, you’re dead now. Stay there in your grave, and leave that business to us.’ And if he ever saw him, I would bet that he would order him to go back to the cemetery right away.”

“You’re right, Isaias. That old man doesn’t pull any punches.”

“When I know something, I tell it like it is,” and the wagon driver continued his journey.

There were falling stars. They were falling as though the sky was sprinkling light.

“Look there,” said Terencio; “look at all the sparkling that’s up there”

“They’re just celebrating the departure of Miguel,” Jesus chipped in.

“Don’t you think that’s a bad sign?”

“For whom?”

“Maybe your sister is hoping for his return.”

“Who are you speaking to?”

“To you.”

“We’d better keep moving, boys. We’ve been on the go for a long time, and tomorrow we have to start early.”

And they vanished like shadows.

There were still falling stars. Then, finally the lights in Comala were turned off, and the sky took charge of the night.

Father Renteria was twisting and turning in his bed, without being able to sleep:

“It’s all my fault,” he said. “I’m afraid to offend those who support me because, the fact is, my job depends on them. I don’t get anything from the poor, and prayers don’t fill your stomach. That’s the way it has been, and these are the consequences. My fault. I have betrayed those who care for me, and have faith in me to intercede with God for them. But what have they gotten with their faith? Going to heaven? Or the purification of their souls? And why purify your soul if, at the last moment... I can still see Maria Dyada, when she came to ask me to save her sister, Eduviges:

‘She always helped her fellow creatures. She gave them everything she had. She even offered a child, to everyone. And she put him out there, so that someone would recognize him as theirs; but no one was willing to do that. Then she said: ‘If that’s the way it is, I will be his father, even

though by accident I have been his mother.’ They took advantage of her hospitality while she tried not to offend people, or fall out with anyone.’

‘But she committed suicide. She went against the will of God.’

‘She had no other choice. She also did that out of kindness.’

‘In the end she failed at the final moment,’ that’s what I told her. She had done so many good things toward her salvation, and then she lost them like that, so quickly!’

‘But no, she didn’t lose them. She died with many sorrows. And her sorrow... You told us something about sorrow I don’t remember. She left us because of her sorrow. She died, tortured by the blood that was choking her. I can still see her grimaces, and those grimaces were the saddest gestures a human being has ever made.’

‘Perhaps she was praying a lot.’

‘We all pray a lot, Father.’

‘I mean maybe, perhaps, with Gregorian Masses; but for that we need to have help, to ask for priests, and that costs money.’

‘I can still see Maria Dyada, that poor woman, with so many children.’

‘I don’t have money. You know that, Father.’

‘Let us leave things as they are. Let us believe in God.’

‘Yes, Father.’

How could she look so courageous in that moment of resignation? What would it have cost him to forgive her, when it was so easy to say a word or two, or a hundred, if that was necessary to save a soul? What did he know about heaven or hell? And nevertheless, lost in a town with no name, he knew many who had deserved heaven. There was a long list. He started to go over the saints of the Catholic cemetery, beginning with those of the day: “Saint Nunilona, virgin and martyr; Anercio, bishop; Saints Salome, widow, Alodia or Elodia and Nulina, virgins; Cordula and Donato.” And he went on. And then, when he began to feel sleepy, he sat down on the bed: “I am going through a list of saints as if I were seeing a herd of goats.”

He went outside and looked up at the sky. It was raining stars. He felt bad about that, because he would have preferred a quiet sky. He heard the sound of roosters crowing. He felt the blanket of night covering the earth. The earth, “this valley of tears.”

“Go ahead, son. Go ahead and do it,” Eduviges Dyada told me.

It was the middle of the night. The lamp that was burning in the corner began to waver, then it flickered and went out.

I heard the woman get up, and I thought that she would go and get a new light. I heard her footsteps getting farther away, and I stayed there waiting.

When the time passed and she didn’t come back, I got up too. I started walking, taking short steps, trying to feel my way through the darkness until I got to my room. I sat down on the floor and tried to fall asleep.

I slept with fits and starts. In one of the moments when I was awake I heard someone shout. It was a pathetic shout, like that of someone who was drunk: “ Ah life, you don’t deserve me!”

I got up in a hurry because it sounded like it was right next to me. It could have been out in the street, but I heard it here, as though it was stuck to the walls of my room. After that everything was silent; only a pin dropping, and the sound of silence.

No, it wasn’t possible to calculate the depth of the silence that produced that shout. It was as if the earth existed in a vacuum. No sound; not even of my breathing, or the beating of my heart;

as if the awareness of sound had ended. When the moment passed and I started to calm down, I heard the shout again, and it continued, over and over, for a long time. “Let me go; it is the right of those who are hanged to protest.”

Then the door was opened wide.

“Is that you, Dona Eduvigés?” I asked. “I have been hearing shouts; what’s going on. I was really frightened.”

“No, my name is not Eduvigés. I am Damiana. I knew you were here, so I came to see you. I wanted to invite you to come and sleep in my house. You would be able to rest better there.”

“Damiana Cisneros? Aren’t you one of those who lived in Media Luna?”

“Yes, that’s where I live. And that’s why it took me a while to get here.”

“My mother told me about someone called Damiana who took care of me when I was born. So then you...?”

“Yes, that was me. I have known you since you opened your eyes.”

“I’ll go with you. The shouts here have been frightening me. Didn’t you hear what was happening? It sounded like someone was being murdered. Weren’t you able to hear it?”

“Perhaps it’s an echo that is locked in there. That room is where they hung Toribio Aldrete a long time ago. After that they locked the door until he rotted away, so that his body would never find rest. I can’t imagine how you were able to get in here, since there is no key to open the door.”

“It was Dona Eduvigés who opened it. She told me it was the only room she had that was available.”

“Eduvigés Dyada?”

“Yes, her.”

“Poor Eduvigés. She must still be grieving.”

“I Fulgor Sedano, a fifty four year old man, a bachelor who works as an administrator, who is certified to bring and continue to press charges, for myself and for my own rights, do claim and allege the following...”

That is what he said when he brought charges against the actions of Toribio Alderete. And he finished: “And let my accusation be recorded as justifiable.”

“Nobody can deny that you are quite capable, Don Fulgor. I know that you can do things. And not because of those who are behind you, but because of you, yourself.”

He remembered. That was the first thing Alderete said after they had gotten drunk together, apparently to celebrate what they had done:

“This matter is going to allow us to cleanse ourselves, because that’s all it can do. And you know that. In fact, as far as you’re concerned you have done what they ordered you and relieved me of having to waste my time, because you had me worried about whatever it was. Now that I know what it is, it makes me laugh. You said “justifiable.” Your master ought to be ashamed for being so ignorant.”

He remembered. They were in the boarding house of Eduvigés, and he had asked her:

“Say Eduvigés, do you think you could let me have the corner room?”

“Whatever you want, Don Fulgor. If you want, you can have them all. Are your men going to be staying here?”

“No, not more than one. Don’t worry about us, and go have a good sleep. Just give us the key.”

“I have to tell you, Don Fulgor,” Toribio Aldrete said. “No one would deny how capable you are. But that son of a bitch who is your boss really gives me a pain.”

“He remembered. That was the last thing he heard him say in his five senses. After that he acted like a desperate scoundrel who was shouting. “Apparently, that’s the type of power that’s behind me. Well I’ll be damned!”

He knocked on the door of the house of Pedro Paramo. He thought about the first time he had done that two weeks ago. He waited for a long time, just like he had done this time. And like he had done before he looked at the black monkey that was hanging from the lintel of the door. He thought to himself: “What the heck! They’ve added a new one; the first one was already faded; this last one shines like silk, though it is no more than a stained rag.”

The first time he had waited so long that he thought the house was uninhabited. This time he was about to leave, but then the figure of Pedro Paramo appeared.

“Come in, Fulgor.”

It was the second time they saw each other. The first time he only saw him, because little Pedro had just been born. And now you could almost say it was still the first time. And here he was, talking to him like an equal. Look at him! He was following him with long strides, wagging his legs. “You will soon learn that I’m the one who knows. You will realize that, and what I have in mind.”

“Sit down, Fulgor. Here we can talk more comfortably.”

They were in the corral. Pedro Paramo leaned against the manger and waited.

“Why don’t you sit down?”

“I prefer to stand up, Pedro.”

“Okay, whatever you like. But don’t forget the ‘Don.’”

Who was this boy to talk to him like this? Not even his father, Don Lucas Paramo, had ever done that. And suddenly this boy, who had just come to Media Luna and didn’t know what was going on, was speaking to him as though he were some farmhand. The heck with it, then!

“How are things going?”

He felt like now was his chance. “Now it’s my turn,” he thought.

“Very bad. There is nothing left. We have sold every last cow.”

He began to take out the papers to tell him how high the debt had risen. He was about to tell him how much they owed, when he heard him say:

“To whom are we in debt? I don’t care about how much it is, only who we owe.”

He gave him a list of names and then said:

“There is no way we can find the money to pay them. That is the problem.”

“And why is that?”

“Because your family used up everything. They borrowed and borrowed, without paying back anything. That is going to make it difficult for you. I already said, ‘Eventually they will use up everything.’ Well, now it’s gone. However, there is someone here who is interested in buying the land. And they would pay well. You would be able to cover the outstanding debts, and still have something left over; although it won’t be very much.”

“Are you the one who wants to buy?”

“Why would you believe it was me?”

“I even believe fools. Tomorrow we will start to settle our affairs. We’ll begin with the Preciados. You say it’s them we owe the most?”

“Yes. And also the ones we have paid less. Your father always intended to pay them last. I understand that one of them, Matilde, went to live in the city. I don’t know if it was Guadalajara, or to Colima. And Lola, I mean, Dona Dolores, is now the owner of all the land. You know, the ranch, in the middle of your land. And it’s her whom we’re going to have to pay.”

“Tomorrow you are going to go and ask for Lola’s hand.”

“But what makes you think she would want to marry me, since I am an old man?”

“You will ask her for me. After all, she does have some charm. Tell her I am deeply in love with her. And ask her if she is willing. While you’re at it, tell Father Renteria to make the arrangements. How much money will you need?”

“Not any, Don Pedro.”

“Well, promise her. Tell her by doing that, she will be paid. I am pretty sure you won’t have any problems. Do it right away, tomorrow.”

“And what about Aldrete?”

“What does Aldrete have to do with it? You mentioned the Preciados, the Fregosos, and the Guzmans. Why are you bringing up Aldrete now?”

“It’s about the boundaries. He already tried to set them up, and now he is asking us to give him the fence pieces he needs to divide the land.”

“Leave that until later, and don’t worry about fences. There won’t be any. The land is not going to be divided. Think about it, Fulgor, even if you don’t understand it. Go and arrange things with Dolores right away. Now, don’t you want to sit down?”

“Yes, I’ll sit down, Don Pedro. I say, I’m starting to enjoy dealing with you.”

“You will tell Lola all these things, and that I love her. That is important. I definitely love her, Sedano. For her eyes, you know? You will do this first thing tomorrow. And I will reduce your duties as manager. Forget about Media Luna.”

“How in the hell had that boy learned to contrive like that?”, thought Fulgor Sedano, as he was returning to Media Luna. “I never expected anything from him. He is useless,” my former boss, Don Lucas, told me. A week good-for-nothing. And I thought he was correct. “When I die, Fulgor, go look for another job.” “Yes, Don Lucas.” “I tried to send him to school, Fulgor, to see if that would help him earn enough to eat and take care of his mother when I’m gone. But he has never decided to do that.” “You don’t deserve this, Don Lucas.” “I’m not counting on anything from him, not even that he might take care of me when I get older. He turned out wrong, believe me, Fulgor.” “That’s really too bad, Don Lucas.”

And now this. If he hadn’t been so attached to Media Luna he wouldn’t have come to see him. He would have left without telling him. But he really cared about that place; all of those bare fields, so overworked, and still full of furrows, each time giving us more of themselves... The beloved Media Luna... And its attachments. “Come here, little land in Enmedio.” He saw it coming. Since it was already there. What else can a woman be used for, after all. “Of course she can!” he said. And he rocked his legs as he walked out of the gate of Media Luna.

It was very easy to be attracted to Dolores. Even if her eyes dazzled and broke up the rest of her face a bit.

“Forgive me for blushing, Don Fulgor. But I never thought Don Pedro would ever notice me.”

“He can’t sleep, thinking of you.”

“But there are so many others he could choose from. There are lots of beautiful women there in Comala. What will they say, when they find out?”

“He only thinks about you, Dolores. And as for the others, there is no one he cares about.”

“It gives me the shivers, Don Fulgor. I would never have imagined it.”

“It’s just that he is very reserved. Don Lucas, may he rest in peace, once told him you were not worthy of him. And he hid his feelings out of obedience to his father. Now that he is no longer here, there is nothing to stop him. It was the first thing he thought about, although I have taken a long time to come and tell you, because of my duties. Let’s say we schedule the wedding for the day after tomorrow. What do you think?”

“Isn’t that awfully soon? I don’t have anything ready. I need to order the trousseau. I’ll write to my sister. No, it would be better to send someone to tell her, but anyway I wouldn’t be ready before the April eighth. It’s now the first, so it’s too soon. Tell him to wait just a few days.”

“He would like to have it right away. As for the trousseau, we can take care of that. Before she died, Pedro’s mother wanted you to have her clothes. That is a custom in the family.”

“But there’s a reason I have to wait. It’s a woman’s thing, you know. Oh, how embarrassed I am to have to say this, Don Fulgor. You’re making me blush again. It’s the time for my... Oh, I am ashamed to say it.”

“What? Marriage is not something to be ashamed of. It’s a matter of love. And with that, everything else is taken care of.”

“But, Don Fulgor, you don’t understand.”

“I understand. The wedding will be the day after tomorrow.”

And he left her standing there with her arms extended, begging for eight days, nothing more than eight days.

“I must not forget to tell Don Pedro—what a clever boy this Pedro is!—that he must inform the judge that the property is jointly held. ‘Don’t forget, Fulgor, tell him that tomorrow.’”

Meanwhile, Dolores hurried to the kitchen with a pitcher, to fill it with hot water. “I am going to try and make it come sooner. I hope it will be tonight. But anyway, it will still last three days. There’s no other choice. Oh, what happiness! What happiness! “Thank you, dear God, for giving me Pedro Paramo.” And she added: “Although afterward, he may hate me.”

“It is now requested, and agreed to. The priest wants sixty pesos for leaving out the marriage banns. I told him we would give it to him in due time. He said he needs to set up the altar, and that the paint is peeling off the dining table. I promised him we would order a new table. He said you never go to Mass. I promised you would go. He said that since your grandmother died the tithes haven’t been given either. I told him not to worry about that. So he agreed.”

“Didn’t you ask Dolores for something in advance?”

“No, Boss. I didn’t dare. That’s the truth. She was so happy that I didn’t want to risk taking away her enthusiasm.”

“Fulgor, you’re a baby.”

(“Oh, come on! Me a baby?” he thought. “After living for 55 years? He has hardly been born, and I am just a few steps away from death.”)

“I didn’t want to destroy her happiness.”

“In spite of that, you’re still a baby.”

“Okay, Boss.”

“And next week you will go see Aldrete and tell him he must tear down the fence. He has encroached on the land of Media Luna.”

“But he measured the boundaries carefully. That is my impression.”

“Well, tell him he was mistaken. That he made the wrong calculations. Tear down the fences, if necessary.”

“But what about the law?”

“What laws, Fulgor? From now on we are going to make the laws. Is there anyone working in Media Luna that you don’t approve of?”

“Yes, a few.”

“Well, send them to work with Aldrete. Then raise a charge against him, accusing him of “usufruct,” or whatever occurs to you. And remind him that now Lucas Paramo is dead, he has to make new arrangements with me.”

The sky was still blue. There were a few clouds. The wind was blowing up above, but down here it was hot.

He knocked on the door again with the wooden handle of his whip just to be stubborn, even though he knew that Pedro Paramo wouldn’t open the door until he felt like it. Looking at the lintel of the door, he said to himself, “These black monkeys look nice, whatever it is they are doing here.”

Just then the door opened, so he went inside.

“Come in, Fulgor. Has the matter with Toribio Aldrete been settled?”

“Yes, boss, it has been taken care of.”

“We still have the matter of the Fregosos, but we can let that go for the moment. Right now I am very engaged with my honeymoon.”

“This town is full of echoes. It seems like they are caught in the cracks of the walls, or under the stones. When you are walking, it seems like they follow your steps. You hear crackling, and laughter. Some laughs are quite old, as though they are tired of laughing. And voices that are worn out from being used so long. You hear all this. Some day the time will come when these sounds fade away.”

Damiana Cisneros was telling me that, as we were crossing through the town.

“There was a time when, during the night there was a moment when I could hear the noise of a fiesta. Those sounds came all the way to Media Luna. I went there to see what was causing the racket, and all that I saw is what we are seeing now. Nothing. Nobody. The streets were as empty as they are now.”

“Then I didn’t hear it any more. It’s because celebrating is tiring. That’s the reason why I wasn’t surprised when it stopped.”

“Yes,” Damiana Cisneros said once more, “this town is full of echoes. They don’t frighten me any more. I hear the sound of dogs howling and let them howl. And, on days when the wind is blowing, you can see it tearing leaves from the trees, when here, like you see, there aren’t any trees. There must have been sometime, or if not, where did those leaves come from?”

“And worst of all is when you hear people chatting, as if their voices were coming out of the cracks and, in spite of that, they are so clear you recognize them. Once I happened to pass by a funeral. So I stopped to say the Lords Prayer, and a woman came over to tell me:

‘Damiana! Pray to God for me, Damiana!’

“She loosened her shawl, and I recognized the face of my sister, Sixtina.”

“What are you doing here?” I asked her. Then she ran back and hid herself among the other women.”

“In case you didn’t know it, my sister Sixtina died when I was 12 years old. She was the oldest. And there were sixteen of us in our family, so you can see how long she has been dead. And there she is, still wandering around in this world. So don’t be frightened if you hear echoes that are more recent, Juan Preciado.”

“Did you also tell my father I would be coming?” I asked her.

“No. And by the way, how is your mother?”

“She died,” I said.

“She died, already? What did she die of?”

“I never knew. Maybe from sadness. She used to sigh a lot.”

“That’s not good. Each sigh is like a piece of your life that you are throwing away. Anyway, so she’s dead?”

“Yes, maybe you should have known that.”

“And why would I know? I haven’t known anything for many years now.”

“Then, how is it that you found me?”

“...”

“Are you alive, Damiana? Tell me, Damiana!”

And I suddenly found myself alone in those empty streets. The windows of the houses were all open to the air, with weed stems hanging out of them. And there were more weeds covering the worn adobe.

“Damiana!” I shouted. “Damiana Cisneros!”

Only an echo answered me: “...ana... neros...! ...ana... neros!”

I heard dogs barking as if I had woken them up. I saw a man cross the street:

“Hey, you!” I shouted.

‘Hey you,’ my own voice answered me.

And I was able to hear some women chatting, as if they were just around the corner.

‘Look who’s coming there. Isn’t that Filoteo Aréchiga?’

‘Yes, it’s him. Act like you don’t see him.’

‘We ought to get out of here. If he is following us, it has to be because he is after one of us.’

‘That must be you.’

‘I was thinking it was certainly you.’

‘We can quit running now. He stopped over there on that corner.’

‘Then it wasn’t one of us he was after, you see?’

‘But what if it turned out that it was you or me he was after? How would that be?’

‘Don’t have illusions.’

‘After all, this is even better. The folks around here say that he is the one who is in charge of trying to find girls for Pedro Paramo. It’s good we got away from that.’

‘Is that right? No, I certainly don’t want to have anything to do with that old man.’

‘We’d better get out of here.’

‘You’re right. Let’s get out of here.’

It was night. Sometime after midnight. And there were voices:

‘...I’m telling you that if the corn does well this year, I will have enough to pay you. If things go bad, you’ll just have to wait.’

‘I’m not trying to force you. You already know that I have been patient with you. But you know this land is not yours. You have been working someone else’s land. How are you going to be able to get what you need to pay me?’

‘And who says that this land is not mine?’

‘They have declared that this land has been sold to Pedro Paramo.’

‘I have never had anything to do with that man. The land is mine.’

‘That’s what you say. But here they say it all belongs to him.’

‘They better not come and tell me that.’

‘Look Galileo, between you and me, I am fond of you. I appreciate the fact that you are married to my sister. And there is no doubt that you treat her good. But you can’t tell me that you didn’t sell this land.’

‘I’m telling you that I never sold it to anyone.’

‘Well, it belongs to Pedro Paramo. He has made that very clear. Hasn’t Don Fulgor come to see you?’

‘No.’

‘He’ll surely come to see you tomorrow. And if not tomorrow, some day very soon.’

‘Well, either he kills me, or he dies. But he won’t get what is not his.’

‘Rest in peace, amen, brother-in-law. Just in case there are doubts.’

‘You’ll see, I will still be here. Don’t worry about me., My mother cut my hair for good reason, so I would look tough.’

‘Okay, till tomorrow, then. Tell Felicitas that tonight I won’t come to dinner. I don’t want them to say: ‘I was with him the night before it happened.’

‘We’ll save something for you, in case you change your mind at the last minute.’

Then the thumping of hoofs was heard, along with the sound of spurs.

“...Tomorrow, when it gets light you can come with me, Chona. I already have the mules ready.”

“And what if my father dies with anger? As old as he is... I would never forgive myself if something happened to him because of me. I am the only person he has to take care of him. There isn’t anyone else. Why are you in such a hurry to steal me away? Wait for a little while. It won’t be long before he dies.”

“You told me the same thing a year ago. And you even criticized me because of my lack of enterprise since, as you said, you were tired of it all. I have prepared the mules, and they are ready. Are you coming with me or not?”

“Let me think about it.”

“Chona, you don’t know how much you mean to me. I can’t stand to wait any longer, Chona. So either you’re coming with me..., or you’re coming with me.”

“Let me think about it, all right. We have to wait until he dies. It shouldn’t be long. Then I’ll go with you, and you won’t have to steal me away.”

“This is also what you said a year ago.”

“So?”

“So I’ve had to hire the mules. I already have them. They are waiting for us. Let him deal with it. You are beautiful. You are young. Surely there is some older woman who will be willing to come and take care of him. Here there are lots of charitable people.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Of course you can.”

“No, I can’t. I’m sorry, don’t you know? But he is my father, after all.”

“Then just forget about it. I’ll go and see Juliana, who is crazy about me.”

“That’s fine. I won’t try to stop you.”

“So do you want to see me tomorrow?”

“No. I don’t want to see you again.”

Noises. Voices. Murmuring. Someone singing far away:

*My sweetheart gave me a kerchief
with tears from crying...*

In falsetto. As if it was women who were singing.

I saw the oxcart pass by. The oxen were moving slowly. The stones cracked under the wheels. The men looked like they were asleep.

“...Every day at dawn the town trembles with the passing of oxcarts. They came from everywhere, filled with saltpeter, ears of corn, and yerba mate. The wheels squeal, making the windows shake, and waking people up. It is the same time that the ovens are opened, and it smells like freshly baked bread. And the sky can suddenly be filled with thunder. The rain falls. Spring arrives. There you will become accustomed to all the ‘sudden events,’ my son.”

The sound of empty oxcarts was spreading through the silence of the streets, and becoming lost in the dark path of night. And the shadows. As well as the echoes of shadows.

I thought about going back. Up there I could feel the path where I had traveled, like an open wound between the blackness of the hills.

Then I felt someone touch my shoulders.

“What are you doing here?”

“I came to look for...”—I was going to say who it was, but I hesitated—“I came to look for my father.”

“And why don’t you come in?”

I entered. It was a house with part of the roof caved in. The tiles were lying on the ground. On one side the roof had fallen the ground. On the other side were a man and a woman.

“Aren’t you ghosts?”

And the woman smiled, but the man looked at me seriously.

“He’s drunk,” said the man.

“He’s only frightened,” said the woman.

There was a gas stove. There was a bed of bamboo, and there was a wicker chair where her clothes were. Because she was as naked as when she was born. And the man too.

“We heard someone who was complaining and banging his head on our door. And there you were. What is it that has happened to you?”

“So many things have happened to me that I only feel like going to sleep.”

“We were already asleep.”

“Then, let’s all sleep.”

By morning my memories had calmed down. From time to time I heard the sound of words, and I noticed the difference. Because I was sure the words I had heard before this had no sound; I heard them, but without sound, like those you hear in your dreams.

“Who can he be?” the woman asked.

“Who knows,” the man answered.

“Why did he want to come here?”

“Who knows.”

“I think I heard him say something about his father.”

“I also heard that.”

“Maybe he’s lost. Remember that time when those people came here and said they had gotten lost. They were looking for a place called Los Confines, and you told them you didn’t know where it was.”

“Yes, I remember. But let me get some sleep.”

“It’s almost time. The reason I am talking to you, is to wake you up. You told me to remind you before dawn. That why I did it. Get up!”

“And why do you want me to get up?”

“I don’t know why. You told me last night I should wake you up. You didn’t tell me why.”

“In that case let me sleep. Didn’t you hear what that man said when he got here? That we should get some sleep. It was the only thing he said.”

Then the voices stop talking and their sound disappears, as if it was turned off. As if it was smothered. Now no one says anything. Like a dream. But then, after a while:

“He just moved. If he hears us, he’s going to wake up. And if he sees us here, he is going to ask questions.”

“What questions can he ask us?”

“Well, he’ll have to say something, won’t he?”

“Leave him alone. He must be very tired.”

“That’s what you think?”

“Be quiet, woman.”

“Look, he’s moving. Do you see how he is writhing? Like something was shaking him inside. I know, because it sometimes happens to me.”

“What has happened to you?”

“That.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I wouldn’t be talking, except that when I saw him beginning to move, I remembered the first time you did it. How much it hurt me, and how much I was sorry for it.”

“Sorry for what?” “Of how I felt right after you did that to me and, although you didn’t want to believe it, I knew it was wrong.”

“And now you’re telling me that? Why don’t you go back to sleep, and let me sleep?”

“You asked me to remind you. That’s what I am doing. For God’s sake, I’m only doing what you asked me to do. Come on! It’s now an hour since you should have gotten up.”

“Leave me alone, woman.”

The man seemed to go back to sleep. The woman kept on talking, but with a soft voice:

“It must already be dawn, because I can see light. I can also see that man from here, and if I see him, it’s because there is enough light to see him. It won’t be long before the sun comes out. Of course, that’s to be expected. What if it turns out he is some sort of criminal, and now we have let him stay here? It doesn’t matter if it was just for one night, because we still hid him. And that could be bad for us in the long run. Just look at how he is squirming, as if he can’t get comfortable. He is acting like he has lost his soul.”

Now it was daytime. The light was replacing the shadows, sending them away. The room where I was felt warmed by the heat of sleeping bodies. The light of dawn filtered through my eyelids. I could almost feel the light. Then I heard:

“He is thrashing around like some condemned person. And he has all of the signs of an evil creature. Get up, Donis, look at him! He’s twisting and turning on the floor. He’s drooling. He has to be someone who has caused many deaths. And you don’t even recognize it.”

“He must be some poor fellow. Go to sleep, and let the rest of us sleep.”

“And why should I go to sleep if I’m not the least bit sleepy?”

“Then get up, and go somewhere where you don’t upset everyone.”

“I’ll do that. I’m going to turn on the light. And when I do, I’ll tell that fellow to come here and get in bed with you, in the empty place I am leaving next to you.”

“Tell him to do that.”

“But I can’t. I’m too afraid.”

“Then go and do what you were going to do, and leave us in peace.”

“I’ll do that.”

“Then what are you waiting for?”

“I’m leaving.”

I heard the woman getting out of her bed. Her bare feet tapped on the floor and then stepped over me. I opened my eyes and closed them again.

When I finally woke up, the sun was shining. Next to me was a cup of coffee. I started to drink it and found there were only a few swallows.

“That’s all the coffee we had. I’m sorry it’s so little. We’re out of just about everything.”

It was the woman’s voice.

“Don’t worry about me,” I told her. “You don’t have to worry about me. I’m used to that. Where does one go from here?”

“To where?”

“To wherever you can go.”

“There are a lot of roads. There’s one that goes to Contla; and another that comes from there. Another that turns right toward the hills. That one you can see from here, I don’t know where it goes.” And I saw her fingers pointing through the hole in the roof where it had caved in. “That other one over there goes to Media Luna. Then there is one more that goes through all the land here, and goes the farthest away.”

“That’s probably the one I came on.”

“Where does it come from?”

“It comes from Sayula.”

“How about that! I thought Sayula was on the other side of us. That’s what I always thought. They say there are a lot of people there, isn’t that so?”

“Yes, like there is everywhere.”

“And just think. Here we are all by ourselves, cut off from the world because we know so little about the rest of life.”

“Where did your husband go?”

“He isn’t my husband. He’s my brother, though he doesn’t want anyone to know that. Where did he go? Well, probably looking for a runaway yearling calf that is wandering about out there. At least, that’s what he told me.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Forever. We were born here.”

“Then you must know Dolores Preciado.”

“Maybe he, Donis, knows her. I know very few people. I never go anywhere. Here where I am is where I’ve always been. Well, not always; only since I have become a woman. Since then I have locked myself away because I’m afraid they will see me. He doesn’t want to believe it, but don’t you think I am frightening?” And she walked over where there was some sunlight. “Look at my face!”

It was a perfectly ordinary face. “What is it that you want me to see?”

“Don’t you see my sin? Don’t you see these purple stains, like impetigo, that are all over me? And that’s only on the outside. On the inside I have become a sea of filth.”

“And who could see that, if there is no one here? I have gone through the whole town, and I haven’t seen anyone.”

“That may be what you think, but there are still a few. Tell me, if Filomena doesn’t live here, and if Dorotea, and Melquiades, and old man Prudencio, and Sostenes, don’t also live here. The thing is, they spend all their time inside. I don’t know what they do during the day, but at night they lock themselves inside. At that time this place is full of ghosts. If you could just see the number of souls that wander around through the street at night. As soon as it gets dark they start to come out. And nobody likes to see them. They are so many, and we are so few, that not even all the effort we make to pray for them helps cure their sorrows. Our prayers couldn’t help so many of them. Maybe part of the Lord’s Prayer would reach them, but that wouldn’t do much good. Then, our sins are in the way. None of us who live are in the grace of God. None of us can raise our eyes to heaven without feeling they are tainted with shame. And shame doesn’t heal anything. At least that is what the bishop told me when he came here some time ago to give confirmations. I went to him and confessed everything:

‘That cannot be forgiven,’ he told me.

‘I feel shame.’

‘That’s not a cure.’

‘Marry us then!’

‘Leave each other!’

‘I wanted to say that life had put us together, locking us in, one next to the other. We were so alone here, and there was no one else. And the earth has to be populated somehow. Perhaps you might confirm him, when he returns.’

‘Leave each other. That is all I can say to you.’

‘But how will we live?’

‘Like others live.’

“And frowning, he mounted his mule and left without looking back, as if he had left behind him a scene of damnation. Then he never came back. And that’s why this place is filled with souls, a complete wasteland of people who died without pardon and would never be able to receive it, certainly not from us. Donis is coming. back Do you hear him?”

“Yes, I hear him.”

“It’s him.”

The door opened.

“Were you able to find the yearling?”

“I never was able to find him, but I followed his trail and I am pretty sure where he is. Today during the night, I will go and find him.”

“You’re going to leave me alone at night?”

“Yes, that could be.”

“I couldn’t stand that. I need to have you with me. It’s the only way that I can feel calm at night.”

“Tonight I will go for the yearling.”

“I just found out,” I intervened, “that your two are brother and sister.”

“You just found out? I have known that much longer than you have. It would be best not to stick your nose into our affairs. We don’t like it when people talk about us.”

“I said that just to show that I understand. Not for any other reason.”

“What do you understand?”

She went to his side, and leaning on his shoulders, she said:

“Yes, what do you understand?”

“Nothing,” I said. “Each time I understand less.” And I added, “I would like to go back to the place where I came from. There I would be able to take advantage of the little bit of daylight that is left.”

“It would be better if you stayed here,” he told me. “Wait until tomorrow. Pretty soon it will be dark, and all the roads are rough. You could get lost. Tomorrow I will show you the way.”

“Okay, good.”

Through the part of the roof that was open to the sky I saw a flock of thrushes, those birds that fly during the late afternoon before the night hides their flight. Then a few clouds already broken apart by the wind came to take away the daylight.

After that the evening star came out, and later, the moon.

The man and the woman were no longer with me. They had gone out through the door that opens onto the patio, and by the time they returned, it was already dark. So they didn’t know what had happened while they were gone. And this is what happened:

A woman came in from the street and entered the house. She was an old woman who was quite short, as if her body had shrunk. As she came in, she looked around the room. She may have seen me. She probably thought I was sleeping. She went right over to where the bed was and took a wicker basket out from under it. She searched through it. She put some sheets under her arm, and she walked away on tiptoes, so as not to wake me up.

I kept still, holding my breath, looking in the other direction. Finally, I turned my head and looked back, where the evening star had joined with the moon.

“Drink this!” I heard.

I didn’t dare to look and see who it was.

“Drink it. It will be good for you; it’s orange blossom water. I know you’re frightened, because you are trembling, and this will calm your fears.”

I recognized those hands, and when I raised my eyes I recognized the face. The man who was behind her, asked me:

“Are you feeling sick?”

“I don’t know. I am seeing things and people where maybe you don’t see anything. A woman was just in here. You must have seen her leave.”

“Come here,” the man said to the woman. “Leave him alone. He is probably some kind of mystic.”

“We ought t let him sleep in the bed. Look at how he is trembling, he probably has a fever.”

“Don’t pay any attention to that. These types act like that in order to call attention. I knew one like that in Media Luna who said he was psychic. But what he never foresaw was that he was going to die when his boss foresaw he was useless. He must be one of that kind of mystics. They spend their life traveling around ‘to see what Providence gives them’; but here they’re not going to find anyone who satisfies their hunger. Do you see now how he’s stopped trembling? It’s because he is listening to us.”

It was as if time had jumped backwards. Once again I saw the evening star next to the moon. The clouds were breaking apart. There were flocks of thrushes. And suddenly the afternoon was filled with light.

The walls were reflecting the afternoon sunlight. My footsteps were walking over the cobblestones. The mule driver was telling me: “Look for Dona Eduviges, if she is still living.”

Then I was back in the dark room with a woman snoring by my side. I noticed that her breathing was uneven, as if she were caught in a dream, or rather, as if she wasn’t asleep and was only imitating the sounds that a dream produces. It was a bamboo bed covered with sacks that smelled of urine, as if the sun had never dried them out; the pillow was a rag that was wrapped around a pile of sticks, or a woolen cloth that was so stiff, or so sweaty, that it had become as hard as a log of wood.

Next to my knee I felt the naked legs of the woman, and next to my face I could feel her breath. I sat up in the bed, leaning on that pillow that felt like adobe.

“Aren’t you going to sleep?” she asked me.

“I don’t feel sleepy any more. I have been sleeping all day long. Where is your brother?”

“He’s out there on the road. You already heard where he had to go. He may not come back tonight.”

“So then he still left? In spite of what you wanted?”

“Yes. And this time, he probably won’t come back. That’s the way they all start. I’m going to go this way, but then they go another way. Until they get so far away they don’t want to come back. He has always wanted to leave, and I think now that you’re here his time has come. Perhaps, without me knowing it, he left me with you so that you would take care of me. He saw his chance. That yearling calf was just a pretext. You’ll see, he’s not going to return.”

I wanted to tell her: “I’m going to go outside to get some fresh air because I feel a bit nauseous,”; but instead I said:

“Don’t worry, he’s going to come back.”

When I got out of bed she told me:

“I left something on the stove in the kitchen. It’s not much, but it is something that can calm your hunger.”

I found a piece of smoked meat and, over the flames, a few tortillas.

“They are all that I was able to get from her,” I heard her say from over there. “I exchanged them with my sister for two clean sheets that I had kept since the time of my mother. She must

have come to get them. I didn't want to say that when Donis was here, but she must have been the woman you saw who frightened you so."

There was a dark sky full of stars. And, next to the moon, was the brightest star of all.

'Don't you hear me?' I asked with a low voice.

Her voice responded: 'Where are you?'

'I'm here in your town, with your people. Don't you see me?'

'No, son, I don't see you.'

Her voice seemed to reach everywhere. Then it was lost. Far away from the earth.

'No, I can't see you.'

I went back to the middle of the room where that woman was lying, and I said to her:

"I will stay here in the same corner. After all, the bed is just as hard as sleeping on the floor. If something happens, let me know."

"Donis won't return," she told me. "I could see it in his eyes. He was waiting for someone to come, so he could leave. Now you will have to look out for me. Or is it that you don't want to take care of me? Come here and sleep with me"

"No, I'm fine here."

"It would be better for you to get in bed. Over there the bugs will bite you."

So then I went and got in bed with her.

The heat made me wake up around midnight. And I was sweating. The body of that woman made of earth, or wrapped in a crust of earth, was leaking as though it was melting in a puddle of mud. I felt myself floating in the sweat that was pouring out of her, and I felt like I didn't have enough air to breath. Then I got up. The woman was still sleeping, and in her mouth there was a sound of gurgling that seemed like a death rattle.

I went out in the street to get some air; but the heat followed me and did not go away.

Because there wasn't any air, only the night that was congested and silent, warmed by the midsummer heat of august.

There was still no air. I had to suck in the air that came out of my mouth, holding it in my hands before it could flow away. I felt it come and go, each time it was less, until became so thin that it slipped away forever through my fingers.

I really mean forever.

I remember having seen something like foamy clouds floating around over my head, then drenching me with that foam, and blocking everything out with its darkness. That was the last thing I saw.

"Are you trying to tell me you died because there was no air, Juan Preciado? I found you in the plaza, quite far from the house of Donis when he was right next to me, telling me you were pretending to be dead. Between the two of us we dragged you to the front door, very tense and stiff, like those who have died out of fear. If there was no air that night, like you said, we would not have been able to take you with us in order to bury you. Now as you see, we did bury you."

“You’re right, Doroteo. Did you say your name is Doroteo?”

“It doesn’t matter. Although my name was Dorotea. But it doesn’t matter.”

“That’s right, Dorotea. It must have been the murmurs that killed me.”

“There you will find my favorite place. The place that I wanted, where dreams protected me. My town, nestled on the plain, shaded with trees and leaves, like a piggy bank where we kept our memories. You’ll see why a person would want to live there for an eternity. The dawn, the morning, the afternoon, and the night, were always the same; except for changes in the air. The air changes the color of things there; where life whirs by as if it were a murmur; as if it were a pure murmur of life...”

“Yes, Dorotea. It must have been the murmurs killed me. Although I was already weakened by my fear. It had been getting closer and closer, until I could no longer withstand it. And when I heard those murmurs they shattered my lifeline.”

“You were right, I had gone to the plaza. The clamor of people drew me there, and I thought I had made it. I was no longer in my right mind; I remember leaning on the walls as if I were walking with my hands. And murmurs seemed to ooze out of the walls, as if they were filtering through the cracks. I heard them; they were voices of people, not clear voices but secret, as if they were whispering something, or as if they were buzzing close to my ears. I moved away from the walls and went on through the middle of the street, but I still could hear them, like they were both in front and in back of me. I didn’t feel the heat like I had before; on the contrary, I felt cold. Since I left the house of that woman who let me use her bed who, like I said, I saw dissolving in the water of her sweat, I felt cold. And while I was walking it got stronger and stronger, until I had goose bumps all over my skin. I tried to go back, thinking that if I returned I could find the heat I had just left, but then I realized that the cold was coming from me, from my own blood. And then I was scared. I still heard that noise from the plaza. So Donis came back then? The woman was sure she would never see him again.”

“It was already in the morning when Donis and I ran into each other. I didn’t know where he was coming from, and I didn’t ask him.”

“Well, so I got to the plaza, and I stopped by the side of the gate. I saw there weren’t any people, though I kept on hearing the murmurs, like when there are lots of people on market day. The same sound, for no particular reason, like the wind blowing through the branches of the trees at night, when you can’t see the trees or the branches, but you hear the murmuring. After that I didn’t go any further. I began to feel as though that murmuring was getting closer and was circling around me until I was finally able to make out a few words that had hardly any sound: “Pray to God for us.” That was what I heard them tell me. Then my soul froze. That’s why the two of you found me dead.”

“It probably would have been better if you hadn’t come here. What did you come here for anyway?”

“I told you that before. I came to look for Pedro Paramo who, according to what I was told, was my father. I came because of an illusion.”

“An illusion? That’s not good. One of those made me live longer than I should have. With that I paid for the debt of having a son who was, to put it that way, nothing more than an illusion; because I didn’t have a son. Now that I am dead it has given me time to think, and figure out everything. God didn’t even give me a nest to put him in. Only this miserable life I lived, with my sad eyes that were always looking behind people, suspecting that someone was hiding my

child. And it was all because of an accursed dream I had. I have had two: I call one of them “blessed,” and the other, “accursed.” The first one was when I dreamt I had a son. And, as long as I lived, I never stopped believing that it was true; because I felt him in my arms, tender, with open eyes, mouth, and hands. For a long time in my fingers I felt the impression of his sleepy eyes, and the beating of his heart. How was I not going to think that was real? I carried him with me wherever I went, wrapped in my shawl, and then, suddenly, I lost him. In heaven they told me they had made a mistake with me. That they had given me the heart of a mother, but the womb of a tramp. That was the other dream I had. I got to heaven and I looked around to see if I recognized the face of my child on one of the angels. And nothing. All faces were the same, made from the same mold. Then I asked them about it. One of the saints came to me and, without saying anything, stuck one of his hands into my stomach as if he had pushed it into a jar of wax. When he pulled it out, he showed me something that looked like an empty shell. “This shows us what happened to you.”

“You know the strange things they say up there; but you can still understand them. I tried to tell them it was only because my stomach was suffering from hunger and the lack of food; but then another one of those saints grabbed me by the shoulders and then pushed me out the door. “Go and rest a little longer on earth; and while you’re there, try to be good so that your purgatory will last only a short time.”

“That was the accursed dream I had, from which I learned the reason I never had a son. I found out very late, when my body had given out, when my backbone had come out of the top of my head and I could no longer walk. Then on top of that, the town was starting to become abandoned; everyone was leaving to go somewhere else, and with them went the charity that was keeping me alive. I sat down and waited to die. After we found you, my bones decided to stop working. ‘Nobody would notice it,’ I thought. I am someone that doesn’t matter to anyone. You can see that I no longer take up any space on the earth. They buried me in this grave where I fit nicely into the hollow of your arms, here in this patch of ground where you have me now. Only, I ought to be the one who has you in my arms. Oh, you hear that? It’s raining out there. Don’t you hear the rain falling?”

“I feel like someone is walking over us. But stop being afraid; no one can do anything to frighten you now. Try to think about nice things, because we’re going to be buried here for a long time.”

At daybreak, large drops of rain were falling on the ground. They sounded hollow as they fell into the soft, loose dirt inside the furrows. A mocking bird flew over the flat ground and imitated the cry of a child; farther away one could hear it utter a groan of fatigue, and farther still, where the horizon opened into a white expanse, it made a hiccup, and then a chortle, followed by another groan.

Fulgor Sendano noticed the smell of the soil, and he looked around to see how the rain was filling the furrows. His eyes opened wide. He took several sniffs of that aroma, and he smiled until his teeth showed.

“Great!” he said. “It looks like we’re going to have another good year.” And then he added: “Come here, little drops of water, come here. Keep on falling until you get tired. After that you can go away, and remember, that we have only opened this ground so it will please you.”

And he burst out laughing. The mocking bird returned from its flight through the fields and flew by, almost in front of him, groaning with a sickly groan.

The rain poured out of the clouds until, out there where it had begun to get light, the clouds closed up again, and it seemed like the darkness that had been leaving was now returning. The gate of Media Luna, drenched by the rain, creaked when it opened. Passing through were two, two more, and still two more, until at least two hundred men on horseback came through and started galloping through the wet fields.

“We need to drive the cattle of Enmedio farther past what used to be Estagua, and then run the cattle of Estagua over to the hills of Vilmayo,” Fulgor Sedano told the men as they were leaving. “And hurry up, because a downpour is coming!”

He repeated that so many times that the last men only heard, “From here to there, and from there even farther.” Each and every one raised their hand to their sombrero, to show that they understood him.

And the last man had just left when Miguel Paramo galloped in and, without stopping his horse, jumped off right in front of Fulgor, letting the horse go and look for its stable by itself.

“Where have you been at this hour, boy?” “I’m coming from having a good time.” “With whom?” “Can’t you guess?” “It must have been Dorotea, the ‘Cuarraca.’ She’s the only one who likes babies.” “You are an imbecile, Fulgor; but it’s not your fault.”

And without removing his spurs, Miguel left to go in and have his lunch.

Damiana Cisneros was in the kitchen, and she asked him the same question.

“But where have you been, Miguel?”

“Oh, out there, visiting mothers.”

“I don’t want to bother you. So excuse me. But how do you make the eggs?”

“Just the way you like them.”

“I am trying to talk to you in a decent way, Miguel.”

“Yes, I know, Damiana. Don’t worry. Listen, do you know a woman named Dorotea, the one they call the Cuarraca?”

“Yes. And if you want to see her, she’s right outside there now.” Every morning she comes here for breakfast.”

“She is the one who has a ball of wool in her shawl and rocks it, saying that it is her baby. It seems something bad must have happened to her some time ago; but since she never talks about it, no one knows what it was. Now she lives on charity.”

“That nasty old man! I’m going to play him a dirty trick that makes him rolls his eyes.”

Then Miguel started wondering if that woman wouldn’t be able to help him with something. And, without hesitating, he opened the back door of the kitchen and called to Dorotea.

“Come here; I’m going to make you a deal,” he told her.

No one knows what kind of a proposition he made, but the fact is that he came back through the door rubbing his hands.

“The eggs will be coming!” he shouted to Damiana. And he added, “From now on, you will give that woman the same breakfast as mine, and make sure you don’t leave out anything.”

Meanwhile, Fulgor went to see how tall the corn had grown. He was worried about the size, because the harvest was going to be late. However, it was just a short time since it had been planted. “I want to see if it will catch up with us.” Then he added: “That boy is just like his father, but he’s starting too soon. The way he’s acting, I don’t think he’s going to make it. And I forgot to tell him that someone came here yesterday with the report that he had killed someone. If that goes on...”

He sighed and tried to imagine where the cows could have gone now. But he was distracted when he saw that Miguel’s horse was rubbing his nose against the wall. “He didn’t even take the

saddle off," he thought. "He doesn't care. At least Don Pedro is a bit more consistent, and he has his moments of calm. But he's too easy on Miguel. Yesterday I reported what his son had done, and he answered: 'Pretend it was me, Fulgor. He is incapable of doing something like that; he's not strong enough to kill anyone. In order to do something like that, you have to have balls as big as this.' And he put his hands up as though he were holding a pumpkin. 'Whenever he does something wrong, you can blame it on me.'"

"Miguel is going to give you a lot of headaches, Don Pedro. He likes to stir up trouble."

"Let him take care of himself. He is not much more than a child. How old is he? He must be about seventeen by now. Isn't that right, Fulgor?"

"It could be. I remember when they brought him here like it was just yesterday. But he tends to be violent, and he's living so fast that I sometimes think he must be racing against time. He will end up loosing, you'll see."

"He's still just a child, Fulgor."

"Whatever you say, Don Pedro. But the woman who came here weeping yesterday, saying your son killed her husband, was completely heartbroken. I know how to recognize a broken heart, Don Pedro. And that woman surely had one. I offered her five hundred hectoliters of corn to help her get over it, but she didn't want it. Then, I promised her we would find some way to correct that harm that was done. She didn't want that either"

"Who was it?"

"They are people I don't know."

"Then you don't have to worry about them, Fulgor. Those people don't exist."

He went out into the fields and checked on the corn. He took some of the corn in his hands to make sure the weevils hadn't bored into it. Then he measured the height of the corn: "It will yield," he said. "When the grazing land is ready, we won't have to give the cattle any more corn. There is more than enough."

On the way back he looked at the sky full of clouds and said: "We'll have water for a long time." And he forgot about everything else.

"Outside there the weather must be changing. My mother told me that when it started to rain, everything was filled with light, and the green odor of saplings. She told me how a mountain of clouds would arrive, how they spread out over the ground, and how they disrupted things by changing the colors... My mother spent her childhood, and her best years, in this town, but she wasn't able to come back here to die. So I guess she sent me in her place. It seems strange, Dorotea, that I was never even able to see heaven. At least, I think it must have been the same place she knew."

"I don't know, Juan Preciado. It's been so many years since I've raised my head that I have forgotten about heaven. Even if I had, what would it have mattered? Heaven is so high up, and my eyes so weak, that I was happy just to be able to see the earth. Besides, I lost all my interest in it after Father Renteria told me I would never know bliss. That I wouldn't even see it from a distance... It was because of my sins, but he shouldn't have told me that because life is full of so many difficult things. The only thing that makes one try is the hope that, when you die, they will take you to a different place. But when they close the door and the only one left open is the one to hell, it would be better not to have been born... So for me, Juan Preciado, heaven is where I am now."

"And what about your soul? Where do you think it has gone?"

“It must be wandering around the earth like many others, searching for living people who will pray for it. Maybe it hates me for the bad way I treated it; but I no longer worry about that. I have gotten rid of the bad habit of feeling remorse. I was embittered by the little bit I had to eat, and I couldn’t stand the nights filled with worried ideas about condemnation and things like that. When I sat down to die, my soul begged me to get up again and keep struggling through life, as if I were waiting for some miracle that would remove my sins. I never tried to do that: ‘This is were it ends,’ I told it. ‘I don’t have the strength to do anymore.’ And I opened my mouth so it could go away. And that’s what it did. Then I felt it when a trickle of blood from the thread that connects it to my heart fell into my hands.”

Someone knocked on his door, but he didn’t open it. Then he heard them knock on the other doors, waking up people. Then he heard the rapid steps of Fulgor walking toward his front door (he recognized him by the way he walked); he heard the footsteps stop for a moment, as if he was going to knock once more. But then he went away again.

There was the sound of voices and footsteps that were slowly moving, as if they were carrying something heavy.

Vague noises.

He thought about the death of his father that was also on a morning like this; although on that morning, looking through the open door, you could see the gray color of a sky turned to ashes. And a woman who was holding back her tears was leaning on the door. A mother he had already forgotten, who was telling him: “They have killed your father!” She was telling him that with a weak, broken voice that was only held together by the thread of her sobbing.

He never wanted to recall that memory because it brought back others; like when a sack breaks open and all the grain spills out. The death of his father that led to other deaths, and in each of them there was an image of a face that was torn apart, with one eye broken, and the other looking vengefully. And then another face, and still another, until those memories stopped when there were no longer any faces left to remind him of them.

“Put him down here! No, not that way. You have to put him with his head the other way. Come on! What are you waiting for?”

Speaking softly.

“What about him?”

“He’s sleeping. Don’t wake him up. Don’t make any noise.” And there he was, watching them setting down an object wrapped in old sacks fastened with the straps of a halter, as if they had covered it with a shroud.

“Who is that?” he asked.

Fulgor Sedano came over and told him:

“It’s Miguel, Don Pedro.”

“What did they do to him?” he shouted. He expected they would say “They killed him.” And he was already getting ready to express his fury with loud shouts of anger, but then he heard the quiet voice of Fulgor Sedano telling him:

“Nobody did anything. He met death all by himself.”

There were gas lamps illuminating the darkness.

“...The horse killed him” one of them spoke out.

They laid him on his bed, removing the mattress, leaving the bare boards where they arranged the body, now without the straps that had been wrapped around it. They placed his hands over

his chest, and covered his face with a black cloth. "Now he seems more grand than he was," Fulgor Sedano thought to himself.

Pedro Paramo was expressionless, and his thoughts were struggling with each other, without being able to connect. Finally, he said:

"Now I'm beginning to pay for it. I suppose it's better to do it early and have it end soon."

He felt no sorrow.

He talked to the people in the patio to thank them for coming, making sure his voice carried through the sobs of the women, not trying to hide his feelings. Later that night the only thing that was heard was the sound of Miguel Paramo's horse, stomping on the ground.

"Tomorrow have that horse put down so it won't keep suffering," he ordered Fulgor Sedano.

"Yes, Don Pedro. I understand. The poor thing must feel devastated."

"That's what I was thinking too, Fulgor. And while you're at it, tell those women not to make such a scene; it's too disturbing for my dead son. If it were anyone else, they wouldn't be carrying on like that.

Many years later Father Renteria would remember how the stiffness of his bed made him unable to sleep that night, until he finally was forced to get out of bed. It was the night that Miguel Paramo died.

He walked through the empty streets of Comala, with his heavy footsteps disturbing the dogs that were sniffing clumps of garbage. He went to the river where he spent some time looking at the reflection of the stars in the water. He spent more than an hour struggling with his thoughts, before letting them sink into the dark water of the river.

"The whole thing began," he thought, "when, from the miserable person he was as a child, Pedro Paramo became an adult. He grew up like a noxious weed. The worst thing is that it was all because of me: 'I confess, Father, that yesterday I slept with Pedro Paramo.' 'I confess, Father, that I had a child of Pedro Paramo.' 'I permitted my daughter go to Pedro Paramo.' I always expected he would come to me and confess something, but he never did. And later, he extended the arms of his evil with that son he had, who he actually recognized as his own, though God knows why. What I do know is that I put that instrument in his hands."

He remembered very clearly the day he brought the child to him, soon after he was born.

He had told him:

"Don Pedro, the mother died when she gave birth to him. She said he was yours. Here he is."

"And he didn't deny it. All he said was:

"Why don't you keep him, Father? Make him a priest."

"With the blood that he has inside him, I don't want that responsibility."

"Do you really believe I have bad blood?"

"Frankly yes, Don Pedro."

"I will prove to you that that is not true. Give him to me. There are many here who would be happy to help take care of him."

"That was just what I thought. At least with you he will be sure to have support."

The child grew up, but even when he was small he was a viper.

"Damiana! Take care of this boy. He is my child."

After that he opened a bottle of wine:

“I will drink this for the deceased mother, and for you.

“And for him?”

“For him too. Why not?”

He filled another glass, and the two of them drank for the future of the child.

“That’s how it was.”

The wagons started to roll by, headed for Media Luna. He ducked down, hiding himself in a hollow next to the river. He asked himself, “What are you hiding from?”

“Hello, Father,” he heard someone say to him.

He raised up from the ground and replied:

“Hello. May the lord bless you.”

Lights were still on in the town. The river was full of luminous colors.

“Father, have they already said the Eucharist?” one of the wagon drivers asked him.

“That must have been some time ago,” he said. And he started walking in the opposite direction, with no intention of stopping.

“Where are you going so early, Father?”

“Where is the person who is dying, Father?”

“Has someone died in Contla, Father?”

He would have liked to tell them, “It’s me. I am the one who has died.” But he had to settle for just giving them a smile. Once he was outside of the town, he accelerated his steps. He returned later that morning.

“Where have you been, uncle?” his niece Ana asked him. “Lots of women have come looking for you. They wanted to confess with you, since tomorrow is good Friday.”

“They can come again tonight.”

He was quiet for a while, sitting on a bench in the hallway, feeling very tired.

“What nice fresh air today, right Ana?”

“It’s very hot, uncle.”

“I don’t feel it.”

The last thing he wanted was for them to know he had been in Contla where he made a full confession to the priest who, in spite of his pleas, had refused to grant him absolution:

“This man whose name you refuse to mention has torn apart your Church, and you let him do that. What can we expect from you now, Father? What have you done to the power of God? I want to believe that you are good, and that there you have received the respect of everyone; but it’s not enough to be good. A sin is not good. And to put an end to it, you must be strict, and merciless. I want to believe that they are still believers; but you are not the one who maintains their faith; they have it out of superstition, or fear. I want to share with you the poverty in which you live, and in the effort and care you give them each day as part of your duty. I know how difficult that is in these poor towns that they have assigned us; but that very thing gives me the right to tell you that we must not give our service to the few who give you something in return for your soul, and with your soul in their hands, what can you do to be better than those who are better than you? No, Father, my hands are not clean enough to grant you absolution. You will have to look for that somewhere else.”

“Do you mean to say that I have to go look for a confession somewhere else?”

“Yes, you have to do that. You can’t continue consecrating others when you yourself are in sin.”

“And if they suspend my ministries?”

“I don’t think they will do that, although perhaps you deserve that. It will be up to them to decide.”

“Couldn’t you...? Let’s say provisionally... I need to give holy oils for the communion. There are so many people in my town who are dying.”

“Father, let God judge those who die.”

And the priest in Contla had said no.

After that the two of them walked through the corridors of the curacy shaded by azaleas. They sat down under an arbor full of grape vines.

“They are acidic, Father,” the priest said, anticipating the question he was going to ask.

“We live in a land where all is given to us, thanks to Providence; but it is given with acidity. We are condemned to that”

“Yes, you’re right, Senor Priest. I tried to grow grapes in Comala, but with no success. All that grows there are oranges, and bayberries; sour oranges, sour bayberries. I no longer remember the taste of sweet things. Do you remember the guavas from China we had in the seminary? The peaches, and the mandarins that were so soft the skin would come off the minute you touched them? I brought a few seeds; just a few, hardly a pocket full... afterward I realized it would have been better to leave them where they would be able to grow; because here I only brought them to die.”

“And nevertheless, Father, they say that the land of Comala is fertile. It is too bad that it is all in the hands of one man. It’s Pedro Paramo who is still the owner, right?”

“That has been God’s will.”

“I don’t think that in this case the will of God is involved. Isn’t that what you think, Father?”

“At times I have doubted it, but there, they accept it.”

“Are you one of them?”

“I am just a poor man who is willing to humiliate himself, when he feels the need to do it.”

Then they had said goodbye. He took his hands and kissed them. After what had happened with him, he didn’t want to think any more about that morning in Contla.

He got up and started toward the door.

“Where are you going, uncle?”

His niece, Ana, was always there next to him, as if she were trying to use his shadow in order to protect herself from life.

“I’m going to walk a for bit, Ana. To see if I drop dead.”

“Are you feeling bad?”

“No, not feeling bad, Ana. Just bad. A bad man. That’s what I feel like.”

He went to Media Luna and gave condolences to Pedro Paramo. Once again he heard the excuses for the accusations made against his son. He let him go on. None of that mattered. However, he turned down the invitation to have dinner with him:

“I’m sorry I can’t do that, Don Pedro, because I have to get back to the church soon. A lot of women are waiting for me by the confessional. Some other time.”

He walked as fast as he could and, since it was getting dark, he went into the church just as he was, covered with dust and misery. He sat down to hear confessions.

The first to come to him was old Dorotea who always was there, waiting for the doors of the church to open.

He noticed that she smelled of alcohol.

“What’s this, now you’re getting drunk? Since when?”

“I was just at Miguel’s funeral, and they kept on giving me something to drink until I turned into a clown.”

“You’ve never been anything else, Dorotea.”

“But now I’m coming to you with my sins, Father. And lots of them.”

Several times he had told her: “Don’t come to confession, Dorotea; when you do that you only take up my time. You can’t commit more sins, even if you tried to. Give the others a chance to come and visit me.”

“But now I do have sins, Father. I really do.”

“Tell me.”

“Now that it can no longer do any harm, I will tell you that I was the one who went to get girls for Miguel Paramo.”

Father Renteria seemed to wake up from his dreams, and asked her:

“Since when?”

“Since he was a young man. Since he had the measles.”

“Dorotea, please repeat what you just told me.”

“Well, I said that I was the one who got girls for Miguel Paramo.”

“Did you bring them yourself?”

“Sometimes, yes. Other times, I only spoke to them. And with others, I told him how to find them. You know, the time when they would be alone and he could catch them unprepared.”

“Were there a lot of them?”

He didn’t really want to ask that question, but it came to him out of habit.

“I have lost count. There were too many of them.”

“What do you want from me, Dorotea? You must judge yourself. Try and see if you can forgive yourself.”

“I can’t do that, Father. But you can. That’s why I have come to see you.”

“How many times have you come to me to ask me to help you go to heaven when you die? You wanted to see if you could find your child there, right Dorotea? Well, you won’t be able to go to heaven any longer. But may God forgive you.”

“Thank you, Father.”

“Yes. I also forgive you, in His name. You may go now.”

“Aren’t you going to give me a penance?”

“You don’t need one, Dorotea.”

“Thank you, Father.”

“May God be with you.”

He knocked on the window of the confessional to let another one of the women know he was ready to see someone. And, as he heard her say “I a sinner...” his head bent over, as if he could no longer hold it upright. Then he had that dizziness, that sensation of dissolving in thick water, and of lights spinning around; all the daylight was breaking into fragments; and there was a taste of blood on his tongue. Then, “I a sinner...” was repeated again more loudly, and finally he finished: “forever and ever, amen,” “forever and ever, amen,” “forever and ever...”

“That’s enough,” he said. “How long has it been since you came to confession?”

“Two days, Father.”

There he was again. As if he were surrounded by misfortune. “What are you doing here?” he thought to himself. “You should get up and get some rest. You’re exhausted.”

He rose up from the confessional and went to the sacristy, without looking at the people who were waiting for him:

“All of those who are feel they are without sin can come to receive communion tomorrow.”
Behind him, all he heard was a murmur

I am sleeping in the same bed where my mother died many years ago; on the same mattress, under the same black wool blanket that used to cover both of us when were sleeping. Then, I slept by her side, in a little place she made for me under her arms.

I think I still can hear the slow pulsation of her breathing, and the sighs with which she lulled my sleep... But none of that is real. I am in a black box like those they use to bury the dead. Because I am dead.

I can feel the place where I am, and I think...

I think of when the lemons ripen. Of the wind in February breaking the stems of the bracken when the lack of care makes it dry up. Of the ripe lemons filling the patio with their odor.

The wind came down from the mountains on those February mornings. And the clouds were up there waiting for the weather that lets them fall down into the valley, leaving the blue sky empty, so that the light shines down with the wind, making circles on the ground, blowing the dust, and rocking the branches of the orange trees.

And the sparrows chirped; they pecked the leaves that the wind had blown off the trees, and they chirped while they did that; they left their feathers on the branches, and they chased butterflies and chirped some more. It was that time of the year.

I remember the February mornings full of wind, and sparrows, and blue sky. That was when my mother died. I probably shouted and my hands must have been torn to shreds after wringing out my despair. You would have liked the way things were. But maybe you were not happy that morning. The wind blew through the open door, rustling stems of the ivy. The hair between the veins on my legs began to rise, and my warm hands trembled as they touched my breasts. The sparrows were enjoying themselves. In the fields the corn was waving in the wind. I felt sorry that she would no longer be able to see the wind in the jasmines, that her eyes were closed to the light of day. But why was I going to cry?

Do you remember, Justina? You had arranged the chairs along the side of the corridor for the people who would come and wait for their turn to say goodbye to her. But the chairs were empty, and my mother was alone in the center of the candles; her face was pale, her white teeth were barely visible between her red lips that were hardened by the chill of death. Her eyebrows were motionless, the same as her heart. You and I were praying endlessly, without her hearing it, nor did you or I hear anything, since all was covered by the sonority of the wind that night. You ironed her black dress, starching the collar and the cuffs so her hands would look fresh when they were crossed over her breast, her loving breast where I once had slept, that had also given me something to eat, and that palpitated, soothing my dreams.

No one came to see her, but that was for the best. Death is not something that you offer as entertainment. No one goes around looking for sadness.

Someone knocked on the door. You went out.

“You go,” I told you. “I have a hard time seeing things clearly. And tell them to go away. Are they coming for the money from the Gregorian Mass? She didn’t leave any money. Tell them that Justina. She will not be able to leave purgatory if they don’t hold these Masses and pray for her? Who are they to enforce justice? You think I’m crazy? That’s okay with me.”

“And the chairs you set up were still empty until we went to bury her with those men we hired who were sweating under someone else’s weight. They lowered the coffin slowly, they covered

the grave with damp sand, while they were refreshed by the cool wind. Their eyes were cold and indifferent. They told us how much it would cost. And you paid them, like one who is buying something, untying your handkerchief that was damp with tears, and was now wrapped around the money for the funeral..."

And when they left, you kneeled in the place where her face was now, and kissed the ground; and it could have made a hole in the ground, if I hadn't told you: "Let's go, Justina; she's somewhere else now; here there is only a dead body."

"Was it you who said all that, Dorotea?"

"Who, me? I was asleep for a while. Are they still scaring you?"

"I heard someone who was talking. It was the voice of a woman. I thought it was you."

"The voice of a woman? You thought it was me? It must have been the one who talks by herself. The one in the large grave, Susana San Juan. She is buried by our side. The humidity must have reached her, and now she's dreaming about things that happened."

"Who is she?"

"The last wife of Pedro Paramo. Some said she was mad. Others, said she wasn't. The truth is that she had already talked by herself when she was alive."

"She must have been dead for a long time."

"Uh, yes! Some time ago. What did you hear her say?"

"Something about her mother."

"But she didn't have a mother..."

"Well, that's what she was talking about."

"...Well, at least, she never had one when she came here. But wait. Now I remember that she was born here, and then when she was an old lady, they disappeared. And yes, her mother died of tuberculosis. She was a strange woman who was always sick and never visited anyone."

"That's what she said. That no one came to see her mother when she died."

"But what time was she talking about? Of course no one came to her house because they were afraid of getting tuberculosis. Didn't this woman remember that?"

"That's what she was talking about."

"If you hear her talking again, be sure to tell me. I would like to know what she says."

"You hear that? I think she's going say something else. I can hear a voice."

"No, that's not her. That's coming from farther away, from the other direction. And it's the voice of a man. What happens is that when humidity reaches these old dead people, they begin to move around and wake up."

'Heaven is huge. God was with me that night. If that was not the case, who knows what might have happened. Because it was already night when I revived.'

"Do you hear it better now?"

"Yes."

'...I had blood all over me. And when I rose up I looked at the blood that fallen on the stones. And it was mine. Puddles of blood. But I realized I wasn't dead. I knew that Pedro Paramo did not intend to kill me. Only to frighten me. He wanted to find out if I had been in Vilmayo two months earlier, on the day of Saint Christopher. At the wedding. I rolled around in my blood and asked him: 'At what wedding, Don Pedro? No, no, Don Pedro, I wasn't there. If maybe I did pass by there, it was just a coincidence...' He didn't intend to kill me. He left me lame, as

you see, or maimed, if you prefer. But he didn't kill me. They say that one of my eyes squinted after that, because of the shock. Heaven is huge. No one doubts that.'

'Who can that be?'

'I don't know. There were so many. Pedro Paramo caused such a loss of life after they killed his father; they say he killed all those who attended the wedding where Don Lucas was going to act as godfather. And the thing is, that it only happened to Don Lucas by accident, because it seems that the shot was actually intended for the groom. And since they never knew who fired the bullet that struck him, Pedro Paramo slaughtered everyone. It was there on the hill of Vilmayo where there were several ranches, where there is no trace of any today... Wait, now that does sound like her. You have good ears, pay attention to her, and tell me what she says.'

'I don't understand anything. It doesn't sound like she is talking; she's only complaining.'

'What is she complaining about?'

'No idea.'

'It must be for something. Nobody complains for no reason. Listen very carefully.'

'She's just complaining. Maybe Pedro Paramo made her suffer.'

'No way. He loved her. It's my opinion that he never loved any woman like he loved her. When he found her, she was already long-suffering, and perhaps mad. He loved her so much that after she died, he spent the rest of his life looking down the road where they took her to the cemetery. He lost interest in everything. He abandoned his lands and had them destroy all his equipment. Some say it was because he grew tired, others say he was suffering from disillusion. The truth is, he sent everyone away and then did nothing more than sit there in his chair, just staring down the road.'

'After that the land became a wasteland, and was in ruins. It hurt to see it so uncared for, with the blight that covered it after it was abandoned. From one end to the other, people lost interest in the land and went to find other more attractive places. I remember days when Comala was filled with goodbyes, and it seemed like a good thing to go and say farewell to those who were leaving. And the thing is that most were leaving with the intention of coming back again. Some asked their family to join them, but not for the rest of their things. Then, they forgot about the town, about us, and even their belongings. I stayed because I had nowhere else to go. Others stayed, thinking that Pedro Paramo would die, and according to what they said, he had promised to bequeath them his property, so this gave them some hope. But the years passed, and he was still alive, always there, like a scarecrow in front of the gate of the empty land of Media Luna.'

'And then, when it was getting closer to the time for him to die, the wars of the Cristeros broke out and their army took in the few men who remained. It was when I was dying of hunger, and since then I never struggled any more.'

'And all that happened because of the sorrow of Don Pedro, because of the way he suffered. Because his wife died, the one named Susana. And that shows how much he loved her.'

It was Fulgor Sedano who told him:

"Boss, do you know who's here now?"

"Who?"

"Bartolome San Juan."

"So what about it?"

"That's what I'm asking myself. I wonder why he came here?"

"Haven't you looked into it?"

“No, not so far. And he hasn’t even looked for a place to live. He went right to your old house. Then, he dismounted and set down his bags, as if you had already rented him the house. At least that’s the way it seemed.”

“And why is it, Fulgor, that you haven’t found out what’s going on? Isn’t that your job?”

“I was confused by what I just told you. But tomorrow I will look into it, if you think that is necessary.”

“No, you can leave that matter to me. I’ll take care of it. Have the two of them come?”

“Yes, he and his wife. But how do you know that?”

“Are you sure it wasn’t his daughter?”

“Well, based on the way he treated her, I would say it was his wife.”

“Okay, go and get some rest, Fulgor.”

“Yes, if you will permit me.”

‘I waited thirty years for you to come back, Susana. I was hoping for everything. Not just something, but everything; so there would be no other desires, only yours, the desire for you. How many times did I ask your father to come and live here again, telling him that I needed him? I even tried it with a few deceptions.’

‘I offered to make him the manager, if he would return with you again. And what did he say? ‘There is no response,’ the messenger always told me. ‘Senor Don Bartolme tears up the letters whenever I give them to him.’ But from the messenger, I learned you had gotten married, and then I heard you had become a widow and were living with your father again.’

For a moment there was silence.

‘Then, the messenger came and went, and when he returned he always told me:

‘I haven’t seen them, Don Pedro. People say they have left Mascota.’

‘And I said:

‘Don’t worry what it costs; go and look for them. It’s not as if the earth has swallowed them.’

‘Until one day he came to tell me:

‘I searched through the entire mountain range, trying to find where Bartolome San Juan was hiding, until I found him lost in a hole in the mountains, living in a small shack made of logs, in the place there the abandoned mines of *La Andromeda* are.’

“After I heard that was when strange things were happening. They said that people had taken up arms. We heard rumors. That was what drew your father here. Not for himself, according to what he somewhat later told me in his letter, but to bring you to someplace that was safe.”

“I felt like the sky was opening. I felt like rushing there to you, to shower you with happiness. I felt like crying. And I did cry, Susana, when I knew you were finally going to return.”

“There are places that know misfortune. You can tell them by the smell of their old, timid air that is pathetic and weak, like everything that is old. This is one of those places, Susana.”

“Back there where we have just come from you were pleased at least by the state of things: clouds, birds, moss... remember? Here, on the other hand, you only find this sour, yellow odor that seems to come from everywhere. And it’s because this is a misfortunate place that is now totally consumed by misfortune.”

“He has asked us to come back. He has let us use this house. He has given us everything we might need. But we should not be grateful to him. We are unlucky to have come here, because here there will be no salvation for us. I can sense it.”

“Do you know what Pedro Paramo wants from me? I already knew that what he has given us was not going to be without cost. And I was ready to pay for it with my work, since we would have to pay for it somehow. I told him everything about Andromeda, and I assured him that it still has possibilities if it is worked the right way. And you know what he told me? ‘I’m not interested in the mine, Bartolome San Juan. The only thing I want from you is your daughter. That has been your most important job.’”

“So what he wants is you, Susana. They said you played together when you were children. That he already knows you. That you even went swimming in the river together when you were kids. I didn’t know that; if I had, I would have given you a beating with my belt.”

“I don’t doubt it.”

“Was it really you who said, I don’t doubt it?”

“Yes, I said that.”

“Does that mean you are ready to sleep with him?”

“Yes, Bartolome.”

“Don’t you know that he is married, and that he has had an untold number of women?”

“Yes, Bartolome.”

“Don’t call me Bartolome. I am your father!”

Bartolome San Juan, a dead miner. Susana San Juan, the daughter of a deceased miner who died in the mines of Andromeda. After he thought about it that way, he saw things clearly; “I will have to go there to die,” and then he said:

“I have told him that that though you are a widow your husband is still part of your life, or at least that’s the way you act. I have tried to dissuade him, but he starts to look angry when I talk about that, and when your name is mentioned he closes his eyes. Like I have told you, he is pure evil. That’s definitely what Pedro Paramo is.”

“And who am I?”

“You are my daughter, the daughter of Bartolome San Juan.”

In the mind of Susana San Juan her thoughts began to occur, at first slowly, and then they stopped, only to begin rushing again until the only thing she could say was:

“That’s not true, It’s not true.”

“This world is pressing on us from all sides, collecting handfuls of our dust here and there, and breaking us into little pieces while sprinkling the ground with our blood. What have we done? Why has our soul rotted away? Your mother said at least we have the love of God. And you spurn all that, Susana. Why do you spurn me as your father? Are you mad?”

“Didn’t you know that?”

“You’re mad?”

“Of course I am, Bartolome. Didn’t you know?”

“For me, Fulgor, she is the most beautiful woman on the face of the earth? I had started to think that I had lost her forever. And now I definitely do not want to lose her again. Do you understand, Fulgor? Tell her father to go ahead and keep on working in the mines. Once he is

there, I think it will be easy enough for the old man to disappear in that place where nobody ever goes... Don't you think so?"

"It could be."

"We need to have it be. She has to be an orphan. We are obligated to protect someone like that; don't you believe that too?"

"I don't see any problem."

"Then get going, Fulgor, get going."

"And if she finds out?"

"And who's going to tell her?" Tell me, between the two of us, who do you think would tell her?"

"I don't think anyone would."

"Don't say you don't think that. Stop thinking like that, and then you will see how everything turns out just fine. Remember the work he used to do at Andromeda. Send him there to continue that work. Let him go back and forth. But nothing that involves his daughter. It will be our job to take care of her. His job will be there in the mine, and his house will be here when he comes home to rest."

"Once again I like the way you are handling things, boss, as though your spirits are livening up again."

In the fields of the valley of Comala the rain is falling. A light rain that is unusual in this land where there are usually downpours. It is Sunday, and the Indians have come down from Apango with their bags of chamomile, their rosemary, and their handfuls of thyme. They haven't brought any pine wood, because it is wet, nor any oak wood, since it is also wet from the heavy rain. They set down their herbs under the arch of the gate on the edge of the town, and wait.

The rain continues falling on the puddles already there.

In the furrows where the corn is just starting to grow, streams of water are flowing. Today the men have not gone to the market, because they are busy trying to alter the furrows so the water will flow through another place and not wash away the tender stalks of corn. They are traveling in groups over the waterlogged terrain, breaking up the soft clods with their poles, and holding the cornstalks with their hands as they try to protect the corn so it will keep on growing.

The Indians are still waiting. They feel like it is a bad day. Maybe it is for that reason they are trembling under their soaked straw jackets; not with cold, but with fear. And they keep watching the falling rain, and the sky that won't give up its clouds.

One woman has asked them for a bit of mending thread, some sugar and, if they have one, a sieve to strain the gruel. But no one else comes. The town seems to be empty. Their jackets become heavy with moisture as noon approaches. They chat, they tell jokes, and they break out in laughter. The chamomiles shine after being splattered with rain. They think: "If we had at least brought some whisky it wouldn't matter; but the batch of agaves has become a sea of water. Unfortunately, there is nothing we can do about it."

Holding an umbrella, and surrounded by streams of water that are gushing over the pavement, Justina Diaz was walking down the road that comes from Media Luna. She made the sign of the cross and crossed herself, as she passed by the door of cathedral. When she arrived at the gate, the Indians turned to look at her. She saw all of them staring at her, as if they were scrutinizing her. She stopped at the first stall, bought ten cents worth of rosemary, and then left, followed by stares from the group of Indians.

“How expensive everything is these days,” she said as she took the road to Media Luna again. “This poor little sprig of rosemary cost ten cents, and it doesn’t even have an aroma.”

When it was beginning to get dark, the Indians removed their stalls. They walked off in the rain with heavy packs on their backs. They went into the church to pray to the virgin and left a handful of thyme as an offering. Then they started back to Apango where they had come from. “There it will be another day,” they said. While they traveled they laughed, as they joked with each other.

Justina Diaz entered the bedroom of Susana San Juan, placing the rosemary on the shelf. The closed curtains made the room look dark, so that only shadows were seen. She assumed that Susana was sleeping and she wished she was always asleep. She thought she was, and she was pleased. Then she heard a sigh that seemed to come from somewhere in that dark room.

“Justina!” someone said.

She turned her head and did not see anyone, but she felt a hand on her shoulder and someone breathing in her ears. She heard a voice speaking quietly: “It’s time for you to leave, Justina. Pack your things, and get out of here. We don’t need you any longer.”

“She does to need me,” she insisted, straightening her body. “She’s sick, and she needs me.”

“Not any more, Justina. I will stay here and take care of her.”

“Is that you, Don Bartolome?” she asked, not expecting an answer. She uttered a cry that sounded like one that made people say, “That seems to be a human howl, but it doesn’t sound like it’s coming from a human being.”

The rain muffled the sounds. After everything that had happened, it was still being heard, its drops pouring as though they were stringing together the thread of life.

“What’s wrong, Justina? Why are you shouting?” asked Susana San Juan.

“I never shouted, Susana. You must have been dreaming.”

“I have already told you that I don’t ever sleep. You don’t have any consideration of me. I’m always awake. Last night you let your cat get away, and it kept me awake.”

“It stayed with me, between my legs. It was drenched, and out of pity I let it stay in my bed. But it didn’t make a lot of noise.”

“No, it didn’t make noise, but kept on twisting around, jumping from my feet to my head, and quietly meowing as though it was hungry.”

“But I gave it plenty to eat, and it never left me during the entire night. You are dreaming things that are not true again, Susana.”

“I’m telling you that it spent the night frightening me with the way it was jumping. And although your cat is very affectionate, I don’t want it with me while I’m trying to sleep.”

“You’re seeing things, Susana. That’s what it is. When Pedro Paramo comes, I’ll tell him I can no longer put up with you. I’ll tell him I’m leaving. There are plenty of other people here that will give me work. Not all of them are maniacs like you, nor do they keep on humiliating someone like you do. Tomorrow I’ll take the cat and leave, and you will be just fine.”

“You will not leave here, poor mistreated Justina. You won’t go anywhere, because you will never find anyone who cares for you like I do.”

“No, you’re right, I won’t leave, Susana. I can’t leave. You know very well that I am here to take care of you. It doesn’t matter if you sometimes make me complain; and I’ll always be here to take care of you.”

She had cared for her since she was born. She had carried her in her arms. She had helped her learn how to walk. To take those steps that to her seemed eternal. She had seen her mouth and her eyes grow “like candy.” “Peppermint is blue. Yellow and blue; green and blue. A cross

between mint, and spearmint.” She tickled her legs. She entertained her by letting her suck her breasts that had nothing in them, as though they were a toy. “Play with it,” she said. “Play with this little toy of yours.” She could have crushed her to pieces.

Outside the rain was falling on the leaves of the banana trees, and it seemed like the water was bubbling on top of the water already on the ground.

The sheets were damp and cold. The pipes were bubbling and emitting foam, tired of working all day, and all night long. The rain kept on splashing into an endless number of bubbles.

It was midnight, and outside the noise of the downpour was blocking out all other sounds.

Susana San Juan slowly got out of bed. She gradually straightened up and moved away from the bed. Once again there was something pressing on her body, first on her feet and then moving over her body, trying to find her face.

“Is that you, Bartolome?” she asked.

She seemed to hear the door creak, as if someone were either leaving, or entering. And after that there was only the rain, intermittent, cold, pouring over the leaves of the banana trees, and bubbling in its own bubbles.

She went back to sleep and did not wake up until the light illuminated the red bricks, sprinkled with rain in the grey morning of a new day. She shouted:

“Justina!”

She appeared right away, as though she had already been in the room, with her body wrapped in a shawl.

“What do you want, Susana?”

“The cat. It was here again.”

“Oh, that’s too bad, Susana.”

She leaned over and put her arms around her, hugging her until she looked up and asked:

“Why are you crying? I’ll tell Pedro Paramo that you’re always good to me. I won’t tell him anything about the problems your cat has given me. Don’t be like that, Justina.”

“Your father has died, Susana. He died last night and today they came here to tell us that there was nothing they could do. They said they had already buried him, that they couldn’t bring him here because it was too far away. You have been left alone, Susana.”

“Then it was him,” and she smiled. “He came to say goodbye to me,” she said, and then she smiled again.

Many years ago when she was a child, he had said to her:

“Drop down, Susana, and tell me what you see.”

She was hanging from rope that was hurting her waist and bloodying her hands, but she didn’t want to let go; it was like the last thread that connected her to the outside world.

“I don’t see anything, Papa.”

“Look carefully, Susana. Try to find something.

He moved the lamp so it would give her more light.

“I still don’t see anything, Papa.”

“Okay, I’ll let you down farther. Let me know when you reach the ground.”

She had entered through a small hole between the boards. She had walked over some old, rotting planks and cracks that were filled with dirt.

“Go down farther, Susana, and you will find what I told you.”

And she dropped down farther and started rocking, her feet swaying back and forth, crying out, “I can’t find any place to put my feet.”

“Go farther down, Susana. Farther down. Tell me if you see anything.”

And when she finally found a place for her feet she stayed there and said nothing, because she was speechless with fear. The lamp light spread out, and a shout from above startled her.

“Give me what is there, Susana.”

And she picked up the skull, and when the light made her see it clearly, she let go of it.

“It’s the skull of a dead person,” she said.

“You should find something else next to it. Give me everything you find.”

The cadaver had dissolved into bones; the jawbone had broken off as if it was made of sugar. She gave him the bones one at a time, until she came to the toes, handing over one joint after another. And then the round ball of the skull broke up in her hands.

“Look for something else, Susana. Money. Round pieces of gold. Look for them, Susana.”

And then she didn’t remember any more, except when many days later she was confronted by the icy glare of her father.

Remembering that was why she was laughing now.

“I knew it was you, Bartolome.”

And poor Justina who was weeping her heart out, rose to see that she was laughing, and that her laughter was becoming even louder.

Outside it was still raining. The Indians had gone. It was Monday, and the valley of Comala was still saturated with rain.

There were strong winds on all those days. They were the same winds that brought the rain. The rain was gone, but the wind was still there. Out in the fields the leaves of the corn had turned golden, and the corn was lying in the furrows, protecting itself from the wind. During the daytime the wind was tolerable; it twisted the ivy and crackled the tiles on the rooftops; but at night it was constantly howling. Banks of silent clouds passed by, as though they were scraping against the ground.

Susana San Juan hears the wind rattling the window pane. She is lying on the bed with her arms behind her head and thinking, as she listens to the sounds of the night that are coming and going, dragged by the endless force of the wind. But then it stops for a moment.

Someone has opened the door. A gust of wind blows out the lamp. She looks at the darkness and wonders. She can sense small movements. Right away she feels her heart beating with irregular palpitations. Through her closed eyelids she can see a gleam of light.

She doesn’t open her eyes. Her hair has fallen down over her face. The light reveals some drops of sweat on her lips. She asks:

“Is that you, Father?”

“I am your Father, my child.”

She opens her eyes a bit. Through the strands of her hair she can see a shadow on the ceiling, with a head leaning over her face. And in front of her a blurry figure is visible through her damp eyelashes. She saw a dim light in the location of her heart, in the shape of a heart, shaking like a flickering flame. “Your heart is dying with pain,” she thinks. “I know you are coming to tell me Florencio has died; but I already know that. Don’t be upset about others; don’t worry about me. I have hidden my pain in a safe place. Don’t let your heart stop beating.”

She raised her body up, and dragged it over toward where Padre Renteria was.

“Let me console you with my sorrow!” he said, protecting the flame of the candle with his hands.

Father Renteria motioned for her to approach him. He watched her put her hands around the flame of the candle and then place her face against the burning wick until the odor of scorched flesh made him shake her and blow out the candle.

Then the darkness returned, and she quickly went to hide herself under the sheets. Father Renteria said:

“I have come to comfort you, child.”

“Then goodbye, Father,” she replied. “Don’t come back. I don’t need you.”

And she heard the sound of his footsteps retreating, leaving her with a sensation of coldness, of shivering, and fear.

“Why do you come to see me, if you are dead?”

Father Renteria closed the door and went out into the night. The will was still blowing.

A man they called the stutterer came to Media Luna and asked for Pedro Paramo.

“Why are you looking for him?”

“I want to talk to him.”

“He’s not here.”

“Tell him, when he returns, that I have come on part of Don Fulgor.”

“I will tell him, but you will have to wait several hours.”

“Tell him it’s a matter of urgency.”

“I’ll tell him.”

Still sitting on his horse, the man they called the stutterer started waiting. Some time passed, and Pedro Paramo, who had not seen him before, finally came to talk to him:

“What do you want?”

“I need to speak personally with the Patron.”

“That’s me. What do you want?”

“Well, just this. They killed Don Fulgor Sedano. I was with him. We were going out to the hillside to see why there has been so little water. And while we were walking, a gang of men appeared in front of us. And from that gang I heard a voice that shouted: ‘I know that one. He’s the manager of Media Luna.’”

“They didn’t pay any attention to me, but they told Don Fulgor to stop. They told him they were revolutionaries, and that they had come for your lands. ‘Go and tell him!’ they told Don Fulgor. ‘Tell your boss that we’re coming to see him!’ And he started running, filled with fear. He was not very fast, because of how heavy he is; but he ran. Then they killed him while he was running. He died with one leg up, and the other down.”

“After that I didn’t move. I waited until it was night, and then I came here to tell you what happened.”

“So what are you waiting for? Why don’t you get moving? Go and tell those men that I’m waiting here to see what they want. Let them come and deal with me. But before you do that, go over to La Consagracion. Do you know Tilcuate? He’ll be there. Tell him I need to see him. And tell those guys that I’m waiting to see them, whenever they come. What group of revolutionaries are they?”

“I don’t know. They never mentioned a name.”

“Okay, I’ll do that, ssir.”

Pedro Paramo went into his office and closed the door. He felt old and worn out. He didn’t care that much about Fulgor who, after all, cared more about others than about him. He had only done what he was told to, although he was quite useful. “At any rate,” he thought to himself, “Tilcuate’s men will take care of those fools.”

He thought again about Susana San Juan who always was in her room sleeping and, when she wasn’t, looking as if she were sleeping. He had spent the previous night leaning against the wall, looking through the dim light of the bed lamp at the movements of Susana; her face sweating, her hands tugging the sheets, and squeezing the pillow, until she finally fell asleep.

Since he had brought her to live here, he had seen nothing but these stressful nights of constant uneasiness, and he wondered when it was going to end.

He hoped that it wouldn’t be too long, because nothing you are feeling should last that long. There was no memory, or anything else, no matter how intense it was, that should not eventually calm down.

If only he knew what it was that had upset her so badly that it made her twist and turn without being able to sleep, so that it seemed like she was breaking up inside.

He thought he knew her. And even if that were not the case, shouldn’t it have been enough for her to know that he loved her more than anyone else on earth? And also, and this was even more important, she made it possible for him to go through life animated by a person who would erase all other memories.

But what was the world of Susana San Juan? That was one of the things that Pedro Paramo was never able to know.

“My body was enjoying the heat from the sand. I had my eyes closed, my arms open and my knees bent, relishing the soft breeze from the sea. The water stretched out in front of me and the waves splashed, leaving their foam on my feet when the tide came in...”

“Now it is definitely Susana who is talking, Juan Preciado. Don’t forget to tell me what she is saying.”

“...It was early. The tide was coming in and bringing its waves. It dropped its foam and then went back out again cleansed, with its green water still in gentle waves.”

“When I swim in the sea, I can only do it when I’m naked” I told him. “And he came with me that first day, also naked and phosphorescent, when he came out of the sea. There weren’t any seagulls, only those birds they call ‘picos feos’ that grunt like they are snoring, and disappear after the sun comes out. He stayed with me that first day and he felt lonely, in spite of the fact that I was there with him.”

“It’s like I am just one more ‘pico feo’ among all the others.” he told me. “I like you more at night, when the two of us are sleeping together under the sheets, in the darkness.”

“And then he left.”

“And I came back. I would always come back. The sea moistens my ankles, it moistens my knees, and my thighs; it wraps its soft arm around my waist, and flows over my breasts; it hugs my neck and presses against my shoulders. Then I dive into it; I surrender myself completely to its powerful waves, to its gentle caress, without holding back anything.”

“I told him that I love to swim in the sea.”

“But he doesn’t understand how I feel.”

“And the next day I went back to the sea again. Purifying myself, and submitting myself to its waves.”

Late that afternoon the men appeared. They came armed with rifles, wearing bandoliers crossed over their chests. There were about twenty of them. Pedro Paramo invited them to eat supper at the table, and they waited silently. When the food came one only heard them sip the cocoa, and chew tortilla after tortilla.

Pedro Paramo watched them. There were not any faces he recognized. Tilcuate was in the shadows right behind him.

“Gentlemen,” he said when he saw they were done eating, “how can I help you?”

“Are you the owner of this ranch?” one of the men asked, waving his hand.

“But another one interrupted him, saying:

“I’m the one to do the talking here!”

“All right. How can I help you?” Pedro Paramo asked again.

“As you can see, we have taken up arms.”

“And?”

“And that’s all you can say? You think that’s nothing.?”

“But why have you done that?”

“Because that’s what others have also done. Don’t you know that? Wait for a while until our orders arrive, and they will explain our cause. For the moment, we are here.”

“I know our cause,” another said. “And since you asked, I will explain. We have rebelled against the government, and against the rest of you because we are tired of putting up with you. Against the government, because it is despicable, and against you, because you are nothing more than some crooked thieves and greedy robbers. And I won’t say anything about the Governor, because we are going to use bullets to tell him what we want to say.”

“How much do you need to continue your revolution?” Pedro Paramo asked. “Perhaps I could help you.”

“What he is saying sounds like a good idea, Perseverancio. You shouldn’t let your words get in the way. We need a rich man to give us something in advance, and who could do that better than this man here? What about you, Casildo; how much do you think we need?”

“He should give us whatever he feels like giving.”

“This one wouldn’t even give water to a rooster at dawn. We should take advantage of the fact that we are here in order to make him give us all the bread he has in his stinking craw.”

“Calm down, Perseverancio. You can accomplish more by being nice to someone. Lets come to an agreement. Go ahead and tell us what you think, Casildo.”

“Well I think that about twenty thousand pesos wouldn’t be bad to start with. What do you think? But who knows if this gentleman might not think that is too little, considering that he is willing to help us. Let’s say fifty thousand. Are we agreed?”

“I am going to give you one hundred thousand pesos,” Pedro Paramo told them. “How many of you are there?”

“There are three hundred.”

“Okay, I am going to give you three hundred more men to enlarge your contingent. In a week you will have both the men and the money at your disposal. I am giving you the money, but I am only loaning the men. When they are done, send them back to me. Is that satisfactory?”

“But of course.”

“Then eight days from now, gentlemen. It has been a pleasure to meet you.”

“Yes,” said one of them as they left. “Just remember that if you don’t live up to your promise, you will hear Perservancio speak again, because that’s what my name is.”

Pedro said goodbye to him, shaking his hand.

“Who do you think is the leader of that bunch?” he asked Tilcuate when they were gone.

“Well, it looks to me like it’s that potbellied one in the middle who didn’t even raise his eyes. I think it’s him... I’m usually right about things like this, Don Pedro.”

“Yes, Damasio, you’re in charge here. Or do you not want to get involved in this uprising?”

“But I can hardly wait. You know how much I like a good brawl.”

“You saw what we are dealing with here, so you don’t need my advice. Just get together three hundred men that you trust, and join up with these rebels. Tell them you are bringing the men that I promised them. As for the rest, you’ll know how to handle that.”

“And what should I tell them about the money? Do I give them that too?”

“I’m going to give you ten pesos for each one of them. Then just enough for their most urgent expenses. Tell them I am keeping the rest here for when they need it. It’s not a good idea to have too much money wandering around in groups like these. And by the way, would you like to have that little ranch at Puerta de Piedra? If so, from now on it’s yours. You’ll take a message to Attorney Gerardo Trujillo, in Comala, and have him put your name on the property. What do you say, Damasio?”

“You don’t have to ask that, sir. With it, or without it, I would do all this gladly. And you already know that. Anyway, I thank you very much. My old woman will have something to do that she enjoys, while I have a good time.”

“And while you’re there rustle up a few cows. What that ranch needs is some new activity.”

“Is it okay if they are oxen?”

“Choose whatever you like, and your wife can take care of them. Going back to our matter, try not to go too far away from my lands, so that if others come, they will see that the land is already occupied. And come and see me whenever you can, or whenever you have news.”

“Okay, I’ll see you boss.”

“What is she saying, Juan Preciado?”

“She says she was hiding her feet between his legs. That her feet were stone cold, and that there they were warmed like they were in the oven where you brown the bread. She said he was biting her feet, telling her that they were like bread browned in the oven. She said she snuggled up next to him, feeling lost in nothingness as she felt like her flesh was opened by a hot nail, then warm, then gentle, pressing against her soft flesh; then sinking, and sinking even more, until she moaned. But his death had hurt her even more. That’s what she says.”

“Who was she referring to?”

“To someone who died before she did, certainly.”

“But who could it have been?”

“I don’t know. She said on that night he had been late coming back, she thought it must have been in the middle of the night, or maybe at dawn. She hardly noticed it because her feet that had been so cold seemed like they were wrapped in something. Like someone had wrapped them in something that warmed them up. When she woke up, she found that they were wrapped in a newspaper she had been reading while she waited for him and let fall on the floor when she

no longer could keep from falling asleep. And there she was, with her feet wrapped in a newspaper, when they came to tell her that he had died.

“Something must have broken the casket they buried her in, because I can hear something like boards cracking.”

“Yes, I hear it too.”

“That night the dreams came back again. Why did she have all these vivid memories of those things that happened? Why not just of death, and not all this sad music of the past?”

“Florencio is dead, senora.”

“How big that man was! How tall! And his voice was hard. As dry as the driest ground. And his figure was blurred. Or did it become blurred afterward, as if the rain had fallen between the two of them? What had he said? Florencio? Whose Florencio was she talking about? Mine? Oh!, why didn’t I cry and drown myself in tears in order to wash away my grief. Lord, you do not exist! I asked you to protect him. To take care of him. I asked you that. But you only care about souls. And what I want is his body that is naked and warm with love, burning with desire; I want to feel him pressing against my trembling breasts, and my arms. My transparent body hanging from his. My light body, open and free to his power. Now, what am I going to do with my painful lips?”

While Susana San Juan was tossing and turning restlessly, Pedro Paramo was standing in the doorway, watching her as he counted the seconds of her new dream that had already lasted for a long time. The oil in the lamp was crackling, and the flame flickered, becoming weaker and weaker, until it went out.

If at least it were pain that she was feeling, and not these interminable and exhausting dreams, he might be able to find some relief for her. That was what Pedro Paramo was thinking, his eyes fixed on Susana San Juan, watching each one of her movements. And what if she also faded out when the flame of the lamp with which he saw her also went out?

After that he left, closing the door as quietly as possible. Outside, the fresh night air removed the image of Susana San Juan from Pedro Paramo.

She woke up shortly before dawn. Feeling hot and sweating, she tossed the heavy blankets on the floor and relieved herself from the warmth of the sheets. Then her naked body was refreshed by the cool morning breeze. She sighed, and then went back to sleep again.

That was how Father Renteria found her hours later; naked, and asleep.

“Don Pedro, did you know they defeated Tilcuate?”

“I know that last night there was an exchange of shots because I heard all the noise, but I didn’t know anything more. Who told you that, Gerardo?”

“Some wounded men who came back to Comala. My wife helped to bandage their wounds. They said they are some of Damasio’s men, and that many others were killed. It seems that they encountered some who turned out to be men of Pancho Villa.”

“That’s not good, Gerardo! These are bad times we are having. And what about you; what do you plan to do?”

“I am leaving, Don Pedro. I am going to Sayula. I will reestablish myself there.”

“You lawyers have a big advantage; you can set up your patrimony wherever you like, and no one is going to give you a ban time.”

“Don’t believe that, Don Pedro; everywhere we go we run into problems. Besides, we hate to leave people like you, and changes like this make us grow apart. We keep breaking up our world all the time, if I may say so. Where do you want me to leave these papers?”

“Don’t leave them. Take them with you. Or does this mean that you can’t keep on taking care of my affairs once you are there?”

“I am thankful for your confidence, Don Pedro. I am sincerely thankful. However, I’m very sure that I wouldn’t be able to do that. Certain irregularities... Let’s say... Things that no one but you should know about. They could lead to shady dealings if they were to fall into the wrong hands. The safest thing would be for you to keep them.”

“Yes, you’re right Gerardo. Leave them here. I will burn them. With or without papers, who would be able to question my ownership of the property here?”

“Undoubtedly no one, Don Pedro. No one. So, with your permission.”

“Go with God, Gerardo.”

“What did you say?”

“I mean, God be with you.”

The lawyer Gerardo Trujillo slowly departed. He was now quite old, but not so old that he had to take such short steps. The truth is that he had expected some compensation. He had been the lawyer of Don Lucas, the father of Don Pedro, may he rest in peace, and then of Don Pedro. That is why he expected some compensation. A large and valuable retribution. He had even told his wife:

“I am going to say goodbye to Don Pedro. I know he will reward me. I think I can say that with the money he gives me, we will be able to set up things well in Sayula and live comfortably for the rest of our lives.”

But why is it that women are always so doubtful? Do they get advice from heaven, or what? She was doubtful that he would get anything:

“You will have to work very hard to get him to open his wallet. If he’s like he usually is, you will get nothing.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because I know him.”

He continued walking slowly toward the door, hoping he would hear a call: “Hey, Gerardo. I was so preoccupied with my affairs that it kept me from thinking about you. But I owe you things that can’t be paid back with money. So I’ll give you this little gift.”

But that call never came. He passed through the door and unfastened the halter with which his horse was hooked to the post. He climbed into the saddle and as he left, trying not to leave too quickly in case there was a call, he headed for Comala. When he saw that Media Luna was out of sight behind him, he thought: “It would demean me greatly if I were to ask him for a loan.”

“Don Pedro, I have returned because I realized I hadn’t done the right thing. I would gladly continue to handle your affairs.”

He said that sitting in the office of Pedro Paramo again, where he had been not more than a half an hour ago.

“That’s good; I’m glad, Gerardo. There are the papers. Right where you left them.”

“I would also like to have... For the expenses... For the transfer... A small amount of money in advance... A little extra, if it would be all right with you.”

“Five hundred pesos?”

“Could it be a little more, just a bit more?”

“Would a thousand be okay?”

“What about five?”

“Five what? Five thousand pesos? I don’t have that much. You know that everything has been going downhill lately. The land, the animals. You know that. Take the thousand. I don’t think you’ll need more than that.”

He lowered his head and thought it over for a moment. He heard the tinkle of pesos on the desk where Pedro Paramo was counting the money. He remembered how Don Lucas had always given him something in advance. He remembered how Don Pedro had changed all of that. He also remembered all the shameful problems his son Miguel had caused him.

He got him out of jail at least fifteen times, perhaps even more. And the time he had murdered that man... what was his name? Renteria, that was it. The dead man called Renteria, who had put the pistol in his hand. He remembered how frightened Miguel had been, though afterward he started laughing. How much would that have cost Don Pedro if things had gone through the usual legal process? And what about all of his rapes? How many times did he have to use money from his own pocket to get them to let things go: “Just be happy you are going to have a blonde-haired son!” he would tell them.

“Here they are, Gerardo. Take good care of them, because they won’t come again.”

And, still caught up in his perambulations, he replied:

“Yes, the dead don’t come back either,” and he added, “unfortunately.”

It was long before dawn, and the sky was full of bright stars that had grown even brighter during the long night. The moon had come out a while ago, but now it was gone. It was one of those sad moons that no one looks at, that no one pays attention to. It was there for a while, and then it had gone to hide behind the hills.

Far away, lost in the darkness, the bellowing of bulls was heard.

“Those animals never sleep,” Damiana Cisneros said. “They never sleep. They’re like the Devil who is always wandering about looking for souls in order to take them to hell.”

She turned over in bed, moving her face closer to the wall. Then she heard the noises.

She stopped breathing and opened her eyes. Again she heard three sharp sounds as if someone was banging on the wall with their knuckles. Not there where she was, but farther away, on the same wall.

“Oh, my God! It must be the three taps of Saint Paschal Baylon who was coming to inform one of his devotees that the hour of their death had arrived.”

She didn’t worry that, because of her rheumatism, some time ago she had missed the Novena; but she began to feel fear, and more than fear, curiosity.

She got out of bed and went to look out of the window. The fields were dark, however, because she knew him so well she recognized the huge body of Pedro Paramo who was pounding on the window of the maid, Margarita.

“Oh, that Don Pedro!” Damiana said. He never stops chasing after women. What I do not understand is why he likes to do those things so secretly. If he had asked me, I would have told Margarita that he needed her for tonight, and he wouldn’t have had to drag her out of bed.

She closed the window when she heard the bulls bellowing. She laid down on the bed, putting her hands over her ears, thinking about what must be happening now with maid Margarita.

Somewhat later she had to take off her nightgown, because the night had become so warm...

“Damiana!” she heard.

Then she was a young woman again.

“Open the door for me, Damiana!”

Her heart trembled, as though there was a toad hopping over her ribs.

“But why, Don Pedro?”

“Open up, Damiana!”

“But I am sleeping, Don Pedro.”

Afterward, she could hear that Don Pedro was walking away through the long hallway, stomping his feet like he always did when he was angry.

The following night, so he would have no difficulty getting in, and in order to avoid another ruckus, she left the door ajar and even took her clothes off. But Pedro Paramo never came back.

Because of that, now when she was in charge of all the servants of Media Luna and they respected her, now when she was older, she remembered that night when Pedro Paramo shouted at her: “Open the door for me, Damiana!”

And she went to bed thinking about how happy maid Margarita must be at this moment.

Then once again she heard knocking, but this time on the front door, as though someone was banging on it with their foot.

Once more she opened the window and looked out into the night. She didn’t see anything, although it seemed like the ground was full of tremors, like when it had rained and the worms came out of the ground. She felt something coming, like the heat from many men. She heard frogs croaking and crickets chirping; a calm night when it was raining. Then, once again she heard someone banging on the door.

A lamp spread its light over the faces of some men. Then it went out.

“Things like this don’t interest me,” said Damiana Cisneros and closed the window.

“They told me that you were defeated, Damasio. Why did you let that happen?”

“They were mistaken, boss. Nothing happened to me. All my men are here, and I now have as many as seven hundred after a few more have joined us. What happened was that some of the older men, who were tired of not having any action, started firing at a group of men that turned out to be a whole army. Have you heard about Pancho Villa?”

“Where did those guys come from?”

“They came from the north, defeating everyone they meet. According to what we’ve seen, they are going everywhere, and gaining ground wherever they go. They are very powerful. No one is going to be able to stop them.”

“And why don’t you join up with them? I have already told you, we have to stick with those who are winning.”

“I already did that.”

“Then why did you come to see me?”

“We need money, Boss. We are tired of eating meat. That doesn’t satisfy us any more. And no one wants to trust us. We have come so you can provide for us, and we won’t have to feel the need to rob someone else. If we were farther out there somewhere it wouldn’t bother us to see what we could get; but here we’re all related, and and we feel guilty about robbing someone. So the end of the story is we need money to buy something, even if it’s from a fat woman with chili. We have had our fill of meat.”

“Are you trying to demand something from me, Damasio?”

“Not at all, boss. I am only making a plea for the men, and as far as I’m concerned, there is no hurry.”

“It’s good that you are trying to take care of your men; but get what you need from someone else. I have already given you plenty. Be satisfied with what I gave you. And understand that that’s not just a recommendation. Why haven’t you thought about looting Contla? Why do you think you have joined a revolution? If you are going to ask for charity, you’re behind times. It would be better for you and your wife to go take care of the chickens. Go ahead and loot some town! If you are risking your neck, why in the devil don’t you make others do their share? Contla is full of rich people. So take a bit from them. Or maybe they think you’re their nursemaid and you’re supposed to take care of their interests? No, Damasio. Make them see you’re not playing games. Give it a try, and you’ll see how you get all the money you need.”

“Thanks, Boss. I always get something helpful from you.”

“Then may it help you.”

Pedro Paramo watched, as the men were leaving. He felt the horses trotting through the darkness in front of him. The sweat, the dust, and the trembling ground. When he saw fireflies with their lights sparkling again, he realized all of the men were gone. He was left alone, like a strong trunk that was beginning to break apart inside.

He thought about Susana San Juan. And then he thought about the girl he had slept with a short time ago. That small body, aroused and trembling, that seemed like it was going to send its heart out through its mouth. “A tiny handful of flesh,” he called her. And he had embraced her, trying to imagine she was Susana San Juan. “A woman who was not of this world.”

At the start of dawn, the day was slowly turning around. You could almost hear the earth’s rusty hinges squeaking; the vibration of this old earth that turns over its darkness.

“Is it right that the night is full of sins, Justina?”

“Yes, Susana.

“And is that really true?”

“It must be, Susana.”

“Then what could this life be, Justina, except one big sin? Don’t you hear? Don’t you hear how the ground is creaking?”

“No, Susana, I can’t hear anything. I’m not as lucky as you.”

“You would be amazed then. I’m telling you that you would be amazed to hear what I am hearing.”

Justina continued cleaning the room and putting things in order. She rubbed the floor cloth on the moist floorboards. She wiped the water off the broken flowerpot. She picked up the flowers. She put the glasses in a bucket full of water.

“How many birds have you killed during your life, Justina?”

“Many, Susana.”

“And didn’t that make you feel sad?”

“Yes it did, Susana.”

“Then what are you expecting when you die?”

“Death, Susana.”

“If it’s nothing more than that, it will come. Don’t worry.”

Susana San Juan was lying on the pillows. Her restless eyes were shifting in different directions. Her hands were over her abdomen, stuck to her abdomen like a protective shield.

There were delicate buzzing noises that floated over her head like wings. Also the noise of the pulleys in the waterwheel. And the noises people make when they wake up.

“Do you believe in hell, Justina?”

“Yes, Susana. And also in heaven.”

“I only believe in hell,” she said and then closed her eyes.

By the time Justina left the room Susana San Juan had fallen asleep again, and outside the sun was shining. Justina met Pedro Paramo on the road.

“How is the lady?”

“Not good,” she told him, bowing her head.

“Is she complaining?”

“No, sir, she doesn’t complain about anything; but they say the dead can no longer complain. The lady is lost to us.”

“Didn’t Father Renteria come to see her?”

“Last night he came and gave her confession. Today she should have received communion, but she must not be in a state of grace because Father Renteria didn’t come to give communion. He said he would do that early this morning, but as you see the sun is out and he hasn’t come. That must be because she is not in a state of grace.”

“In grace with whom?”

“With God, sir.”

“Don’t be a fool, Justina.”

“As you say, sir.”

Pedro Paramo opened the door and went to stand next to her, letting the sunlight spread over Susana San Juan. He saw her eyes were tightened like someone who feels pain inside; her moist lips were partly open, and the sheets were pushed down by her unconscious hands, revealing the nakedness of her body that was twisting and turning with convulsions.

He walked over to the bed and covered her naked body that continued writhing like a worm in spasms, becoming more and more agitated. He bent over her and said, “Susana!” And he said again, “Susana!”

The door opened and Father Renteria quietly entered, then saying: “I have come to give you communion, my child.”

He waited until Pedro Paramo lifted her up so that she was leaning against the back of the bed. Still half asleep, Susana San Juan stuck out her tongue and then swallowed the host. After that she said: “We have had some very happy times together, Florencio.” And then she sank down and buried herself in the sheets again.

“Do you see that window, Dona Fausta, there in Media Luna where the light is always on?”

“No, Angeles, I don’t see any window.”

“That’s because it’s dark right now. Could something bad have happened in Media Luna? For more than three years that window has been lighted, night after night. Those who have been there say that it’s the room inhabited by the wife of Pedro Paramo, a poor, crazy woman who is frightened by darkness. And just look; now the light is turned off. Isn’t that a bad sign?”

“Maybe she died. She was very sick. They say that she no longer recognizes people, and she talks to herself. Pedro Paramo certainly got what he deserved when he married that woman.”

“Too bad for Don Pedro.”

“No, Fausta. He deserves that, and a lot more.”

“See, the window is still dark.”

“Stop worrying about that window, and let’s go and get some sleep. It is very late for a couple of old women like us to go wandering alone through the streets.”

And the two women, who had come out of the church very close to eleven o’clock that night, began to disappear under the arches, watching how the shadow of a man was passing through the plaza in the direction of Media Luna.

“Look, Dona Fausta, don’t you think that man walking over there is doctor Valencia?”

“It could be, though I’m so weak-sighted I probably wouldn’t recognize him.”

“You must remember that he always wears white pants, and a black jacket. I bet something bad has happened in Media Luna. Look how fast he’s walking, as if something were making him hurry.”

“I hope it’s not true that something serious has happened. I feel like going back and telling Father Renteria to go there and see what’s happening. It would be a shame if that woman died without a confession.”

“Don’t think that, Angeles. God wouldn’t want that. After all she has suffered in this life, no one would want her to pass away without the last rights and then continue suffering in the next life. Although the spiritualists say that a confession doesn’t benefit someone who is mad and, even when their soul is impure they are innocent. God only knows... Look, now the light is on. I pray to God that everything turns out to be all right. Imagine what would happen to all the work we have done to restore the church and make it ready for the Nativity if someone were to die in that house. With the power Pedro Paramo has, that would ruin all that we have done in no time at all.”

“You’re always expecting the worst is going to happen, Fausta. It’s better to do what I always do: entrust it to the Divine Providence. Recite an Ave Maria to the Virgin and I am sure nothing bad will come of it. Then after that, God’s will be done because, when all’s said and done, she must not have been very happy in this life.”

“Believe me, Angeles, you always restore my spirits. I am going to sleep and let my dreams have these thoughts. They say the thoughts of your dreams go directly to heaven. I hope that mine will be able to travel that high. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“See you tomorrow, Fausta.”

Then the two women both walked to the front door of their houses, and went inside. After that the silence of the night descended over the town.

“I have my mouth filled with dirt.”

“Yes, Father.”

“Don’t say ‘Yes, Father.’ Repeat after me what I am saying to you.”

“What are you going to say to me? Are you going to have me confess again? Why do we have to do that again?”

“This is not going to be another confession, Susana. I only came to talk with you, and prepare you to die.”

“Now I’m going to die?”

“Yes, child.”

“Then why don’t you leave me in peace? I feel like sleeping. They must have told you to come keep me awake. That you should stay here with me until I’m not sleepy. How would I be able to get enough sleep then? No, Father. Why don’t you go away and leave me alone?”

“I will leave you in peace, Susana. As long as you keep on repeating the words I say to you, you will soon start feeling sleepy. You will feel as if you are falling asleep. And once you are sleeping, no one will wake you up... You will never wake up again.”

“All right then, I’ll do what you say.” Sitting on the side of the bed, his hands pressing on the shoulders of Susana San Juan with his mouth almost touching her ear, Father Renteria said each of his words softly: “I have my mouth filled with dirt.” He stopped for a moment to see if her lips were moving. He saw them stutter without making any sound.

“I have my mouth filled with you, with your mouth. Your lips pressed hard against mine, as if they were trying to bite me...”

She stopped too, and looked at Father Renteria out of the corner of her eye, as if he she saw him from a distance, behind a misty glass. But then she heard his voice in her ear again:

“He swallowed foamy saliva; he chewed clods of dirt swarming with worms that crawled over my throat and scraped the roof of my mouth... My mouth twists and distorts into a grimace, pierced by teeth that chew and devour it. My nose softens. The gelatin of my eyes melts. My hair burns with a single flame...”

He was surprised at how quiet Susana San Juan was. He would have liked to know what she was thinking and see her heart struggle as it tried to reject the images he was placing inside her. He looked at her eyes and she looked back. It seemed to him like her lips were trying to smile.”

“Something else is missing. The vision of God. The soft light of His infinite heaven. The joy of the cherubs, and the song of seraphs. The happiness of the eyes of God, the last fleeting sight of those condemned to eternal sorrow. The marrow of our bones set on fire, and the veins of our blood in little streams of fire, making us squirm with incredible pain that never ends, always stoked by the ire of God.”

“He sheltered me in his arms. He filled me with love.”

Father Renteria looked at all the those who were waiting for the final moment. Pedro Paramo, with his arms crossed, waited by the door; then doctor Valencia, and next to them some other men. Behind them were some women who should have started saying the prayer for the dead.

He wanted to get up and administer the holy oils to the dying woman, saying: “I am finished.” But no, he couldn’t do that, because she still hadn’t died. He couldn’t give her the sacraments without knowing the measure of her repentance.

He began to have doubts. Maybe she didn’t have anything to repent for. Perhaps there was nothing to forgive her for. He bent over and, shaking her shoulders, he said in a low voice:

“Soon you will be in the presence of God, and the way He punishes sinners is merciless.”

When he leaned down to her ear again, she shook her head saying:

“Go away Father! Don’t torment yourself because of me. I am fine, I just need some sleep.”

There was a sob from one of the women hidden in the shadows. Then, Susana San Juan seemed to recover her strength. She raised up in bed and said: “Justina, please do me the favor of going somewhere else to cry!”

After that she felt her head fall over and bury itself in her stomach. She tried to separate her head from her stomach; to stop it from pressing against her eyes and cutting off her breathing; but each time she tried that she convulsed even more, as if she were sinking into the darkness.

“I saw Dona Susana die.”

“What are you saying, Dorotea?”

“What I just finished telling you.”

At dawn, the people were waiting for the bells to ring. It was a morning in December, a grey morning; not cold, but grey. The ringing started with the largest bell, and then the others followed. Some thought it was the call for morning Mass and began to open their doors; a few others who had been unable to sleep were waiting for the bell to tell them the night had ended. But the pealing lasted much longer than usual. Not only the bells of the First Church were ringing, but also those of Shrine. Midday came and the bells still had not stopped ringing. Then night came. All day and all night, the bells continued pealing, sounding even louder, until it became an endless lamentation of sounds. Men shouted so others could hear what they said: "What on earth has happened?" they asked.

After three days, everyone was deafened. It was impossible to talk, with the uproar that still filled the air. But it didn't stop; it continued until some of the bells were worn out and began to sound hollow, like an empty jug.

"Dona Susana has died."

"Died? Who?"

"The wife."

"Yours?"

"No, Pedro Paramo's."

People began to come from other places, attracted by the constant pealing. From Contla they came as though they were on a pilgrimage. They came from far away, who knows from where. Even a circus came, with kites and flying chairs. And musicians. At first people were curious, but after a while they took it for granted, and there even were serenades. Then little by little, it transformed into a celebration. Comala was swarming with people, with an exuberance of sounds like on a day when there was a crowded party, and it was difficult to pass through town.

The bells finally stopped ringing, but the celebration continued. There didn't seem to be any way to make them understand that it was a mourning, or days of mourning. And there didn't seem to be any way to make them depart; on the contrary, even more kept coming.

Media Luna was left alone, in silence. People walked quietly, and they spoke softly. Susana San Juan was buried, and few people from Comala knew about it. In Comala they were still celebrating. There were cockfights, there was music, there were shouts of drunken people, and lotteries. The light from Comala spread out, forming an aurora in the grey sky. But these were grey days, and sad days, for Media Luna. Pedro Paramo didn't speak. He didn't come out of his room. He swore to take vengeance on Comala.

"I will cross my arms, and Comala will die of hunger."

And that's what he did.

Tilcuate continued to come:

"Now we're followers of Carranza."

"That's good."

"We are working with general Obregon."

"That's good."

"Things are peaceful right now, so we have nothing to do at the moment."

"Keep waiting, and don't disarm your men. That can't last very long."

"Father Renteria has taken up arms. Should we go with him, or against him?"

"Don't do that. Put yourself on the side of the government."

"But we are irregulars. They consider us rebels."

“Then go take a rest.”

“With all the responsibility I have?”

“Do as you like then.”

“I will go and reinforce Father Renteria. I like the way they shout. Besides, that way we will win salvation.”

“Do as you like.”

Pedro Paramo was sitting in an old wicker chair next to the front gate of Media Luna, shortly before the last shadows of night disappeared. He had been there alone for maybe three hours. He had not slept. He had forgotten about sleep, and the time of day: “We old folks don’t sleep much, hardly at all. Sometimes we sleep for a short while, but without ceasing to think. That’s all I can do now.” Then he added, speaking louder: “It won’t be long now; it won’t be long.”

And he continued: “It’s a long time since you left me, Susana. The light was the same then as it is now; not so reddish, but the same weak light without redness, wrapped in a blanket of white mist like it is now. It was the same moment. Here, next to the gate I watched it dawn, then I watched as you went away, following the path to heaven, when the sky was beginning to show its lights that were becoming more and more faded here among the shadows on earth.”

“It was the last time I saw you. You passed by with your body brushing against the branches of the fruit trees along the side of the road, making the leaves flutter. Then you were gone, and I said to you: ‘Come back, Susana!’”

Pedro Paramo’s lips kept moving, whispering words. After a while his mouth closed, and he opened his eyes in which the weak light of dawn was reflected.

Dawn was breaking.

At that same time Dona Ines, the mother of Gamaliel Villalpando, was sweeping the street in front of her son’s shop, when Abundio Martinez walked through the open door. He found that Gamaliel had fallen asleep on the counter, with his hat over his face in order to keep off the flies. He waited a long time for him to wake up. He had to wait until Dona Ines finished the task of sweeping the street, and came to tickle her son’s ribs with the handle of her broom, saying to him: “You’ve got a customer. Wake up!”

Gamaliel straightened up, grumbling, in a bad mood. His eyes were red, after staying up so late the night before, after accompanying his drunken friends and getting drunk himself. Still sitting on the counter, he cursed his mother, he cursed himself, and he made endless curses about life, “a stupid waste of time.” Then he settled down on the counter again and went back to sleep, muttering curses:

“It’s not my fault that there are so many drunks out there late at night.”

“My poor son.”

“Forgive him, Abundio. Last night the poor fellow was trying to set up a deal with some travelling salesmen who had too much to drink. What brings you here so early in the morning?”

She said that, practically shouting, since Abundio was deaf.

“I just wanted a bottle of whisky, which I need very much.”

“Has your Refugio become ill again?”

“She has died, Mother Villa. Just last night, about eleven o’clock. Because of that I sold my burros; I had to do that in order to try and help her.”

“I can’t hear what you’re saying, Abundio. Or is it because you’re not saying anything? What are you saying?”

“That I spent last night watching over her, over Refugio. She stopped breathing last night.”

“So that’s why I smelled death. Mind you, I even told Gamaliel: ‘It smells to me like someone in town has died.’ But he didn’t pay any attention to me; then he went out with those travelling salesmen, and the poor fellow got drunk. And you know that when he is like that he just laughs at things and does not pay attention to anything. So what can you tell me? Have you invited people to the funeral?”

“Not yet, Mother Villa. That’s why I need the whisky, to sooth my pain.”

“Do you want it strong?”

“Yes, Mother Villa, so I can get drunk sooner. And please give me it right away, because I’m in a hurry.”

“I will give you two deciliters for the price of one, since it is you. And while you’re at it, tell her that I always appreciated her, and ask her to think about me when she gets to heaven.”

“Yes, Mother Villa.”

“Tell her before her body gets cold.”

“Yes, I’ll tell her. And she is also counting on you to pray for her. And she would want me to tell you that she died feeling very sad, because there was no one to help her.”

“Didn’t you go to see Father Renteria?”

“Yes, I went; but they told me that he was out somewhere in the hills.”

“What hills?”

“Out there in some godforsaken place. You know, where they started a revolution.”

“So he joined them? Oh, poor us, Abundio.”

“But what does it matter to us, Mother Villa. It doesn’t have anything to do with us. You can give me the other bottle now. Here no one will know about it and, as you can see, Gamaliel has fallen asleep again.”

“But don’t forget to ask Refugio to pray to God for me, because I really need it.”

“Don’t torment yourself. I will tell her just as soon as I get home. And I will ask her to give me her word to do that, in case it is necessary, so that you won’t have any more worries.”

“Yes, you should definitely do that, because you know how women are. You have to ask them to do it right away.”

Abundio Martinez put another twenty cents on the counter.

“Give me the other bottle please, Mother Villa. And if you want to give it to me for nothing, it’s up to you. The only thing I promise you is that I will go and drink this next to my dead wife; next to my Cuca.”

“Go ahead and leave then, before my son wakes up. He’s always in a bad mood when he wakes up after getting drunk. Hurry along, and don’t forget to give my message to your wife.”

He left the shop sneezing. By now it was completely light outside, but since they had told him this way he would get over things more quickly, he took swallow after swallow, brushing air into his mouth with the flap of his shirt. He started to go directly to his house where Refugio was waiting for him; but then he changed direction and began to walk up the street; then he left town and started walking down the road to Media Luna.

“Damiana!” Pedro Paramo shouted. “Go and see what that man who is coming down the road wants.”

Abundio kept on walking, stumbling, bowing his head, and sometimes walking on all fours. He felt like the ground was twisting, turning him around and then letting him go. He ran to catch

up with it and when he caught up with things, he kept on walking until he was in front of a man who was sitting next to a doorway. Then he stopped:

“Give me a little money, so that I can bury my wife,” he said.

Damiana Cisneros was praying: “Free us from the wiles of those who are evil, Lord.” And she pointed her hands at her body, making the sign of the cross.

Abundio Martinez saw the woman praying and crossing herself, and trembled. He wondered if the devil had followed him there, and he turned around, expecting to see some evil creature. But when he didn’t see anything, he said again:

“I have come here for some help so that I can bury my wife.”

The sun was shining behind his back, a weak sun that had just come out, and was distorted by clouds of dust.

Pedro Paramo’s face was hidden beneath his poncho, as if he were hiding from the sunlight, while the shouts of Damiana Cisneros echoed through the fields: “They’re killing Don Pedro!”

Abundio Martinez heard the woman shouting. He didn’t know what to do in order to stop her. He thought that the shouts of that old woman could probably be heard far away. Maybe his wife would even be able to hear those ear-splitting shouts, although he wasn’t able to understand what they were saying. He thought about his wife, stretched out on the cot all by herself, there in the patio of his house where he put her so that her body wouldn’t cool so quickly. His dear Cuca, who had been sleeping with him yesterday, still quite alive, and was frisking about like a colt, biting him and rubbing his nose with her nose. The woman who had given him that child who had died soon after he was born, according to what they said because she was weakened by all the illnesses she had suffered. Even though he sold all of his burros in order to bring a doctor there to treat her, it had all been for nothing... His Cuca, who was now there under the night dew with her eyes closed, without being able to see the arrival of dawn, or the sunlight.

“Help me!” he said. “Give me something.”

But he couldn’t even hear himself. The shouts of that woman were so loud that they blocked out everything.

On the road from Comala some little black dots were moving. In a moment those dots were converted into men who soon were there in front of him. Damiana Cisneros stopped shouting. Now she had fallen, with her mouth open, as if she was yawning.

The men who had come picked her up from the ground, and carried her into the house.

“Are you all right, sir?” they asked.

The face of Pedro Paramo appeared, but all he did was move his head.

They disarmed Abundio, who still had a knife covered with blood in his hand:

“Come with us,” they told him. “A fine mess you have gotten yourself into.”

And he went with them.

Before they got to the town he asked them permission. He moved to the side and he vomited something yellow that looked like bile. One stream after another, as if he had swallowed ten liters of water. Then his head started burning, and he felt his tongue stammering:

“I am drunk,” he said.

He went back to where they were waiting for him. He leaned on their shoulders, and they took hold of him, dragging him along so that the tip of his toes made a furrow in the ground.

Back there, seated in his wicker chair, Pedro Paramo watched the group of men who were traveling back to town. When he tried to raise his left hand, it felt as if it had fallen dead on top

of his knees, but he paid no attention to it. He was used to having parts of his body die. He saw how the heavens were shaking, making the leaves fall: "Everyone chooses the same path. Everyone leaves us." After that he went back to the the place where he had left his thoughts.

"Susana," he said, and then he closed his eyes. "I asked you to come back..."

"...There was a full moon in the middle of the sky. My eyes longed for you when they saw you. The rays of the moon were spreading over your face. I never tired of looking at you. Beautiful, cleansed by the moon, your puffed lips moist and sprinkled with stars; your body translucent in the water of the night. Susana... Susana San Juan."

He tried to raise his hand to clear the image, but his legs held on to it as if it were stone. He tried to lift his other hand but slowly began to fall sideways, until he was resting on the ground, like a crutch supporting his weak shoulder.

"This is my death," he said.

The sunlight was falling over things, bringing back their form. In front of him the empty land was in ruins. The heat warmed his body. His eyes scarcely moved; they were jumping from one memory to another, blurring the present. Then his heart stopped, and it seemed as if time and the breath of life had also stopped.

"Just as long as it's not a new night," he thought.

Because he was afraid of nights that were full of ghosts. They frightened him.

"I know that soon Abundio will come with his bloody hands to ask me for the help I denied him. And my hands will not be able to cover my eyes so I don't see him. I will have to listen to him until his voice ends with the day, until his voice dies."

He felt that some hands had grasped his shoulders and were lifting him up, helping him.

"It's me, Don Pedro," said Damiana. "Do you want me to bring you your lunch?"

Pedro Paramo answered:

"I'm going there. I'm ready."

He leaned on the arms of Damiana Cisneros and made an effort to walk. After a few steps he collapsed, pleading inside, but without saying a single word. He hit the ground and crumbled, as if he were nothing more than a pile of stones.

The End