

MR.



DE SÁNDARA

This book aims at introducing to the reader the most noteworthy cognitions about the temperamental and psychological world in which the human being finds himself as well as at guiding him through the luminous path of conscious creation where he can find happiness. It also has the objective of breaking the repetitive tone of the language that characterizes modern thoughts regarding the realistic crudeness which have caused such a great decrease in the moral level of society.

Mr. de Sandara is a novel of a new genre, psychodynamic, which as it exalts the beauty and the fecundity of the thinking and the feeling in men and women, it discards everything that perverts and distorts them.

It alerts against the excessive vulgarity which the modern novelists use while depicting the most shameful aspects of human passion.

The content of its pages makes Mr. de Sandara an edifying novel that opens a series of new possibilities to the reader. It comforts and instructs spiritually because each instructive teaching, each transcendent cognition for one's life or an orientation deserving to be considered in conducting one's attitudes arise from each episode and from each action of its plot.

Everything in this novel obeys a central thought, whose objective is to reveal to the understanding of those that read it carefully ignored mysteries of human nature in its two aspects: the physical and the spiritual. The reader can appreciate the exact difference between two worlds, which are also two ways of life and two cultures. Its genuine characters allow the reader to grasp clearly the process of reversion that a couple trails until they reach the conscious reunion with their own spirit.

MISTER DE SÁNDARA

(A PSYCHODYNAMIC NOVEL)

BY THE AUTHOR:

An Introduction to Logosophical Cognition, 494 pages, 1951. [1 | 2 | 3]

Logosophical Exegesis, 110 pages, 1956. [1 | 2 | 3 | 4]

The Mechanism of Conscious Life, 125 p pages, 1956. [1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5]

Self-Inheritance, 32 pages, 1957. [1 | 2 | 3 | 4]

Logosophy, Science and Method, 150 pages, 1957. [1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 7]

Deficiencies and Propensities of the Human Being, 213 pages, 1962. [1 | 2 | 3 | 4]

Initiation Course into Logosophy, 102 pages, 1963. [1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5]

Bases for Your Conduct, 55 pages, 1965. [1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 9]

The Spirit, 196 pages, 1968. [1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 6]

Mister De Sándara, 509 pages, 1959. [1 | 2 | 3]

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MISTER DE SÁNDARA
(A PSYCHODYNAMIC NOVEL)

ORIGINAL TITLE: El Señor De Sándara

COVER: Márcia Signorini

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Kong Rex

Dados Internacionais de Catalogação na Publicação (CIP)
(Câmara Brasileira do Livro, SP, Brasil)

González Pecotche, Carlos Bernardo, 1901-1963.
Mister de Sandara : (a psychodynamic novel) /
Carlos Bernardo González Pecotche (Raumsol) ;
[translated from Spanish Gaston Levy]. --
1. ed. -- São Paulo : Logosófica, 2011.

Título original: El señor de Sándara.
ISBN 978-85-7097-077-0

1. Logosofia I. Título.

11-09389

CDD-149.9

Índice para catálogo sistemático:
1. Logosofia : Doutrinas filosóficas 149.9

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www.editoralogosofica.com.br | www.logosophy.info
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PREFACE

A few introductory remarks will facilitate one's reflections upon reading this novel and will call attention, in addition to the extraordinary and preponderant role that thoughts have in daily life, to the excellencies of the human feelings which, when based on real experiences, neutralize the unfair and untimely reactions of one's personality.

This is a psychodynamic novel. We have named it so because it is based on a conception that moves, with unusual vigor, the thoughts and deeds that mold human behavior in its multiple aspects. Its action is tenacious and consistent with the idea of forging the image of what man is capable of achieving and becoming, once he is enlightened by knowledge.

From the first to its last pages, there is a firm purpose of giving the reader – through the numerous and variable transitions experienced in the main character's mental and psychological changes – the certainty that "Mister de Sándara" can become his most trusted counselor. Consult it always, and after each reading it will provide you with new teachings, as the force of its expression goes far beyond its words.

May this novel be timely to those who yearn to reach a lucid and conscious awakening in this world so obscured by human deceit.

MISTER DE SÁNDARA

Once again, the first signs of summer appeared in the Palaeozoical mountains of Tandil. In that area, Don Tulio Larrecochea owned a very modern rural property whose beauty was greatly enhanced during the peak season. The place had become a favorite gathering point for numerous groups of relatives and friends who regularly met there. Only due to exceptional circumstances would some fail to spend their merry and restful vacations over there.

The magnificent house, built in Basque style and situated above a beautiful park, could easily accommodate all its guests, all of whom were eager to enjoy a pleasant stay.

Dona Fermina, Tulio's wife, had practically devoted herself to her social life. Accustomed to a life of luxury, her fifty-five years of age had not yet managed to dampen the energy of her past youth. Heavily built and with a large bosom, her arrogant attitude and decisive modality expressed an energetic and authoritarian character. She dominated with ease the household and did not need more than a nod to be understood by her servants. Her skill in this area was so efficient that the servants, excelling in their duties, fulfilled their functions perfectly and attentively attended their guests.

Nora, the youngest of their three children, filled, so to speak, the ambitious heart of her mother since her siblings, Florencio

and Cecilia, were already married and in fact belonged to another era. Nora was slim, had brown eyes and a gracious nose with the tip turned-up as in a sign of vanity. The girl's abundant hair, of deep saffron color, crowned her pretty little face that still held an adolescent look. She was capricious and spoiled and any average psychologist could have surely diagnosed how the tenacious influence of these two characteristics had strongly adhered to her temperament.

12 The guests' favorite pastimes consisted of horseback riding and tennis. There were also those who preferred a good walk or gatherings that led to amiable discussions gravitating around either the subject of some political issues or around some important business prospect. It all included, no doubt, a bit of social gossip and even bold or reckless references regarding the latest love affair.

After their walks or tennis games, everyone would meet at the pool where some would swim their normal lengths while the expert swimmers would climb up the diving board and dive in elegant somersaults. Older people would spend the rest of the day playing bridge or poker while the younger groups elected to listen to music and dance. All this granted that rural estate the elegance and refinement of urban life.

And so it was that large groups of people would spend a good part of the day running around like squirrels, talking about everything, playing or planning the next excursions, while small and large groups moved in different directions to meet later in a specified spot. The children usually caught birds or snatched eggs from their nests "to be used in school", words they used to justify their deeds.

Don Roque Arribillaga, first cousin to Fermina, was a familiar presence in this circle. An amiable and extremely honest man, he was highly regarded by everyone. He owned a ranch in Balcarce, and had his own business in Buenos Aires importing agricultural equipment. His intensive business activities had visibly affected his health, which several heart attacks caused by a cardiac lesion had already weakened.

A widower for five years, he had one son, Claudio, who was at the time 12 years old.

Claudio had a particularly pleasant nature. His fast growing stature made him look thin and taller than all the other boys. His face, lit up by two large brown and expressive eyes, still kept a childish look. A dark and shiny strand of hair fell obstinately over his forehead on account of his intense outdoor activities. His face was slightly elongated; his skin soft and tanned and a friendly smile seemed to come easy to his lips. Although lacking the audacity and the concerns of other boys his age, Claudio was nevertheless adventurous and active, avidly preferring the outdoors, which he enjoyed during his vacations.

In a way, Claudio was accustomed to a reserved life. He normally had no companions other than his father and his house butler Patricio, and would not trade the summers spent at aunt Fermina's ranch for anything in the world. He called her aunt not because of any blood relationship but to comply with his father's and Fermina's wishes. He had been raised by his father to regard her as a relative, since he had always maintained a sibling relationship with her. The fact that Claudio felt at home on the ranch increased his predilection for the place as he visualized

it from a distance, in his child's imagination, as being a joyful, wonderful and animated paradise. Hence, he never hesitated to choose it when asked where he wished to spend his summers.

Quite often he would ask Nora, whom he called "cousin" for the same reasons, to join him in games and walks with the other children in the ranch. Due more to her temperament than to being his elder, she had a strong influence over Claudio. By taking advantage of her cousin's tendency to being friendly and conciliatory, Nora imposed her authoritarian and despotic attitude when dealing with him.

Those summer days at Don Tulio's ranch were warm and pleasant and offered everyone healthy entertainment.

14 One morning, the sun rose with gleaming sparks. Irritated probably by its interminable vigil, it forced people out of bed as if by magic, leaving them with no other consolation than to tolerate its bad mood early on.

Feeling more than anyone the attraction of the coming warm day, Claudio and Nora met in the dining room where silence still prevailed and celebrated the early rise with a hearty breakfast. Joyful and in good mood, they decided to take a walk towards the stream. As usual, *Sultan*, the beautiful sheepdog accompanied them. He had become the rowdy children's tireless companion in their adventures.

They carefully watched their footsteps as they reached a dense acacia grove, which spread out beyond the large storage buildings used for housing agricultural equipment. Thereafter, due to a sharp slope of the terrain, the bush declined steeply towards a stream from which fresh and sparkling water rushed in its shade.

The youngsters jumped down the slope and stopped at the water's edge where they began collecting small colorful pebbles. This, however, did not last long because Nora, already bored, tossed all the pebbles she had collected in her skirt up in the air and started to nag Claudio with her affected comments. Sitting on a rock, and repeatedly beating the water with a branch, she mentioned for the hundredth time the trip to Europe that she would be taking with her parents. According to her, she was already a young lady and therefore had to make the same "rounds" that her parents had given her sister Cecilia, years ago.

Having been raised amongst older people and treated with excessive tolerance, Nora would constantly put down her simple and naïve cousin imposing her authoritarian temper on him. The golden clouds of indulgence had no doubt promoted her tendency to impose herself onto others.

Claudio heard her without paying any attention, absorbed in the gathering of his pebbles. Suddenly, he stopped and, in an unusual manly tone, said to his cousin:

"Listen, Nora... You know something? When I grow up I will travel the worlds."

Surprised, she burst out laughing and said:

"The worlds? Which worlds?"

"What are you laughing at, you silly girl? Don't you know that there is an Old World and a New World... and a microscopic world... and the world..."

"And the other world!" replied the girl cutting him short. And, pleased with her own response, she warned him in a laughing tone:

"Be careful because you can also end up taking a trip there and if you do, I'm not sure you will return."

Irritated by his cousin's mocking remarks, Claudio hurled his pebbles in the water, stood up and turned his back on her. He did not want to pursue the discussion.

Looking for a new pastime, he began hopping from one algae-covered rock to the next, which lay semi submerged in the stream and, in spite of the risk of slipping, he managed to cross to the other side. He then repeated the motion in reverse. The feat made him quickly forget that he was upset with his cousin. He invited her to compete with him. When they had had enough, they took off their shoes and put their legs in the clear and fresh water of the stream. While they enjoyed these joyful improvisations, Claudio asked Nora:

16 "What happened to the hornless cow? I haven't seen it at the ranch this year."

"It's at Don Pedro's house," she answered quickly adding an idea that had just entered her mind:

"How about going there to see it?"

"¡Ujuuu!" exclaimed Claudio, imitating an Indian cry. "Let's go!"

And without any further ado, they left promptly.

Until a year before, Don Pedro, the old and highly regarded Pedro Laguna, had been the foreman of Tulio Larrecochea's ranch. He had decided to leave due to the heavy errands inherent to his job and moved to a house of his located next to the ranch. He lived with his son Bartolomeu, a competent doctor who had recently come to live there with his family on account of his young daughter's frail health.

Don Pedro had a vast experience in rural living, was well educated and smart. Strong as a horse, kind and scrupulously

honest, he was able to conquer the respect and esteem of all those who came into contact with him. His passion for country life made him choose this kind of work and he had never regretted it.

When both children arrived that morning at the old foreman's property, they found him busily pruning the bushes. As soon as he saw them, he stopped his chore and asked them in a gently reprimanding tone why Nora had not visited him sooner.

"You are right, Don Pedro," said the young girl as she tried to find suitable excuses, "but we were so busy back at the ranch that I forgot."

"No, no!" protested the old man pretending to be serious. "The fact is that I do not deserve your consideration anymore."

"Please, Don Pedro, don't say that! We always remember you. It was only a short time ago that my father expressed his wish to invite you for a barbecue soon."

"You must come, Don Pedro," said Claudio spontaneously.

"And when you do," added Nora in a flattering way, "don't forget your guitar. You know how much father enjoys your melodies and local songs."

"Well! I am too old for that, my little Nora! But if Don Tulio invites me, I will have no other alternative than to accept."

Sultan kept jumping up at Don Pedro who reciprocated the dog's expressions of joy. During his last years at the ranch *Sultan* had been his favorite dog.

"I cannot forget this one," he said with satisfaction. "I see him around quite often."

Disturbed by the presence of the newcomers, a band of rowdy geese, returning from their morning stroll, was heading

in their direction in single formation. True to their nature, they swayed their heavy bodies in a haughty posture as they went by the visitors. With their wings pressed to their bodies, they seemed to imitate those boys who whistle as they walk with their hands in their pockets.

In a sudden leap towards them, Nora shooed the geese away and enjoyed seeing them hastily scatter, their wings stretched out ready to take flight. They began to swirl in peculiar semi-circles on the tip of their feet, as if performing waltz steps.

Attracted by the children's laughter and unaccustomed to the unusual disarray of the geese, Griselda, Don Pedro's charming granddaughter, came out of the house, and upon seeing them, ran over in their direction.

18 Nora was greatly surprised, not expecting to see such a lovely girl.

There was no doubt that Griselda was beautiful. Her delicate nature coupled with her sweet and candid expression enhanced her beauty even more making her look extremely pleasant.

She was not yet ten years old. Her silky blond hair fell in gentle locks forming a golden rim around her face before flowing down on her shoulders. Her light brown eyes with very long eyelashes and her beautifully designed lips revealed her amiable and kind ways.

If Nora was dumbstruck, Claudio, in contrast, was under the spell of a sweet emotion mixed with both attraction and bewilderment. Hence the reason why he did not dare look at her at first.

A small incident pulled him out of his trance. *Sultan* was pursuing a cat that was perched on top of a peach tree. With its

tail in the air and its back puffed up, the cat hissed at the dog, defending itself with its claws.

The children's laughter, while encouraging every assault made by the sheepdog that already seemed to feel his opponent between his teeth, created a cordial atmosphere that was even more enhanced by Don Pedro's invitation to visit the breeding place where he raised his cherished rabbits within the strictest norms of feeding and hygiene.

Don Pedro had brought a basket filled with vegetables for the children to have fun watching the rabbits eat.

"You will see how beautiful the young rabbits are!" he told them. "We had plenty of them this year."

"I really like small rabbits, Don Pedro!" said Claudio. "What a great idea it was to come and see them! We don't have them at my uncle's ranch or at my father's place."

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In a gesture of vanity, Claudio threw back a strand of hair and offered to carry the basket.

The basket was rather heavy for him. Nevertheless, he managed to carry it proudly until Don Pedro, noticing that the boy had sufficiently defended his masculinity, took it from him.

In the den, the children admired the beautiful rabbits kept in cages, most of which had newly born offspring, neatly separated by breed behind a wire fence. The youngest ones were very pretty, rambling around the fresh vegetables that were thrown at them.

Seeing that Claudio was pleased, Griselda approached the young rabbits and choosing the best of them, offered it to him in a gesture of innocent glee.

"Do you like this one? Here, hold it."

With smiling eyes, Claudio first looked at the baby rabbit and then at the girl as he extended his hands to hold the trembling and rebellious mound of white soft fur.

"How beautiful it is! How very beautiful!" he repeated as he caressed it.

"Would you like to have it? My grandfather would be pleased. You could raise it as a pet and give it a beautiful name as well."

"I would like that, but what a pity, I don't have a place to keep it in."

Griselda's generous attitude irritated Nora who witnessed the scene. Unable to hold her composure, she snatched the animal from Claudio's hands and with a rough gesture dropped it back in the cage.

"What did you do that for?" protested the boy, upset and surprised.

Pushed by some inner concern and without hesitation, Nora turned to Griselda and sternly reprimanded her, saying:

"What's the idea of touching these dirty animals?"

"The rabbits, dirty?" replied Griselda undisturbed. "Mother always carries them and lets me caress them."

Nora's sarcastic smile cut her off. Silent and deeply embarrassed, Griselda examined her hands and glimpsed at her white cotton apron. She was glad when she saw that everything was in order, all the more so because the inspection had been made under a stern and demanding glare.

Don Pedro regarded the incident as a simple children's quarrel and tried to mitigate its effect by proposing a visit to the barn for them to see the cows and get some fresh milk.

“Great!” exclaimed Nora applauding the idea. “We particularly wanted to see the hornless cow.”

“This is going to be difficult, little Nora. That smart cow usually goes far away to get the best pasture for her calf.”

“Is it still as tame as before, Don Pedro?” asked Claudio, still under the effect of the incident that had just occurred.

He had no time to hear the reply as Nora grabbed him by the hand and forced him to run after her using the silly excuse of wanting to arrive at the barn before everyone else.

It was not easy for Claudio to free himself from the hands of his incorrigible cousin, but when he did, he sternly reprimanded her. This earned him a series of accusations and several demeaning looks while they waited for Don Pedro who, accompanied by his granddaughter, was slowly approaching.

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A peasant from the stable came forward to milk the cow. Don Pedro had previously sent word to his daughter-in-law to make preparations for the children and when they arrived at the barn a servant had brought all that was necessary including delicious pastries.

“This milk is so good!” said Nora emptying her glass with the intent of getting another one.

Claudio drank his with less enthusiasm and, seeing that Griselda was not drinking, he asked her:

“You don’t drink milk?”

“No...” she said with a smile. “I had a late breakfast.”

Seeing his daughter-in-law coming down the tree-lined path that extended beyond his house, Don Pedro told his granddaughter affectionately:

“There comes your mother, my child.”

Needing her mother’s company now more than ever, the girl could not wait and ran to meet her.

Don Pedro sat on the sturdy roots of an old tree that embellished the area during the warm summer days watching mother and daughter approach. He was followed by Claudio who did the same in displaying satisfaction and solidarity.

Nora began showing signs of impatience and wanted to leave.

“Why are you sitting down?” she asked Claudio curtly. “It’s already time to go back.”

“But Nora, the ranch is not far from here!” said Don Pedro. “Moreover, if you are tired or want to get there early you could take our horses.”

“That won’t be necessary, Don Pedro. I am concerned about mother who may be restless. Contrary to our habit, we left on our own today and meant to return soon after.”

The conversation stopped as soon as Griselda and her mother arrived.

Don Pedro’s daughter-in law, usually affectionate, thanked the children for their visit with a warm embrace.

“I am sure you made Griselda very happy because she is always so lonely” she said among other comments.

Dona Laura Estevez Ursain, Griselda’s mother, came from an honorable family. She married quite young and now seemed to be less than thirty years old. She was kind and attractive and, in addition to her respectable education, she possessed a high degree of self-confidence. Griselda

resembled her having inherited little from the Lagunas whose brown and typical characteristics revealed men who were long bonded to the Argentine soil.

Dona Laura's insistence for the children to extend their visit was as ineffective as Don Pedro's. Having decided to leave, Nora stretched out her hand and, with a forced smile, said goodbye as she walked to the door. She was upset. After taking a few steps, she stopped to wait for Claudio who, being more cordial and attentive, prolonged his affectionate departure.

In response to an involuntary impulse and detained by her usual shyness, Griselda accompanied him for only a few steps.

Claudio and Nora left in a hurry but this did not prevent Claudio, a gentleman at heart, from turning several times towards his friends, waving goodbye until they were out of sight.

As the ranch came into view, both children decided to rest at a windmill that served as a water hole for the animals. They sat on top of large roots that stretched out on the ground. The shade provided by the large oak tree with its thick foliage that barely let the light through and the damp earth around it produced a silent and pleasant coolness. On this very hot day, the spot offered the delights of an oasis.

Nevertheless, Nora's bad mood persisted. Suddenly, as if wanting to imitate the way adults talk, she shouted at Claudio in a stern voice:

"I don't understand what attracts you so much to this girl?"

"What is it with you? Are you mad?"

"I, mad?"

"Yes! What kind of question is this? What I see in her? Well, that she is kind..."

And I feel pity for her because she doesn't have any friends."

Moved by a surge of a generous feeling, which was frequent in him, Claudio added:

"Why don't we invite her to come and play with us at the ranch?"

"Invite her to come to the ranch? Invite her? How dare you say such a thing knowing that she is not of our station in life? Mother would resent that if she found out."

"I don't think she will resent it, Nora... Griselda is Don Pedro's granddaughter."

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"So what? And who is Don Pedro? You are stubborn, Claudio, so stubborn! There is enough entertainment for Griselda at her farm. Furthermore, didn't you hear her father say that he takes her downtown for music lessons?" And enhancing her theatrics by waving her hands, she exclaimed:

"Really Claudio, you are terrible!"

Upset at each other and not reconciled, they both continued their walk along the road used by the cars that went from the village to the windmill. *Sultan* followed them closely but his noble head could not understand the changes that had taken place in his masters' minds.

Claudio resented the lack of companionship in his cousin. He nevertheless tried to calm her down by suggesting they make another excursion in the afternoon.

"I won't go," was the definitive answer. "I am not interested at all and won't go with you!"

To Claudio's relief they arrived at the orchard and were joined

by other children who asked them all kinds of questions. Nora avoided making comments and, pretending she had to greet her uncles who were expected that morning at the ranch, hastily went into her house.

Standing tiptoe on her small feet, Griselda remained immobile staring at the children on the ranch until they disappeared behind the trees. Bearing the stiff composure that children take on when they are upset, she went to her mother. Deep in thought, her hands behind her back, she was initially downhearted, but, as if other thoughts were moving in her, she hurried in Dona Laura's direction.

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Hanging on her mother's arm, from which she would at times let go to walk alone, hopping about in small steps to satisfy the unrequited child mobility, Griselda began, on their way home, to narrate on and off some of her impressions of the morning.

Arriving at the house, they both sat in the shade on the veranda, which was sometimes used as an entry hall.

The white walls of Don Pedro's house stood out as if framed by the colorful vegetation that surrounded them. Its old architecture had undergone an extensive remodeling, which had significantly enhanced it, making it more comfortable and appealing. It was only a one-story building surrounded by light green windows with black iron bars. The simplicity and monotony of its symmetrical design was enhanced by the details

of plants and flowers, which Dona Laura arranged with great taste by selecting the most appropriate varieties and locations.

During the summer days, the veranda was the preferred spot, as it was during winter when the leafless trees allowed the sun to shine over the mosaic designs of the marble.

As the same thoughts seemed to revolve insistently in Griselda's mind, she asked her mother:

"Why did she behave this way with me?"

"Who? Little Nora?"

"Yes, Nora."

"My dear girl, you should not take such things so seriously." replied her mother trying to dispel that impression. "All people are not alike, and this girl's attitude simply reflects her manner of being."

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Finding it hard to understand what she heard, Griselda added:

"What a pity, mother! But Claudio is not like that. He is really kind and caring."

"This is so, no doubt." agreed the mother. Yet being aware that it was difficult for the girl to justify the attitude of rejection she had just experienced, she added:

"Do not forget, dear, that all families have relatives and friends with whom they interact. Our neighbors are very wealthy, and naturally live in great luxury. We, on the other hand, cannot live like them."

"Why not?"

"Because there are many things, my dear, that prevent us from living like them and the most important may be the lack of money to be able to compete with them in luxuries, tastes and whims."

The attention given by Griselda to what her mother said turned into perplexity, and she was unable to object.

Dona Laura explained further:

“In order to live like them, my child, one must have luxurious clothes as dictated by fashion and expected by society, so that one becomes presentable according to the occasion.”

Instinctively, Griselda looked at her clothes and, with charming innocence, asked her mother if the clothes she wore during her visits downtown were not pretty enough.

Taking advantage of the girl's comment, her mother responded to the insinuation by explaining that in fact her clothes were beautiful but not adequate for the parties or the demands required by Nora's lifestyle.

After a sigh, which was the way the girl's involuntary language expressed her sorrow, she said:

“Mommy, I would have liked so much to play with them!”

“You should not worry so much about it,” Dona Laura exclaimed in a comforting manner. “Nora is a child and children like you think one way today and another tomorrow. Who can say that they will not return, better disposed to play with you?”

Griselda spent the rest of the day less cheerful than normal. It was nightfall when her father returned from town where he worked as a physician. When told about his daughter's disturbing experience he asked his wife to put her to bed early so that sleep could dissipate this first struggle that had taken place in her tender feelings.

The child fell asleep quickly. Yet, having been extremely moved by the events that night, her spirit offered her a peculiar dream.

Lifted in a lucid flight, Griselda suddenly found herself in her neighbors' luxurious mansion, transformed into Nora. Frightened, she ran through the hallways and sleeping quarters until she stopped at Nora's bedroom, which was quite different from her own. In awe, she contemplated this charming room brightly lit by the sunshine that came through the wide windows. Here and there, the sumptuous furniture was positioned in such symmetrical precision that it seemed to offer its occupants the utmost in grace and comfort. On one side there was a large closet with its door ajar allowing for a seductive glimpse at beautiful dresses and enviable shoes, all in a variety of styles and colors. Even the walls were attractive with their artistic paintings reflecting the tastes and life of an adolescent. There were also beautifully decorated bookshelves filled with books. The whole room was delicately adorned with princely details. Nevertheless, the guiding thought of the dream drew Griselda away from all this and made her search everywhere for Claudio until she saw him sitting on a bench on the veranda. The boy's face showed concern and, judging by his frequent head turning from one side to the other, one would say that he was expecting someone. Having forgotten the metamorphosis she had gone through, the girl approached him, but as soon as he noticed her, he stood up disdainfully and walked slowly down the few steps that led from the veranda to the garden. Distressed by such insult, Griselda turned around and, with a sad look, went to seek a hiding place where she could ease her pain. Everything in this house seemed strange to her. Even though it could not have been more beautiful or more desirable, it seemed that someone

was spying on her from behind the furniture and armchairs, and that their mocking figures, appearing as thick smoke, dissolved when looked upon. Moved by despair and sadness, she began to cry and then woke up. Disturbed by her dream, she stood up and slowly pushed back her graciously ruffled hair , letting out a deep sigh.

“What a relief, Griselda! Fortunately it was only a dream!”

Relieved from her perplexed mood, the girl smiled. She felt like herself again, as she renewed her joy in continuing to be the Griselda she had always been.

One afternoon, after the suffocating heat was over and life on the ranch returned to its normal flow, Nora searched for Claudio but could not find him. Urged by a sudden thought of fear, she left for Don Pedro's house certain to find him there.

She was not wrong. She saw, from a distance, that he was with Don Pedro and Griselda. All three were walking along a cornfield, which was already green and eager to reach its heights.

Nora took a shortcut and, stopping behind a barbed wire fence, frenetically called Claudio, as if some very urgent matter were pressing her. Yielding to an impulse of obedience, Claudio ran towards her expecting an imminent outburst. In his haste, he forgot everything. There was no time for excuses or friendly goodbyes.

Even though Don Pedro was surprised at the boy's hastiness, he overlooked it and, in a warm gesture, typical of countryside

dwellers, he waved his right hand to Nora as a signal for her to come in. She refused and, without even returning a courtesy gesture, she left with Claudio.

She could not bear the thought that he, who had always yielded to her whims, would now refuse it or act on his own when it was convenient for him. And so, very upset, she accused Claudio of a lack of companionship.

"Come on!" he answered. "You always think of the strangest things... I felt like going out and taking a walk, that's all!"

"You are not telling me the truth!"

"Nora!" shouted Claudio, losing his temper. "Am I not free to go anywhere I please?"

30 "Yes... Sure! And this is why the only thing you think about is going to Don Pedro's house."

The boy's explanations, natural and simple, were to no avail. His cousin would not accept them. Finally, he promised her that he would not return to the house and succeeded in calming her down.

Keeping the promise though was becoming harder and harder for Claudio who felt the lack of freedom to move around to be intolerable, especially when he remembered Griselda. He imagined her sad and deprived of the joys of playing with others.

Nevertheless, when the opportunity to be free came up, if only for a few hours, he took advantage of it. One morning, after giving a silly excuse, he refused to go on an excursion to the hills with the adults and the children. Determined to liberate himself, he mounted his horse and was soon close to Don Pedro's house.

Sultan ran ahead of him, and from the animal's joy expressed by heading directly to a fixed point jumping and

waving his tail, Claudio knew that the dog had spotted his friends. Heading in the same direction, he soon saw Griselda accompanying her mother who was tending the flowerbed. The boy was greeted with such a warm welcome that his shyness disappeared as if by magic. He quickly dismounted and tied the horse to a post. Griselda, who was caressing *Sultan* enthusiastically, pleaded with Claudio to make the animal show off some of his tricks.

In shorts and riding boots, Claudio seemed taller and stronger. The girl noticed that and immediately said:

“You seemed smaller the last time you came here.”

“I think you are mistaken, Griselda,” he replied. Yet, reconsidering, he added :

“Maybe you are right. My father says that everything I eat makes me grow.”

“How strange! Father also says that I’m growing like a weed..”

As they were laughing at each other’s innocent jokes, Don Pedro arrived holding a horse by its reigns.

“Are you riding out?” asked Claudio approaching him.

“Yes, my friend. I have some work to do in the field.”

“Do you want me to go with you?”

“Why not? Come!”

Glad to have him, Don Pedro immediately started to harness his horse.

With his baggy trousers, worn out riding boots and loose shirt, Don Pedro Laguna was the living image of the epic and mythical *gaucho*, an icon of the whole land, sprinkled with traditions and legends.

“What of your cousin?” Mrs. Laguna asked Claudio as she rejoined the group after a short absence.

“She left for an early horse ride.”

“How strange that you didn’t join her!”

“I chose to ride alone, ma’am,” replied the boy blushing slightly.

Don Pedro was ready to mount. Suddenly, he turned his silver head, semi-concealed under his hat and, looking at his granddaughter, he asked her with a smile and savoring the surprise:

“My little princess, don’t you want to join us?”

“Sure I want to go, grandfather!” the girl replied happily. “May I go, mother?”

“Let her come, ma’am,” begged Claudio, enthused by the perspective.

“Don’t deprive her of this trip, my dear!” Interceded Don Pedro. “We won’t be long.”

“How could I refuse?” said Dona Laura smiling like everyone else.

“From the looks of it,” protested Don Pedro as if complaining, “I will have to spend the morning saddling horses!”

His complaint faded away as he got busy saddling another horse that had just been brought in by a peasant – a beautiful dark pony he had given his granddaughter as a present when she had arrived at the house. Claudio assisted him in his task.

In order to exit the compound, Don Pedro took the side gate that led to a path bordering the area. Barely containing the enthusiasm that was about to explode in their chests, the two children joined him. They rode next to Don Pedro who enjoyed listening to them but feigned indifference.

"Do you like the countryside, Griselda?"

"Very much, although I also enjoy Buenos Aires." replied the little girl.

"How long have you lived here in Tandil?"

"Only a short while. Just since the fall. We came because grandfather was very lonely and also because I needed to recover. That's what mother and father say."

"And what about you?"

"I don't quite understand these things."

"The same happens to me. Father always worried about me. You wouldn't believe the number of times he took me to the doctor for no reason at all."

Claudio suddenly added on a sad tone:

"It's a pity summer does not last all year long!" And, turning to Don Pedro, he said: "I could live in the countryside forever."

Don Pedro laughed showing two strong set of teeth and quickly went into his usual refrain:

"Life in the countryside, my friend, does have its difficulties... and you must be aware of this! Obviously, there is nothing more beautiful than to become attached to the piece of land we cultivate. Everything here is peace, joy and tranquility and, while we enjoy a hundred percent of the sun, city dwellers barely glimpse at it. And while the air we breathe here fills our lungs, there one has to compete for it in parks and gardens although it is mixed with the smoke emanating from the heavy trucks in traffic which is harmful to one's health. People over there live so crammed that they don't even have room for a barbecue."

"You are absolutely right, Don Pedro," agreed Claudio in a serious tone. "This is why I don't want to go back to the city after living in the countryside."

They were now coming close to a hill where the path met a large road. Don Tulio's ex-foreman then pointed with his whip to an approaching cloud of dust that was heading their way and said:

"Here come the people from the ranch."

Claudio turned pale. His first impulse was to ride away and disappear, but as he contained this thought in time, he proposed to Don Pedro in an anguished voice:

"How about crossing the road before they arrive?"

34 "No, my friend! We shouldn't do that! We'll stay here until they pass by. Then, we will proceed. Why do you want to cross now?"

"No reason, Don Pedro..."

"Are you ashamed to be seen with us?" insisted the old *gaucho* with the intent to nudge and challenge the boy.

"No, Don Pedro. The fact is that I told them I was sick and could not join them."

"Oh, now I understand! You don't want them to discover your subterfuge, right? That's bad! Man must not create situations that make him hide from his fellowman. You should never do that nor ever submit your will to anybody's whims."

The advice seemed to have hit home because he sat up straight on his horse and advanced courageously for a few feet assuming a position of challenge that only Don Pedro, smiling inwardly, had noticed.

Amongst the arriving party were Nora's brothers and other people from the ranch, who greeted Don Pedro warmly with nods or handshakes. He responded amiably to everyone by raising his black hat.

On the opposite side of the group was Nora who pretended not to see them.

When the group was out of sight behind the hill, Don Pedro and his companions rode on.

The ease with which children forget their setbacks relieved Claudio from the small dark cloud that had depressed him and he became as talkative and cheerful as before.

"Are you tired, Griselda?" he asked courteously.

"Me, tired? Imagine that!" She answered as she kicked her horse and galloped away.

35

Don Pedro and Claudio let her savor her daring demonstration, before catching up with her.

They were glad to cross over a pasture where numerous quails and small birds took flight as the horses approached. Responding to Claudio's commands, *Sultan* chased the restless birds in vain.

"Had I brought my rifle I would have shot down a few," complained the boy as he pretended to take aim.

"You could not do that, my friend! It would be a crime to kill them now when they are nesting. Moreover, hunting is prohibited this time of year."

"You are right, Don Pedro, I had forgotten!"

"Therefore you should be happy for not having brought your rifle," added Griselda, with a smile.

The sun had reached its peak, signaling noontime and Claudio finally thought it prudent to leave his friends and ride back.

As soon as he was distant, he let his reigns go and pushed his horse to a gallop, in an effort to arrive as fast as possible at the ranch. *Sultan* followed him closely in spite of his exhaustion.

The following days were filled with tense encounters between Nora and Claudio. Rather than unleashing her usual laments, Nora adopted an indifferent attitude that kept the boy reserved and sad. Finally, the small dictator decided to change her cold attitude for a conciliatory one, which nonetheless did not contribute to improve things because the situation had already affected Claudio's mood and had deprived him of great part of the joy he experienced during his vacation.

36 The day of his departure had finally arrived and Claudio's fervent wish was to say goodbye to his friends. However, he was unable to do so because he could not escape Nora's vigilance. Heavy hearted and blaming himself for his lack of courage, he left Tandil never to return.

As usual it was hard for him to readjust to city life. He missed those happy days in the countryside and now the image of Griselda, enveloped in candid innocence, frequently filled his soul with touches of nostalgia.

The beginning of school pulled him out of this trance. His admission to the National School and his new duties together with his sport activities absorbed him completely. In spite of all this and the time invested in his frequent walks with his father, Claudio found time to spend with Patricio, his faithful butler, who had been hired by his father's household when his mother was still alive, having served them for over five years.

The boy had always considered Patricio as a good friend. In fact, he had adapted well to Claudio's young age and was able to reasonably fulfill the boy's need for affection after his mother's death.

Don Roque excelled in providing the best for his son. Hence, he was well aware of the butler's assistance. He valued it greatly and rewarded the butler with increasing demonstrations of confidence. Of Spanish origin, Patricio had an excellent character with modalities that adjusted very well to the functions of a butler. Additionally, he was well read, and at the age of forty five had already been through numerous difficult times. This had given him a rich background of experiences from which his clear and sound judgment had been able to extract errors and hardships, all of which contributed to making him an ideal man for the duties he undertook. It was understandable, therefore, that the boy sought him frequently during his free time and accepted his help in his studies.

A few years had passed.

As Claudio was growing up and as the Lord of Time with his long and silvery beard pulled the boy away from the clear episodes of childhood, his memories of those vacations slowly faded away. His uncle's long and frequent absences during his trips to Europe and due to other circumstances related to his own health had gradually contributed to make Claudio forget those events altogether.

37

When Claudio's uncle and aunt returned from the Old World, the figure of his cousin had undergone the natural changes imposed by adolescence.

Nora was already sixteen years old. The brown-eyed red headed girl with the snub nose had turned into a lively and

talkative young lady. She was of medium height, had nice curves, was cute but temperamentally anxious and she seemed to be enveloped by a dense halo of frivolity. Her feminine traits had developed prematurely as shown by her daring attempts to flirtation, which concealed the natural enchantments of her tender age. The desire to be admired made her extremely conceited, enhancing the psychological traits that had characterized her since childhood.

This was Claudio's impression once their relationship as cousins was renewed.

38 He too had undergone changes, but he had always kept that same intelligent expression, which was undoubtedly the result of his pleasant attitude. Due to having grown a lot over the past three years and to his concerns over his recent health problems, he looked very skinny. His eyes, still encircled by a light blue shadow, seemed bigger and one could still see in them the innocent nuances of the changes that occurred at his age. The sign of this transition, which etches on the adolescent face the figure of a man, only appeared to be sketchy at best.

His soul, usually affectionate and free, did not seem to have yet experienced the baptism of fire that life is subjected to when it enters the age of poetry. Pandora's Box had remained closed and might never open for him if, instead of tempting himself like Epimeteus, he would activate the eyes of his understanding to discover its secrets from the outside and guard himself against them.

During the frequent contacts she tried to maintain with Claudio, Nora noticed his uncertain state of mind and she attempted to

reinstate her previous authority over him. Nevertheless, the anxieties of the burgeoning masculinity opened within Claudio the path to feelings of a different nature and, although she made his blood boil over with her feminine arguments on several occasions, the boy's affectionate impulses were withheld when the aspirant to Circe tried to convert him into an idolater of her person.

The young boy's heart felt painfully oppressed by his cousin's propositions, which he could only look upon with indifference as if he found her lacking the most precious gifts. There was no doubt that such a behavior, rather than attracting him, strengthened his resistances and rejections and resulted in periodical separations. These became more frequent over the following years as if destiny, in a secret resolve, were trying to impose its fatalistic precept.

39

Claudio was nearing his twenty-fifth birthday when he graduated from Law School. At that time, his father's failing health forced him to momentarily take over a part of the management of his business, obliging him to postpone the decision of starting his own career. Nevertheless, he still had some free time, which he dedicated, by inclination, to cultivate his spiritual sensitivity.

Irresistibly attracted by the unknown, Claudio searched the library shelves for the word of knowledge or for the spark of inspiration that would, as a magic carpet, transport him to other hemispheres, which his intuition depicted as of incomparable

beauty and wonder. This inquietude of his spirit encouraged him to form a group of friends to debate, for lack of other topics, philosophical ideas and literary books written by modern and ancient authors.

Yet, the constant interruptions required to attend to his health made it difficult for him to fully comply with his activities, even though it was obvious that the concern over his health was unduly excessive. In fact, some of these precautions had persisted throughout his adolescent years on account of a serious life threatening weakness that predisposed him to carry such concerns for years. This contributed to his decision to maintain a moderate lifestyle regarding commitments and social interests. He also made it a habit, when his studies allowed it, to spend brief periods of time in some mountain resort. Nevertheless, his external appearance showed no sign of any such weakness. Of sturdy physical constitution, he was in good health and his body movements were brisk and agile. Were it not so, he would not have been able to share with his friends the different kinds of activities that great cities like Buenos Aires had to offer. It must be said, however, that he did not exceed the limits of prudence. He decided that he should not be deprived of worldly pleasures nor should he avoid relating to other types of people that constituted human society so that he could come to know them in their respective functions. This did not exclude those who, due to their inclinations or vices, acted against the norms of relationships and morals within that same society. Someone once told him that a man of the world must strive to know everything and, by following this rule, he tried to adjust his behavior so as not to be lured by any devious intent disguised as good faith and aimed precisely at

deceiving his candidness. This way, he could come to meet men and women of different types. To the former, Claudio was considered to be naïve and to the latter an innocent, prone to fall into the net of their seductions. All this, in addition to the favorable influence of the family environment, had anchored in the brilliant lawyer the objective of living in a different way than that of common people. This indicated that his inner struggle had begun, leading him to accept the need to face up to the small reactions that his determination would produce. At this age, however, all the stimuli of youth seem to undergo a psychological eclipse because the emergence of one's reasoning detains the juvenile thrust and connects the thoughts, words and acts to the inner centers of responsibility. And even though it may seem paradoxical at first, this is precisely the moment when men become prone to various forms of sentimentalism.

41

One night, as he lay on the sofa in his room, Claudio was delighted to postpone dressing up for the party organized by his cousin Cecilia, Nora's elder sister, at her residence. This was the last winter party given by his relatives to a group of friends. Although Claudio tried his best to avoid any circumstance that would bring him close to Nora, he was extremely careful not to spoil his good relations with his family, especially with his uncle and aunt. Bearing this in mind and before his aunt Fermina came to visit them to shower him with her usual complaints, this time, Claudio courteously accepted the invitation.

After his intentional delay, Claudio began to put on the clothes Patricio had prepared for him. Half an hour later, he left his home and joined his relatives, dressed according to the refined norms imposed by etiquette.

The party had already begun when he arrived at his cousin's house. As soon as he stepped in, he was greeted by relatives and friends who celebrated his arrival. In the midst of this hustle and bustle, he found himself facing a group of beautiful and joking faces that smiled as they welcomed him. But, as the first notes of a foxtrot were struck, they disappeared one by one with their partners, leaving him unexpectedly alone with Nora. They seemed both surprised – he more than Nora – and burst out laughing as Claudio cordially invited her to follow the other couples on the dance floor.

Due to their childhood relationship, he was affectionate when he was close to her but only when, as now, past disagreements had faded after long periods of separation.

42 Without any other intent than to express his esteem, Arribillaga addressed Nora using words of refined courtesy, which were not difficult to utter since she was feeling flattered and full of insinuations and seemed to expect them as a result of her artificial ploys.

They danced for a while and, as he did not need to change partners, he pursued the pleasant and entertaining chat that she was encouraging at that moment in a calm and cunning manner, well aware that it would be useful when she would throw her net.

"It seems to me, Nora," he said as they sat down to chat in a corner of the room, "that I am depriving you of the opportunity of dancing with someone else who could be more interesting than I. By the way, may I ask why haven't you gotten married?"

"Well! Simply because I did not meet someone who could convince me to abandon the pleasures provided by my life as a single girl... You know that flirting is one of my favorite hobbies."

"You always take life lightly. You are incorrigible!"

"And aren't you being a little too puritanical?"

"Extremes always exceed the correct measures hence defeating all reasoning. Therefore I'm happy the way I am."

"Here you go getting formal again! Then, according to you, I would find the correct measure by getting married!"

"Not exactly, but yes, it would help if you started being less fickle."

While continuing the dialogue, Claudio kept thinking how distant Nora was from his ideal woman. At the same time, due to the blood ties that bonded them, he was sorry that she misunderstood the concept of life due to the influence of the duplicity of her thoughts. These thoughts, while on one hand seduced her with their fallacies, on the other, deprived her of the prerogatives of enjoying a home where she could one day live happily with her husband and children. "When frivolity and the domineering character," he said to himself mentally, "are not counterbalanced by a few virtues (even when embryonic) that prosper within the warmth of noble feelings, they end up creating all kinds of fear and misfortune in addition to the unhappiness of the one who promoted them." This was his cousin's case. Claudio was analyzing her traits without her having the slightest idea of what was in his mind at that moment.

They talked in the same familiar way, although he now felt more at ease than at other times on account, undoubtedly, of the unusual calm and moderate manner Nora displayed. As the party was coming to an end, she willingly executed her preconceived plan to create a compromising situation for her cousin.

As they stood withdrawn from the commotion, she entangled her cousin in skillful and seductive postures, trying her best to portray him as a suitor. The ploy would then yield the desired effect.

It was evident that Nora had decided to have her way that night. Having advanced her plan that far, all that was left to do was to subtly let the news circulate, as she did, about her recent sentimental attachment to Claudio. Unaware of the trap, her brothers, cousins and friends would take care of the rest by spreading the news, forged in cunningness and imposture.

44 A few days later, as the plan unfolded, several comments began to surface and, making a full circle, reached Claudio who found himself in an embarrassing spot. His responses to the first jokes and congratulations were as if he had been faced with mere insinuations of bad taste. But later, as he realized that something more serious was developing around him, he quickly and firmly denied the story saying that it was the fantasy of some joker. Yet, when he heard that his cousin was confirming and even encouraging such gossip, he did not hesitate to firmly change his course of action. One day, having decided to face that serious issue, he headed for his aunt's house.

"I find it extremely unpleasant," he told Nora "that people take us as a target for their jokes and you do nothing to deny them."

"But, Claudio!" she exclaimed, feigning surprise. "Why is this so extraordinary? Why should we hide it?"

“Hide what?” asked Claudio upset by such cynicism. “Was there ever anything else between us other than mere affection between cousins?”

“Claudio, are you denying that you like me?” complained Nora as if she were hurt.

“I never thought that such a thing could happen between you and me! And certainly not like this.”

He kept silent for a moment. Then, as he became more and more upset by all that, he added firmly:

“I cannot believe that you intended to compromise me in front of my friends because you would only turn my feelings against you. I could never accept to be forced into what was never in my thoughts nor in my heart. Do you understand me?”

As Nora still tried to dominate the situation with her hysterical sniveling, she insinuated in a subtle conjecture:

“Claudio, don’t you understand that, as we were seen together all night long, people could not help but think it was not only because we are cousins? It would be very difficult to convince them otherwise.”

“Then, there is no other way.” concluded Claudio resolutely.

Not another word was uttered from his lips in an effort to appease the situation, which left in his cousin’s eyes a dark gaze of resentment. At that very moment Nora walked away and went to her room. This had been extremely hard for her and she needed a pause to regain her composure. She fell flat on her bed face down. All alone, she now felt Claudio’s indifference gnawing at her vanity with intolerable insistence. She blamed herself for having realized too late that her feelings towards him had gone beyond mere affection. Nevertheless,

only for a fleeting moment did she realize that she and she alone was to blame for everything that had happened. Since she was a child she had tried hard to publicly flaunt his submission to her whims and fickleness, yet, as she grew older, she more than once experienced contradictory reactions towards him. While on the one hand she sought him, led by a sentimental attraction – love, perhaps – on the other, she held back that feeling as her distorted nature urged her to seek a love that could offer her more intense feelings of passion, which Claudio had never awakened in her.

46

She was unable to resolve the conflicts she had created for herself due to her domineering and authoritarian temperament. A frequent inner struggle was settling within her, feeding her anxieties. Believing that she was attracting Claudio, she was in fact pushing him away permanently. Yet, obstinate as she was, she still struggled to keep him subjected to her capricious will. That was her serious mistake; a mistake that had brought about a certain bitterness like the one she had just experienced and for which she refused to accept a solution that would be so painful to her conceit and vanity.

Nora belonged to a category of women who were defined by the volatility of their thoughts and by the spiritual emptiness that does not allow the presence of any of the virtues that endow the feminine soul with attractive enchantments. Blinded by such a disadvantage, she had imagined it would be easy to move her pawns skillfully and checkmate Claudio's weak points – and it was this strategy that had given her the certainty of success. In view of the disastrous failure, she had no other recourse than to surrender once more, without, unfortunately for her, having been capable of extracting any worthwhile teaching from the experience.

In spite of it all, that mischievous thought continued to float around and became the talk of the town within the social circles.

Don Pedro's country house had been abandoned. So many changes and transformations do take place throughout the years! The house with the white walls once decorated by Dona Laura with colorful flowers of different nuances and undertones now displayed sinuous moss-covered cracks. Wild creeping plants intertwined with weeds now replaced the beautiful flower arrangements of the past. Old dried up trees, of stern and enduring aspect whose sturdy and beaten branches seemed to recall extinct times, illustrated the number of years that had passed since the moment their owner, now absent, had planted them in the hope of spending his old age in their silent company. Don Pedro, the kind Don Pedro Laguna who had been the soul of this place, had left this world and that had undoubtedly broken the enchantment which had kept his family bonded to everything he wanted and cared for so affectionately. After his death, his son, Dr. Laguna, moved with his family from the inherited property to Buenos Aires.

There, he re-opened his office. Deeply dedicated to his profession, he became highly regarded and financially well off, which allowed him to later occupy a comfortable apartment in the center of the most elegant residential area in the city. A family man by nature, Dr. Laguna compensated his long absences required by his work and studies by intimately enjoying the affection given by his wife and his daughter Griselda.

Griselda had just celebrated her twenty first birthday. Her gentle and expressive face showed a refined psychological profile, which reflected her preferences, tastes and modalities. With a tendency to concentrate her thought on the intimacy of her soul, many issues concerning life challenged her intelligence. She often delved into those questions as if she could find their answers by just using her own skill. Withdrawn and silent and, with her thought fixed on the indefinite beyond, the tranquility in her eyes seemed often clouded by an inexplicable sadness. What nostalgia palpitated there in the inscrutable regions of her soul that even she was not able to decipher? She loved to read good books, which often made her dream of becoming one of those characters idealized by art and raised beyond human accomplishments.

48 Griselda's predominant interests, honed probably by the education received from her mother, kept her distant from any excesses that could undermine her own determinations regarding the behavior she had set for herself and which she followed without detriment to her youthful endeavors. That was why she was able to reconcile her social commitments and the vibrant rhythm of modern life to her spiritual preferences. Even though Griselda was always eager to attend parties and other social gatherings, she nevertheless declined her friends' invitations when they consisted of wild entertainment or parties attended by inexperienced youngsters who believed that these events would help them break away from prejudices and conventionalisms, unaware that they would be subjecting their lives to a series of extravagances, which would absorb and affect them incurably.

Her mother was part of a large social circle which provided Griselda with most of her friends, among which there were the

three daughters of her aunt Eulogia, Dona Laura's youngest sister, who threw parties or get-togethers. She had a dynamic and cheerful character and that was undoubtedly due to her enthusiastic disposition that often made her home very lively. Rarely did Griselda miss such parties because her aunt would not allow it unless, of course, it was for a very good reason. Sometimes she enjoyed pretending to be indecisive or not in the mood because she relished to see the concern of her aunt who would be alarmed. Yet relying on her ability to energize the girl, she would say: "Come on, darling! Don't be silly! Do you want to end up as a spinster? Young people like yourself need to dance and have fun!"

It was precisely in one of those parties that Griselda heard Nora Larrecochea's name years after having lost contact with her and thrown in the gossip was the name Arribillaga, now an attorney. The news referred to their recent engagement. She deemed the information to be of reliable sources as it had been mentioned by a lady who was very close to both families.

As Griselda listened with personal interest to this news, she felt old memories stirring up in her. She saw flowing in her mind, in fleeting reminiscences and although clouded by time, several events of her childhood in Tandil when Don Roque's son paid his short visits to the sunny ranch. The simple evocation of those facts seemed to bring up the partially faded echo of past sensations very clearly.

That same night, while she was about to fall asleep, the emotional episodes of her childhood reappeared. However, in obstinate repetition, the images seemed determined to project young Nora, frivolous and arrogant, as something incomprehensible

in the context of those images. Finally, the figure of her venerated grandfather filled her heart with tenderness and, once comforted by his memory, she fell into a placid sleep.

On the next day, the entries Griselda made in her intimate diary were more extensive than usual. She then picked up one of her preferred books and delved into its pages, reading avidly.

September had arrived. A symphonic prelude of colors orchestrated the spring singing of the birds, announcing the arrival of the fair season in all the gardens and parks of Buenos Aires.

50 The Laguna family was already on its way to the mountains in Cordoba. The experienced doctor had decided to take a short vacation with his family after a period of intense professional activity. Readily accepting the idea, the family prepared for the trip with great enthusiasm.

As the car made its way down the paths of warm fields, heated by the stimulating breath that accelerates the growth of the first flower buds, its occupants, responding to this renovation of life within themselves, felt their souls vibrate with the perspective of upcoming projects.

Beaten down by the heavy winter frost, the sad and colorless grounds were beginning to show the light green colors that nature renews every year to indicate in its uniform transformation, the designs of eternity. Soon, the grass would once again cover the whole land and the fresh new wheat stalks would wave in the fields.

In the midst of a kaleidoscope of flowers, the roses would bloom in all the towns, those same roses that have always filled man's hearts with wholesome joy and that have always, with the inexpressible and concealed mystery within its petals, spoken to the soul of His marvelous Creation. Upon seeing such an invitation, who then would detain the renewal of intimate goals and the promises made to accomplish what was deemed worthy of being achieved?

Driving by Rosario, doctor Laguna remembered that someone had referred to this city of the province of Santa Fe as a sad city, a city deprived of beauty... Could there be a reason for that? Could it have been condemned to remain kneeling at the foot of the majestic Capital of Buenos Aires on account perhaps of a sin it had perpetrated and was not absolved of?... Would it one day atone for its innocent guilt?

51

It was getting dark when they reached the Southern city, with its old and prestigious University and its majestic palaces, remnants of a long gone patriarchal life that still evoked incense and myrrh in the numerous churches. They decided to spend the night there.

The morning began with bad weather, which gradually cleared up during the trip, ending in a radiant sunshine. Arriving at the city they saw from the high ground the town of La Falda with its scattered reddish roofs, which were still shining from the recent downpour.

They chose to lodge at a hotel in which they had previously stayed and due to its comfortable accommodations and location the choice was unanimous. Situated on a hilltop, they could contemplate from its windows and terraces, the picturesque topography of the environment and the luxurious houses that

urban construction extended further every day. Shaded by dense foliage, the main exit route from the city led to trails and roads towards many other locations.

As was customary in the Cordoba region, spring had arrived quickly and earnestly. One could already see the beautiful dance of the butterflies that looked like colored confetti thrown by the invisible hands of nature. In the rural area, hayfields unfolded over large distances and waved with the breeze, diffusing everywhere that well known fresh aroma of mint blended with pennyroyal. The eternal mystery of chlorophyll was extending its colorful cloak throughout the foliage in a renewed call of spring.

52 Having rested after their trip, the Laguna family went off to enjoy the sights, and breathe, in addition to pure oxygen, the peace and the subtle forces that emanated from free and uncontaminated nature. As tourists, the novelty of visiting new places calmed their desire for renewal, which was felt as a natural need. Every minute is enjoyed as if man unconsciously perceives that the cycles of life are extended when they are lived more intensely.

At the end of the day, satisfied for having put his time to good use, Dr. Laguna went to bed early. His wife and Griselda followed him much later but Dona Laura was the last to go to sleep. Absorbed in a book by Hugo, she allowed her spirit to delight in the majestic spectacle that an author's imagination offers in its chimerical flights.

The couple was abruptly awakened at two thirty in the morning when the phone rang in their room. Dr. Laguna answered the

untimely call and was informed by the night watchman that a doctor was urgently needed at a neighbor's house.

Accustomed to such calls, the doctor quickly got dressed. Accompanied by the watchman, he arrived moments later by car at the patient's house. There, the patient's friend informed him briefly on what had happened.

A quick look at the patient was sufficient for the doctor to diagnose the unequivocal symptoms of a spasm of the larynx. Without delay, the doctor applied the usual treatment that moments later relieved his patient from this unpleasant incident.

The patient – Oh, the apparent whims of chance! – was none other than Claudio Arribillaga. As soon as he recovered, he expressed his deep gratitude to Dr. Laguna, and with a frank and clear voice mentioned how sorry he was to have inconvenienced him.

53

"Don't worry about that, my friend," replied the doctor in a cordial tone, "the important thing is for you to get well; the rest is secondary."

After prescribing a medication and ensuring him that the spasm would not happen again, he left wishing the patient a quick recovery.

On their way back and slightly intrigued by the occurrence, the doctor asked the watchman:

"How did those young boys know I was a doctor, and where to find me?"

"It's really very simple, doctor: when the local doctors cannot be reached, a search is made in the hotels to find out if there is a doctor among its guests and this usually yields good results."

Without being asked, the watchman began narrating, in lengthy verbosity, several cases of emergency calls received at

the hotel and tried, from time to time, to elicit some information concerning the patient.

As he was going up to his apartment, he still heard the echo of this simple and boring talk spoken in a nasal voice obstructed by sinusitis.

His wife was awake when he entered the room, and soon, Griselda's sleepy voice was heard from the adjacent room asking her father if it was a serious case.

"No, nothing of the sort," he answered after briefly explaining the reason for the call, adding: "it's just that at night the pain always seems greater."

The nights, still cold, induced a great number of tourists to gather in the hotel lounge. Young and old could find there a variety of motives for entertainment. Some discussed generalities concerning trips and excursions, mentioning their pleasures and upsets; others referred to politics, movies and to everything that related to this carefree life, including, of course, some derogatory remarks about an absent acquaintance.

Most people enjoyed the music of a grand piano, which played the latest tunes.

That was where Griselda befriended the sisters Liana and Albina Etchegaray who were staying with their mother at the same hotel. Both were more or less Griselda's age. Happy,

attractive and pleasant they always seemed well disposed to accept everything with joy and good mood. This attitude contrasted with Griselda's restraint yet, they were similar in their tastes and inclinations.

One afternoon, as they rode their horses around the surroundings of the city, Griselda noticed both sisters looking with unusual curiosity at a house strategically located on a hilltop and from its well-kept park, as if etched in the turf, a stone staircase descended gently down to the side of the road.

Intrigued by her friends' whisperings, she asked:

"Do you know the owners?"

"Only by sight – one of the two replied.

"A very elegant young man lives there," said the other, aware that the information would trigger great interest.

"Oh! Then there must be a little secret hidden there..."

"Oh, no!" Liana exclaimed, laughing.

There was no more time for further comment because the person in question, appearing on one side of the house waved to them from high above in a very courteous gesture.

Caught by surprise, they responded to the greetings and rode off. Then, a sudden urge to escape made them dig their spurs in the horses, embarrassed that their indiscretion had perhaps been noticed. When they reached a safe distance, they laughed at their reaction, but still felt slightly concerned.

"It seems to me," Griselda told her father, hours later at dinner, as she referred to the small incident of that afternoon, "that this young man could be the one who requested your services a few nights ago. Don't you remember his name?"

"This detail escaped me. The truth is that I am not very good at names. Why do you ask?" he added.

"Mere curiosity, nothing else." she answered, glancing naturally at her father in whom she detected a probing expression.

Looking around the spacious restaurant where a great number of people gathered on weekends, Griselda's attention was attracted by the presence of two people who had just arrived and sat at a table next to hers. She immediately recognized one of them, Jose Gutierrez, who had been introduced to her a few days ago. She didn't know the other one although he attracted her attention. Following the amiable greetings of the first, the second man added a prolonged bow of his head.

56 He was about to sit down with his back to her, but suddenly changing his mind he grabbed another chair and sat facing her. Griselda noticed the change and was embarrassed for a moment. The sensitivity, whose subtle language is articulated in the soul by unequivocal signs that end up being accepted by one's intelligence, seemed to have expressed in her feelings, at that moment, a clear, happy message.

Urged by a nagging curiosity that intrigued her, she asked her father if that young man was the same he had assisted some nights ago. Complying with her request, Laguna took advantage of his short dialogue with the waiter to catch a glimpse of the man she indicated and confirmed that it was, in fact, the same person.

Dona Laura, who was following these movements without missing a beat, observed that the confirmation had pleased her daughter.

The eyes of both youths met several times during dinner. Finally, somewhat confused, Griselda abstained from looking in that direction any longer.

That night, mother and daughter left the restaurant earlier than usual to go to the movies. Pressed for time, they declined coffee, as they still had to go up to their rooms, comb their hair and fetch their coats. One was resplendent in her youth, and the other more advanced in age, yet both irradiated the beauty of two harmonious and successive eras as they passed by the table where the young boys were sitting. An amiable and gracious gesture by Griselda produced a great impact in the one who, throughout dinner, had admired her with interest and enchantment.

Meanwhile, Dr. Laguna had finished savoring his coffee and lit a cigarette. After two or three tasteful puffs, he decided to leave the table.

As though an extended invisible thread was responsible to bind similar episodes, Dr. Laguna had stopped to greet an acquaintance, and the echo of his voice reached the young man who, upon seeing him, immediately recognized his benefactor. He stood up discreetly and reaching the doctor as he was approaching the door, he respectfully barred his passage by stretching out his hand. They talked for a brief moment when finally, due more to speculation than to gratitude, Claudio invited him for an excursion in the high mountains where the doctor had hesitated to go on account of his lack of driving experience. He gently refused alleging his return to the Capital and gave other motives skillfully elaborated. In fact, he considered the invitation rather premature.

The young man accepted his justification without revealing the disappointment that invaded him. Had it not been for Laguna's asking of his name, the episode would have ended right there.

"Oh! I am sorry! My name is Claudio Arribillaga, at your service."

"Arribillaga? I know this name...Tell me, aren't you, by any chance, Don Roque's son?"

"That's right. Do you know him?"

"Of course I know him! Don't you remember Don Laguna who years ago was the foreman of your uncle Larrecochea's ranch in Tandil?"

58 "Sure I remember!" And hitting his head with a fist, Claudio exclaimed: "Then you are Don Pedro's son! How is it possible that I didn't realize it before?"

But as soon as his surprise subsided, another thought came to his mind and made him fluster as he said:

"Then...you were accompanied by Dona Laura and Griselda?"

"Yes, indeed!" The doctor confirmed with a smile.

"Who would have believed that?" Claudio exclaimed in amazement.

They shook hands effusively and for a moment an intimate emotion passed between them.

The past, transformed into present through memory, connected to this moment that was beginning. Many consider such encounters to be governed by chance; yet, to the sensitive and intuitive souls, such circumstances embody a far greater significance engendered by life's profound mysteries.

Perhaps in the very depth of his being, Claudio had maintained inalterable, with that pristine force that had animated his awakening, an affection that in this moment diffused its subtle waves. Sometimes hearts take such ingenious forms to seek each other that when the encounter occurs one's own reason remains perplexed.

Nevertheless, dominated by the idea of the excursion he had suggested, and perceiving the possibility of an acceptance, Claudio said, with a smile:

"Don't you think, doctor, that such a happy encounter deserves to be celebrated?"

"You are right!" he replied, knowing what he was referring to. "Very well, my friend, come tomorrow around ten o'clock and we will discuss the matter, but as it is customary in these cases my approval will depend on what the family decides."

59

Moments later, as he went up the stairs, Dr. Laguna realized something and, although he could not understand it, he could not help associating this to his daughter's curiosity. Shaking his head, he mumbled to himself: "Now I understand."

He opened the door of his apartment and found his wife and daughter ready to leave. Laguna pretended not to notice that, and simulating concern, fell on the sofa that was closest to him.

"I have a difficult problem to solve," he said, putting on a serious face. "A problem that is so serious that it requires an immediate family meeting."

"How serious you look! If we did not know you well..." Dona Laura joked graciously deflating his intent.

The doctor, however, tried to keep both women on edge regarding the issue they had glimpsed at.

"But, father... why so much fuss?" Griselda said.

"Come! Tell us once and for all what this is all about. Can't you see that we are late?"

After beating around the bush, he finally told them the news, which produced enthusiastic expressions of amazement.

Griselda was particularly surprised by the news mainly because she could not reconcile the attitude of the person she had just met at the restaurant with that of a man like Claudio Arribillaga, whom she knew was engaged. Nevertheless, she overlooked this oppressing impression and joined in her parents' discussion, saying she was willing to accept the invitation. The "difficult problem" was therefore
60 solved by unanimous consent, although Griselda still held some intimate restrictions.

When she returned a few hours later, Griselda hastily bid her parents goodnight and went to bed. She wanted to be alone with her thoughts; but it so happened that these tortured her for a long time embittering the hours before she slept. At times she was able to soothe her spirit with their assistance but reality, showing up every now and then, jolted her and made her feel as if she were walking out of one of those beautiful dreams that fade out as soon as the light of dawn dissipates the brightness of the stars.

The next morning, Griselda woke up somewhat late, as a result of her long insomnia, yet she felt serene and motivated by an inexplicable confidence. She quickly went down to the restaurant to join her family who undoubtedly was expecting

her for breakfast. On her slim and slender body, of medium height, she wore a sports outfit consisting of a dark gray cotton skirt and a white sweater that graciously enhanced her bosom. A light blue jacket, matching the color of her earrings lay casually on her shoulders. Her silky wavy hair, of the same light brown color as the hair that had caressed her childish face, barely touched her forehead, being neatly combed and tied in a silky *chignon* at the back, exposing her neck. Griselda's skin was fair; her lips red and well designed and in her eyes shone a spiritual serenity, which at times contrasted with her juvenile expression, giving her a precocious look of seriousness.

"It seems I am a bit late, aren't I?" she asked her parents.

"You are just in time." Dona Laura replied as she called the waiter who approached with a tray covered with appetizing sweets and biscuits.

It was ten thirty in the morning when the Lagunas and Claudio, sitting on a veranda that the sun had turned at that time into a solarium, talked earnestly as they recovered – especially the young ones – from the emotion of the meeting.

Dona Laura, cordial and talkative, as much as the others, had contributed to put everyone at ease, after they had exchanged news about their respective families.

At one point, Dona Laura asked Claudio about Nora and congratulated him on his recent engagement.

"There is no truth at all in this, madam," the young man quickly clarified. "This news started with a practical joke and I'm sorry to see that you heard about it."

"And yet," she added "you were always good friends, so it would not be surprising that now, as grownups, a more intimate bond could have settled between you."

"The truth is, madam, that I have never ceased to consider Nora as a sister. And frankly, I could not entertain any other alternative concerning her."

"Could it be that some setback moves you to say this? Setbacks do pass you know...."

"And what reason would I have to conceal it?"

"Absolutely none. You can be sure."

"You have no idea how glad I am to have clarified this embarrassing issue."

62 Griselda followed closely the course of the discussion and felt her heart little by little quieting down.

"Your staying here is undoubtedly due to the consequences of this fact. Is it not?" Dona Laura insisted in her tenacious investigation.

"Only partially. Health problems also oblige me to seek, from time to time, a better climate like this one. The intensive efforts related to my career are the main cause of my temporary absence from our Capital city."

"Are you ill?"

"No, madam, but I must take certain precautions regarding my health."

"But, I do not see why your health would require so much attention..." objected Dr. Laguna, emphasizing his words as in cases where he had to use the psychological recourse of a convincing thought to dissipate the obstinate disposition of

his patients. "Some time ago, I heard you say pessimistically that you were accepting the idea of living alone. There is nothing worse than that, my friend. You, like all of us, need to build a home."

"This is good advice as long as Nora is not part of it," Claudio replied glad to have made the point.

"I cannot say anything about that," the doctor answered gingerly "although the fact of having known her all your life may be to your advantage."

"This may be if one did not know that a long family relationship does not ensure getting along well" insisted the young man. "Sometimes such excess destroys one's good judgment and mutual consideration."

"You must know why you say this." Dona Laura replied in a kind tone.

Dr. Laguna then remembered a luncheon appointment at a friend's house located far away. So, he interrupted the conversation to organize the excursion proposed by Arribillaga, and they finally decided to go the next day when they would leave for Pampa de Achala.

63

The unexpected has always had the virtue of altering, temporarily or definitely, life's monotonous rhythm. To the eyes of Griselda, Claudio now emerged as a star, which, after the eclipse, returns to its splendid brightness. How could

such an unexpected turn of events fail to stimulate the most sensitive fibers of her soul?

The little god, who had rehearsed his aim during their childhood, judiciously placed them again in front of his extended bow. It was then impossible for Griselda not to weave a thousand conjectures on her imaginary loom.

The hours, during this parenthesis, flew by inconspicuously. Withdrawal causes life to retreat discreetly from the external to fix its attention on what vividly impresses the inner self. Even if life lacks knowledge and experience during this prudent period of nature, one's sensitivity, which is always more lucid than one's understanding, calls love by its name, and one does not embrace it blindly as the instinct embraces passion. Human sensitivity, expressing nobility and sincerity, demands to be corresponded with honesty in its affection. This is why Griselda, while asseverating these clear precepts of morality that the feeling opposes to illusion and hope, felt an indescribable joy, and in this mood started early her long awaited day.

She woke at the first light of dawn that filtered through the windows of her room and, feeling elated, she hastened to open them guided by the thoughts that were throbbing within her, in a desire to have them share the delights of the morning breeze. Like a bird that promises itself to have a field day, the young girl let her thoughts fly about; yet, similarly to birds kept in their cages for a long time, these thoughts returned at once fearing to lose their cherished intimacy. As her soul seemed to have understood, she suddenly withdrew, choosing to reserve the outpour of her feelings for other opportunities that the future might bring.

Nevertheless, without abandoning the reflection she had just made within herself, she yielded to the joy that permeated her, and in agile movements opened her closet and picked out what to wear. Today, she wanted to look beautiful, she wanted to please.

Fascinated by the recollection of Griselda, Claudio spent long hours playing solitaire with the new cards Providence had dealt him. Playing with them as an oracle, he consulted them on the pleasant surprise that destiny had prepared for him and, in spite of feeling that happiness was smiling at him, the anxieties of uncertainty emerged. What hands move the course of life? What secret plans does the goddess of Fortune possess that do not bestow upon the souls the privilege of penetrating into the wonders of its irresistible powers? He had no other choice but to wait for Eon to clarify his doubts.

He too jumped out of bed early and, after his usual exercises, he dressed quickly. As he waited for the time to meet his friends, he relished these moments by surrendering to the charming influence of winged thoughts which his imagination draped with the rosy and celestial veils of enchantment.

The moment had finally arrived and, as Claudio wanted to be ahead of time, he arrived early at the hotel, only to find out, to his surprise, that the Laguna family was already waiting for him to start on their journey.

Driving fast, in no time Claudio covered great distances in a region that took him uphill all the way on an extended mountain terrain, which kept on rising, until he came to a path that winded in sharp curves between peaks and precipices.

Having negotiated the first steep slopes, which Arribillaga encountered in an uninterrupted succession during his

continuous climb, he decided to stop the car for a pause. They were on top of a very high peak. From this vantage point, they contemplated the immense panorama of this mountainous region that stretched as far as the eye could see with its peaks towering far above the misty covered valleys below. Floating clouds enveloped the vertical peaks and the mountainsides as if blending with them. The prevailing silence, broken at times by bold gusts of wind, contributed to the magnificence of this eternally immobile spectacle. The inhospitable roughness of those peaks and precipices merged into an inseparable unity, and by standing on the edge of the abyss one could easily feel the suction of one's own forces that has often made man reflect over the huge power that nature exercises on human life.

The four of them walked together for a while. Attracted by a crack in the ground that she saw from a distance, Dona Laura held tight to her husband's arm as both approached the strange gaping mouth, through which, as they found out, a small refreshing stream ran.

Griselda was going to signal them to follow, but Claudio gently held her back. It was an opportunity to speak to her alone and he would not lose it for anything in the world.

"I cannot overcome my amazement, Griselda. In fact, I cannot believe the happiness I feel in seeing you again."

"I cannot recover from the surprise either. It seems to be impossible that you are the same boy I knew when I was a little girl."

"Have I changed much?"

"I don't know if it is true, but I was told that forgetfulness usually makes people change a lot..."

"No doubt it is so in some cases but not in mine. Internally, I have not changed an iota."

And as if he was overtaken by a sudden suspicion, he asked:

"You're not engaged, are you?"

She smiled and, in a joking tone, held up the back of her hand and quickly covered it. Then, she exposed it with a flirting air and showed it to him the way he wished to see it.

"How can I not believe in apparitions?..." Claudio exclaimed in ecstasy.

"Why?"

"Aren't you the most precious of all apparitions?"

In response to such gallantry, both smiled in rapture when Dona Laura's voice interrupted them as she approached accompanied by her husband.

They kept on walking and, having covered the grounds, they considered it wise to go back. During their descent, they stopped at a shelter to look around. On an improvised grill thrown over a few stones, an appetizing goat was being roasted on a fire by an old mountain dweller whose face bore all the traits of a rough and rustic life. He said the best moment to savor its meat was when the goat was beginning to sizzle. The stimulating aroma of the barbecue triggered the characteristic reflex of the stomach that reminded them it was noon, urging them to hurry back and have lunch in a populated area along the way.

It was already mid-afternoon when they returned from their excursion. Before leaving, Claudio asked Griselda whether he could see her again the next day.

“Perhaps,” she answered, but her tone of voice suggested otherwise.

Albina and Liana who from the terrace, had witnessed the scene with sharp curiosity, ran towards Griselda as she came to the top of the stairs. Having seen her with Claudio Arribillaga was a great event. They assailed her with questions that depicted the vehemence of the thought that intrigued them.

68 With unmatched grace, Griselda avoided the verbal barrage and retired promising to address the issue later. But having met her again that same night, they did not forgive her silence and she was obliged to tell the origin of her friendship with Claudio.

“You were very lucky indeed!” Liana said, perplexed at the amount of details that had contributed to bring them together again.

“That is truly great,” Albina said. I wish I had such luck.”

“You surprise me!... Why do you complain about luck if it does help us when we least expect it? Furthermore, the mere fact of meeting a friend again does not constitute an abnormality.”

“I really cannot say!” objected Liana laughing aloud. “I can detect the aroma of romance. What we have here is a magnificent young man, with name, career and fortune; as to her, we don’t even have to say anything! They met when very young and met again as adults. How can this fail to lead to an awakening of a love that would unite them for life?”

“Hey! Wait a minute, my dear... You are flying faster than the wind...At the end, the outcome will be God’s will.” And, as she left, Griselda said: “Don’t get angry if I leave you now, I am really very tired.”

She then went to her father, who was playing bridge close by and told him she was leaving. Dona Laura had retired early, and Griselda, wishing to speak with her, went up to her room hoping to find her awake. In fact, she was reading a magazine.

Moved by a deep affection that bonded her with her mother, Griselda sat at the foot of the bed and immediately confided in her.

“Frankly, my daughter, I don’t know what to tell you... Although I am quite aware of Claudio’s interest, I believe we must wait until we find out what his intentions are.”

69

Griselda remained pensive, incapable of understanding at first the meaning of those words.

To Dona Laura, the motions her daughter was going through demanded that she be careful so as to prevent the sudden surge of love from eclipsing Griselda’s reason and from submitting her will to the fatalism of her senses. Prudent as ever and understanding what was going on in her daughter’s soul, she tactfully observed; “I cannot, dear daughter, avoid recalling certain memories brought about by the encounter with Claudio. The vanity of the Larrecocheas made me suffer quite enough when we moved in with your grandfather. They never had this trait that distinguishes a well-bred family, or be it, getting close with simplicity to those who were not as well

off as they were. Your grandfather, although he concealed it, felt this difference intensely.”

“They were vain, I remember very well, but Claudio is different.”

“Nonetheless, you must realize that he is part of that family and of the same social standing.”

“But, mother! Couldn’t one be good even though his relatives are not?”

“Yes, my daughter, of course! There are always exceptions; however, I believe that the circumstances require prudence. Don’t forget what I told you a few moments ago. Try to get to know what Claudio thinks before you embark on a flight of hope.”

70 After kissing her mother, Griselda went to her room and lay down. Her mother’s warnings, ringing in her ears, kept her awake during long hours. For the first time, the young girl experienced revolt because while, on one hand she recognized the value of these advices, on the other, they seemed incompatible with the confidence inspired by Claudio. It was very hard for her to overcome the conflict raging within her feelings. The influence of the tiny coals, which had been lit one day in her child’s heart and been kept inert for a long time by the ashes of hidden memories, were ignited once again by Claudio’s presence.

After a while, love brought a letter to Griselda on an impetuous flight; the letter Claudio had promised her. The white flying carpet was not like the one that flew from Persia to India covering the great distances which the imagination filled with wonderful legends. It transported in words of fire, not totally deprived of enchanting wonders her soul yearned for, the secret sent by her prince charming, the same who is shown on his knees when facing the expectations of a first love.

Nervously, Griselda tore open the envelope and pulled out a neatly folded note, reading avidly. Having now calmed down, she sat on the small armchair in her room, looked at it and re-read it slowly. This is what it said:

“Griselda:

Yesterday, when I promised to write to you, I had already decided what I now confirm, which is, that nothing or anyone can deviate me from my path that will lead me to the threshold of happiness with the one elected by my heart.

The strange circumstance that has just brought us together awakened in me a true whirlwind of questions and several reflections. There are opportunities that cross our path only once in a lifetime, and if I had to recall one element of reason to clearly show the existence of such a reality, that would be the fact that you and I still remain to this day extraneous to the darts of Cupid.

Should I add anything more? Yes, certainly – neither the ears nor the heart can be fulfilled only by the sweetness of a lovely phrase. They need to hear and feel this wonderful word that emerges from a lover's lips and, once it is pronounced, the tenderness of love demands the right to be reciprocated. I love you, Griselda. And it is not a moment of fleeting vehemence that urges me to express this; it is by raising the most delicate and tender of human feelings to the throne of my heart.

But I must make a confession; a confession that robs me of a great part of the happiness I feel today. I'm referring to the shortcomings concerning my health, which you know about. I have already told you how much it has influenced my temperament, tormented by the rebellions against a destiny that threatens once again to annihilate my life. This is the reason for the sorrow and the anguish, which now invade me. Could it be the apprehension that you may be indifferent to my demonstrations of love? Or perhaps fear when seeing you so beautiful, so tender and so sweet that I may not become the trustee of your precious soul?

72

This letter will seem strange to you, I know, or better still, I guess it will. However, only to the beloved woman can the most precious feelings be entrusted with no hesitation or fears. I'm speaking with the utmost frankness, as I am sure you will understand the nature of the feeling that inspires my words. Paper is a magnificent depository of feelings that yearn to be expressed and, just the thought that these pages keep alive the gift confided in them, calms my heart with the hope of being well interpreted.

A few days ago, when you showed me your hands free from any engagement ring, I felt a unique tenderness and ardent hope that it would be my ring that would shortly be shining on them, and this dissipated the clouds that enveloped my heart.

This, Griselda, is what my heart yearns for. Now I hope to deserve a few words from you. Do not be afraid to state them with all sincerity because whatever your reply is, it will find me in the best conditions to receive it.

With all my love and respect,

Claudio Arribillaga

A little later, Dona Laura came into the room looking for her daughter. Seeing her pensive and holding the letter in her hands she asked:

“Who wrote to you?”

“Claudio, mother” replied the young girl giving her the letter. “He expresses his love as well as his concerns...”

She read the letter to the end and seeing that Griselda withheld a sob, she approached her and said:

“Don’t be silly, my child... I am sure you are concerned about the comment on his health. Don’t give it any importance, Griselda; the excursion we took a few days ago by car required healthy lungs and a good physical resistance. Only yesterday your father mentioned something about Claudio’s exaggerated fears that are due, he said, to a type of mania, to an obsession that makes him believe that he has some pulmonary deficiency. He explained that all this was undoubtedly the result of his father’s excessive care brought about by Claudio’s illness when he was a teenager. This is partly understandable; this son is all Don Roque has left.. But all this will pass, no doubt, when Claudio has to face bigger problems.”

Griselda expressed a sigh of relief.

“Do you really believe this, mother?”

“Yes, my child, you can rest assured... However, there is something more important to me than that issue. Let us suppose that Don Roque, influenced by Fermina, who intervenes so much in his life, refuses to give his consent to your relationship with Claudio. Do you believe that he would be capable of opposing the decision of his father whom he respects so much and is so dedicated to?”

Undisturbed by her mother's last words, the girl said calmly:

"I also thought of that, mother. But, judging by the emphatic determination reflected in his words, I would say that this is a non-issue."

"Don't be too sure, my dear. Wait and see what his father's attitude will be."

Left alone again, Griselda went to the window to seek, perhaps, in the quiet serenity of the late afternoon, a sedative for her soul. She still had the letter in her hands holding it close to her heart. Undoubtedly, she had been deeply moved by the warm message contained in it. She felt happy with that declaration of love. Her life which, until then, was indifferent to the caresses of love, experienced the delicate enchantment of being reciprocated. "My Claudio , she whispered taking the letter to her lips, to you I give my purest hopes and thoughts. Today, I realize that it was you that my heart was waiting for... This was revealed to me by my emotion, when I still didn't know that it was you I was looking at."

74

After a happy sigh as the one expressed by the heart when it is relieved of a doubt that oppresses it, Griselda asked her mother later:

"Does father know anything about all this?"

"Oh, my child...nothing escapes your father, not even a falling leaf."

"And what did he say?"

"He said nothing more than what I have already told you."

On this same day, Griselda took a pen and paper and wrote these lines:

"Claudio:

I read your letter, which gave me a lot to think about. This moment is so important that I cannot find words to express my thoughts

faithfully. Something inhibits my spirit and forces me to abstain from being more explicit. I beg you to understand my position.

I will expect you tomorrow afternoon after teatime.

Affectionately,

Griselda

Griselda was so absorbed by her reflections that after sending those lines the hours seemed to have passed in a blank. The next day, the horizon of her small world was slightly tainted. Expectation and fears mingled with illusions and hopes in a languishing blend as the moment of their date was approaching. The uncertainty about the way Claudio's family would regard their relationship made her nervous and she was afraid she wouldn't know how to face the situation.

75

Under the influence of such thoughts she went for a walk that afternoon along the paths of the park's bright green grass and beautiful vegetation, which had been recently watered.

The noisy brakes of a car stopping at the hotel door made her look back; Claudio Arribillaga was getting out of the car. He turned around and walked towards her covering in a few seconds the distance that separated them.

At first, in emotional words, and later mellowing his agitated composure and recovering his calm, Claudio reiterated his love for her while they walked to the hotel; but noticing her reticence, he stopped.

"What is the matter, Griselda?" he asked. I see you are worried."

"A little bit, not much...I have thoughts that I need to discard."

"I could help you! That is, if it is within my power, obviously."

Dona Laura, who was coming towards them, interrupted the dialogue.

"What's new, Claudio?"

"Well, for the past few days I feel as if I were a new man, so much so that I am amazed at how good I feel about everything."

"The mountain air is wonderful." Griselda's mother said avoiding the exaggerated reference.

76 "No doubt the air is good; but that is not all," Claudio replied enthusiastically. "In my experience I have observed that melancholy, boredom and indifference can suffocate us even when we breathe pure oxygen."

At that moment, several ladies who were organizing a card game approached the group to invite Mrs. Laguna to join them. When she left the two love birds alone, they sought a discreet place where they could talk freely.

Claudio insisted to know what was bothering Griselda, who replied:

"What bothers me, perhaps excessively, is the difficulty that your father might create once he hears of your intentions. I am well aware that you are free and that he may have no other option than to accept your determination, but I would feel deeply disturbed if a misunderstanding came to harm your relationship."

"I really don't see any reason for that, Griselda! What motives could he have to oppose it? Furthermore, even if this were to happen, it would only take the necessary time required by the circumstances to convince him of his useless position. I trust my father whose only concern has always been to see me happy. Moreover, I have already hinted the matter to him and his answer will be forthcoming."

"How hasty you are!" Griselda exclaimed, disturbed. "Wouldn't it have been better to face the issue in person?"

"Perhaps, but, in any case, there is nothing I can do now and I am ready to face the consequences. What I am far more concerned about, believe me, is my physical condition."

"Wouldn't such a concern be unfounded?"

"Why?"

"Because you seem to be very apprehensive. I presume that by using your health as an excuse you've become used to pampering yourself."

Claudio looked into her eyes for a moment, unable to evaluate if the perplexity that had overcome him was due to a reaction towards her doubt or to the unexpected shock that forced him to face a mistake he had overlooked until now. Were Griselda's words in that moment acting as an exorcism upon him? Was the obsessive spell breaking down into pieces, that same spell that had led him to exaggerate the symptoms of an illness suffered a long time ago and which was now practically eradicated? His own words gave the answer.

"Only a circumstance as this one," he said, "could produce the effect I now feel, Griselda. If prior to knowing you, someone were to tell me the same thing, I would have discarded it blindly. I have never felt before, as I do now, the slightest desire to

modify this belief. And in the same way as I used to nourish it, moved by thoughts derived from that belief, from now on I will discard it because I want to feel healthy and enjoy life, and in the pursuit of this objective I will do my utmost. Do you realize that unknowingly you put your finger on my very problem? I feel healed, I assure you, miraculously cured.”

“I am amazed by how quickly you dismiss your problems! I wonder if it were not more appropriate to take more time to think things out calmly; to think, for example, about the important steps you are about to take.”

“Please, Griselda! Love is felt, not thought out and even if I came up with a rationale, it wouldn’t escape the influence of my feelings.”

78 “But are you sure that your love is reciprocated?” Griselda insinuated with a flirting smile.

“Absolutely sure, because the language between the souls is more expressive than words, and even before we pronounce the first one, we would already be convinced in secret that we are not indifferent to the one chosen by our eyes and feeling. I can also add that at this moment your eyes are telling me this and so are your lips when they smile even though no words have been pronounced.”

“It seems it is not necessary,” she said graciously.

“Now more than ever, Griselda. However, I relieve you from this requirement as I consider it already fulfilled .”

Her beautiful eyes looked down and she blushed lightly.

The enchantment of the moment enraptured them both with its immaterial wings. In this fleeting moment, Claudio took the girl’s hand in his, kissing it tenderly.

“Griselda, I want your parents to know immediately what my intentions are.”

“This is a little premature, Claudio. It would be better for you to do it in Buenos Aires.”

“No; this cannot be. I urge you to comply with this formality as soon as possible. I feel it as a profound need.”

As the hotel guests were arriving for dinner, the atmosphere grew very lively.

It was raining the following day. During breakfast, Griselda complained about it showing visible signs of affliction. Her parents smiled discreetly at the growing impact on their daughter’s mood of this unexpected setback.

“This rain will surely be good for the vegetation!” said the doctor in a crafty tone. “Although I believe that its benefits will not last long. This rain will pass...”

“I think so too. By noon it will surely let up.” Dona Laura said, adding her forecast to his.

“I fear it may last the whole day!” Griselda complained as she looked up at the heavy clouds in the sky.

Dr. Laguna had not lost sight of Griselda’s lack of appetite. While he casually put butter and jelly on his toast, he slyly stated, still in his crafty tone, that she should not stop eating because of it. He said it so graciously that he eventually managed to make her smile.

Nevertheless, the bad weather did not relent. The downpour was continuous and as the sky darkened, the storm intensified. Dense clouds, displaced by sudden gusts of wind, seemed to fulfill their mission of unloading their cargo as if to indicate that even the domains of the assumed guardian of the keys to heaven were invaded.

In the afternoon, Griselda, deeply discouraged, observed that the atmospheric chaos was turning violent at times. The hours seemed to drag. Their solemn slowness contrasted with the anxiety of the girl who contemplated, from her window, the persistent struggle between the wind and the rain. She looked repeatedly at her watch whose tiny hands, totally ignoring her impatience, performed their circular motion in an undisturbed monotony.

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Claudio's voice made her suddenly turn around and transformed instantly her anguish into joy.

"Oh! How careless of you! How did you manage to come in this weather? Will it not affect your health?"

"I had to carry out a mission that could not be postponed, Griselda. A mission that supersedes all others."

They sat down to pursue their conversation, which was often interrupted by their friends who, confined in the hotel due to the weather, made comments about it and talked about trivialities.

"Since yesterday," Claudio said, "I have done nothing else but make projects about our future. Look how things turn out: he, who until yesterday doubted of his ability to change the course of his life, comes now to offer you the symbolic key to his destiny."

“Would this be the first time you do that?”

“Yes, Griselda; I confirm it in all honesty. Nothing similar has ever happened to me before for the simple reason that of all the women I had met none awakened in me the feeling I have for you. Anyone could say I am old fashioned yet the modern woman, who is so emancipated, so extremely limited at times, does not conform to my taste.

“Could you tell me where you see the difference? You hardly know me. Who can say that you won’t see me later as one of them?”

“No, Griselda, not you. Your whole being constitutes an exception that does not fit the vulgarity of a society that has lost the enchantment of the old family standards”.

“You speak exactly like my parents! They too are opposed to modern lifestyles and do not trust them.. You cannot imagine how many times I heard mother argue with her friends who agree with the notion that to resist the new ways is to fall into ridicule.”

“And do you share her opinions?”

“Yes, but with the difference that her convictions are upheld by the power of her observations and her life’s experiences, while mine originate from the education I received and from the concepts that I have freely adopted in line with my intimate needs, my aspirations, my tastes and my manner of being.”

“How glad I am to see that my own thoughts are confirmed!”

“When I was a young girl,” she continued “I loved to hear from my grandfathers’ lips stories of legends that described characters performing great deeds of generosity and heroism. As I was growing

up, my parents, who knew my taste, usually offered me storybooks of the most different varieties, which I read with exquisite passion. For this reason, I experienced heartfelt disappointments later in life. And don't believe that I expected to find the exact copy of what my imagination had suggested to me; absolutely not!"

"A lesser evil!" Claudio exclaimed, laughing.

"Don't get so happy about it. I still haven't mentioned to what point I lowered my expectations."

"It's precisely my hope that you haven't kept them so high that I would find them difficult to satisfy."

Claudio smiled and added enthusiastically:

"You are to be commended, Griselda, for being so thoughtful. I praise and applaud you. You have no idea how much my love deepens as I listen to you and come to know the intimacies of your soul."

82

He tried to grasp Griselda's hands, but she withdrew delicately.

"It isn't reasonable, Claudio, for you to let yourself be carried away by sudden acts of passion."

"You're right. I see that you're already guiding me towards you by making my path less difficult. I like this and even thank you for it. The truth is that I am a little impulsive."

"A little or too impulsive?"

Later on, as he tried to express himself in a way to avoid running into another failure, he asked:

"Why don't we address each other the way we used to when we were children?"

"Because we are grown-ups now and you are a very respectable man," she replied, laughing.

And so, as the suitor advanced his bishops in strategic and clever maneuvers, the white queen moved with agility across the chessboard. The moves to check were frequent, yet, never reaching a checkmate, which would have ended the game.

Unfortunately, the inevitable and fearful moment of departure had arrived. Upon leaving each other that afternoon, both carried within themselves the sweet promise, which intensified during the following days, of seeing their lives united.

That same night, while waiting in the lobby for Dona Laura to organize a card game, Dr. Laguna said to his daughter:

“Your mother told me that Claudio Arribillaga is interested in you.”

“It is true, father”, replied Griselda; and, encouraged by her father’s affectionate tone of voice, she revealed the mutual affection they felt for each other, prompting a very cordial dialogue.

Dona Laura joined in, and between jokes and comments, a cheerful interchange followed.

Once the game had begun, its options brought about divergent opinions, probably the only ones they ever had between them due either to the simulated glory of the winner or to the apparent unconformity of the loser. In the end, everything was part of the fun.

Liana and Albina invited Griselda to join a group of young people. Since the Lagunas were about to leave, she had a good reason to accept immediately. Therefore, by making the final

and happy move in the game, Dona Laura had allowed Griselda to be with her friends.

Mingling in the group, Griselda chose to sit next to Liana who took her hand, and in a low and affectionate tone said:

"You have no idea how much people are talking about your affair. It is the talk of the town, darling!"

"And what do they say?"

"You would be scared if I were to tell you!" replied the naughty girl, deliberately exaggerating her tone of voice.

"I can see," replied Griselda resigned to accept anything, "that no one here escapes the voracity of gossip with its insatiable eagerness to put through the mill of criticism every grain obtained from observing others."

84 "And when the grain is the size of a bean," added Liana in a burst of laughter, "you can just imagine how hard the mill will have to work!"

Her loud laughter attracted the attention of the others who demanded to know why she was laughing.

"No, no, no! These are private matters that cannot be disclosed to the curiosity of public opinion." Liana said.

"We want to know what it is all about!" insisted the girls in the group, repeating the refrain in whispers.

Jose Gutierrez's intervention, in his usual gentle manner, came to the two girls' rescue, suggesting in funny and eloquent gestures that the prank should be forgiven just this once as its conclusion seemed to be of a private nature. The episode ended amidst a confusion of laughter, comments and jokes.

Some, in insinuating tones, demonstrated surprise over Claudio Arribillaga's absence that night, whereby Gutierrez replied that he

had been in charge of inviting him but that Claudio had declined as he was expecting a very important phone call from Buenos Aires.

Griselda could not avoid hiding her concern and, had it been possible, she would have quickly taken leave of her friends at that moment.

She was going to her bedroom after midnight, when she saw light in her parents' room and, hearing them talk, she went in.

"Which one of you won?" she asked, in a nice way.

"We came out even", answered Dr. Laguna. "It is difficult to win when playing against your mother."

"That's not it", protested Dona Laura. "The truth is you get distracted."

"Maybe mother is right since you usually lose."

"And how did things go for you?"

"Quite well, mother; we had a very entertaining evening", replied the young girl.

Yet her face did not confirm her statement. She was undoubtedly aware of it and in order to avoid new questions she pretended to be tired bidding goodnight to her parents in her habitual affectionate manner.

Through the partially opened shutters, the moon's rays projected whimsical designs on the blanket covering Griselda's stylish silhouette. Forcing herself to stay awake, although overpowered by the hypnotic chant of Morpheus,

she finally let herself into his arms and fell profoundly asleep. The moment her lovely head rested comfortably upon the pillow, she evoked the adorable spectacle of these oriental princesses which were described by the poetic muse as being confined to inaccessible towers. In their dungeons, surrendered to sleep or to ecstasy, they escaped, without premeditation, the vigilance of their inflexible jailers. This spiritual evasion allowed the princesses to reach the divine union produced by their hallucinations, which partially attenuated the incomprehensible torment which sentenced them to eternal celibacy. Griselda's soul, like those of the captive queens, had surely been elevated to the celestial heights which are usually just vaguely remembered upon waking up. The uncertainty of her future and the difficulties that could arise during her courtship constituted this symbolic prison for her. The deep sighs, arising from her chest from time to time, seemed to allow her to jump over the legendary walls and caress, within the deepest intimacy of her heart, her restrained emotions.

The gigantic celestial dome with its huge screen in the background, moved graciously to other latitudes and its eternal lights, like eyes that never sleep, followed her, scrutinizing new destinies.

The majestic Phoebus, who cannot understand the language of lovers, finally sprang up devouring with a Cyclops' appetite the minutes that men's clock are in charge of registering with rigorous precision.

Everything seemed to favor the moment for a pleasant awakening. But as Griselda partially opened her eyes, it did not take her long to remember her previous concerns. Still worried, she dressed up and with no enthusiasm decided to accompany her parents in one of the last outings of her stay in the mountains.

That excursion in the mountains turned out to be the least pleasurable to her. An unexpected delay on their way back made her heart in love suffer continuous startles that gradually eroded the happy meeting she had been counting on, that morning.

This, however, did not happen.

As they passed the huge gate to the hotel, they crossed Claudio's car heading in the opposite direction. It did not take Claudio long to maneuver his vehicle, open the door, jump out from his seat and stand next to the Laguna's car at the precise moment Griselda was coming out.

"Were you leaving?" Griselda asked, anxiously.

"Oh, no! I was going to the post office to mail a letter, thinking you might arrive later."

"Father is strictly against speeding."

Having heard the remark, her father calmly justified it.

"I don't trust the wheels, my child. Furthermore, speeding is not always recommended when we want to be punctual."

In a few words, Claudio brought Griselda up to date on the new developments.

"Last night," he said, "when I returned home, I found a cable from my father requesting my immediate return. I presumed that this request was related to my letter, which I confirmed later by phone."

"Oh, Claudio; I had a premonition about this! Our difficulties have begun."

"Don't think of it this way, Griselda. It is logical for my father to inquire about my intentions."

“Naturally. The strange thing about it is the urgency of the request. What are you going to do now?”

“I leave tomorrow at dawn. I will not rest until I resolve this matter successfully.”

“I am really sorry that we cannot travel together.”

When Dr. Laguna was informed of Claudio’s unexpected return, he suggested that his wife invite him for lunch. The suggestion was well received by everyone.

As Laguna and Arribillaga headed for the bar to wait for the ladies, the young man in love told the doctor what his intentions concerning his daughter were, emphasizing, in determined words, that he would do his utmost to make her his bride as soon as possible. The doctor’s prudent remarks indicated that such a proposal would have to be confirmed in Buenos Aires after it had been discussed with his father. Claudio agreed to follow this course of action.

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“In any case,” concluded Dr. Laguna, “you can count on our full support and our best wishes for the matter to be solved successfully.”

It was a joyful lunch. When dessert was served, Griselda’s father proposed a toast to everybody’s happiness. Then Claudio raised his glass:

“Although it may seem premature,” he exclaimed “I already feel part of the family and I wish you all a future filled with happiness.”

Moments later, Griselda’s parents said goodbye to Claudio and discreetly retired to rest.

Being alone with Griselda, and satisfied about the way things were going, Claudio told her:

“I hope we will be able to add to this unforgettable day many others even happier and more pleasant.”

Later on, inspired by the balmy weather, they left for a stroll in the park. There, in sweet solitude, they both felt in their hearts the intimacy of this idyllic moment, consenting to the gift of the most exquisite caresses. Upon leaving Griselda that day, Claudio carried the sweetest memory that, at every moment, would revive in him the promise of making her his life companion.

A delicate situation awaited Claudio in Buenos Aires. With a fearless reaction, instigated by her determined and categorical attitude, Nora had gone to Don Roque with the devious and daring intent to triumph. After a short exchange with his father, Claudio understood the situation and realized that his father, who judged him with excessive severity, had believed his cousin's complaint and was now throwing reprimands and blame at him.

He was deeply saddened, especially because of the consequences of the intervention of Fermina who, unaware of her daughter's manipulations and intrigues, had presented her case to Don Roque with the absolute conviction that her cause was just.

Late afternoon on the next day, Claudio, who had not yet come to terms with the unexpected event, got dressed and went

for a walk in order to abate the previous hours of anxiety. All his movements during that walk revealed how the depression he was feeling had absorbed the energies from his members. He was taken aback when Patricio entered his room at that moment to announce the presence of Dona Fermina and her daughter Nora in the house.

The young man was distraught by the news. But his indignation strengthened his resolve and, with the help of his butler, he got dressed quickly, determined to face the unpleasant and nebulous situation as soon as possible.

As he came down the stairs, nervous but resolute, he went to his father's study where all three were expecting him.

Simulating an outburst of cheerfulness and surprise, Dona Fermina said:

"How are you, Claudio?" and, with a hint of reprimand continued:

"Why didn't you call us? We were surprised!"

With sparse words fitting the occasion, Claudio apologized and greeted Nora.

And then a silence filled the room. Sitting firmly in his armchair, Don Roque's stern, austere and rigid attitude, so unbecoming of him, inhibited everybody who waited to hear what he had to say; the ladies expecting a favorable statement and Claudio anticipating what his father was going to say.

After taking his time to clean the lenses of his eyeglasses, Don Roque addressed the issue.

"You have come at a very special time," he said "because I am planning a trip to Europe with Claudio."

"This cannot be, Uncle Roque!" Nora protested.

"How can such a thing happen now?" objected her mother, leaving her chair.

It was not possible for Claudio, during that fleeting instant, to confirm whether his father's words were said as a ploy to dismiss a delicate family issue or as a provocation to pressure him. Nonetheless, he remained silent.

Dona Fermina, disturbed by the untimely decision of Don Roque whom she admonished energetically, quickly said:

"And you chose this particular time to travel to Europe? Precisely when we are about to announce the engagement of Nora to Claudio?"

"What?" Claudio asked perplexed, "Who is going to announce my engagement? You? Am I not party to this? And where did you dig up these loves that never existed?"

"What you're saying is not true!" interrupted Nora angrily. "Haven't you clearly stated by your attitudes and words what you're now denying? I have also written you letters whose contents you never refuted."

"And was not the mere fact of not answering them sufficiently clear to you?"

Dona Fermina blushed and choked with all this. But confident that her influence over Claudio could still come to bear, she said in a conciliatory tone:

"What's happening here, son? I don't recognize you! Can you perhaps ignore that during more than a month, since Cecilia's party, everybody has been talking about your courtship with Nora? Come now, young man, we must resolve this matter! You must be reasonable."

"I am very sorry, auntie. We have nothing to solve since nothing of what was said ever existed."

Nora looked at him with contempt.

"Isn't it nice! You say this now after getting involved with your pretentious Dulcinea."

Claudio did not reply. But determined to put a final stop to all this, he informed his relatives that his courtship with Griselda was a "fait accompli" and did not admit further discussions.

Dona Fermina who saw her family influence collapse, not only with Don Roque who had said nothing in her favor, but also with Claudio, ended up by severely blaming him for his conduct towards them and calling him irrational. And, as if this were not enough, Nora nervously said with disrespect:

92 "It is obvious that I have been taken for a fool. As you can see, the granddaughter of the old Laguna has followed his footsteps."

Bitter and disturbed by a controversy in which angry words were exchanged, Don Roque now intervened with the intent to calm down everyone, explaining in a few words the circumstances that led to the encounter of Griselda and his son. However, this was not enough. Every so often he was obliged to reiterate his arguments until finally, tired, he clearly said to Fermina not to insist any longer and to leave the matter alone.

When mother and daughter had left, Don Roque turned to Claudio, who sat with his head down, and looking at him, at that moment perhaps with less benevolence than a father's heart requires, he said:

"Do you know what the girl's parent's financial situation is?"

"I didn't inquire," replied his son, disturbed by the nature of the question and his father's manner of referring to Griselda.

Nonetheless, he calmed down and added:

“All I know is that her father is a highly respected doctor and a successful professional. On the other hand, even though I know little about the family, I hold them in high esteem. As for Griselda, I have already told you that she is a good person, well-educated and intelligent. I am sure that if you meet her, you will like her very much.”

After listening to this frank and simple reply, Don Roque, pacing aimlessly and showing signs of agitation, stopped, facing his son:

“The only thing I can say is that shame will fall upon us when friends and relatives come to know that you got interested in a woman who is not up to our social standing. I see that you have been misguided and you can be sure that I will not agree to it.”

What Claudio had just heard was not the unbiased assessment of Don Roque. He knew his father well but could see to what extent Dona Fermina’s superficial ideas had penetrated his head as well as her influence in demeaning and even harming the position of Griselda’s family. Fully aware of the unfavorable situation surrounding him and doubting that he could now overcome his father’s obstinacy, he nevertheless said in a persuasive tone of voice:

“I believe, father, that nothing would harm our name. We are referring here to an honorable family. Besides, Griselda has all the necessary conditions to be my wife. And moreover, since it is I who will get married, I must presume to have the minimum right to choose my wife to be.”

Realizing that none of his arguments were successful in convincing his son to submit, Don Roque tried others, more to the point, without exhausting the issue.

“Well! All right then! But you should know that I have decided to appoint somebody else to administer my assets. Don Gregorio has been handling my accounts for over ten years and could easily replace you.”

“Does this mean that you are releasing me from all obligations?”

“That is so. This should not come to you as a surprise since I am doing the same thing as you are: I am exercising my right to free will.”

“Alright,” answered Claudio, evidently disturbed.

And without another word, he left the study.

As a result of what had occurred, Claudio's mind was in a state of turmoil. After hours of restless sleep, he had breakfast and left to see Don Luciano, a rich farmer and an old friend of his father.

Luciano came to greet him. He was the youngest son, better known as Lucianito, a diminutive he kept since childhood, as he also kept his character as a mocker and a joker. He was Claudio's age and had been his schoolmate.

He welcomed him with cheerful demonstrations that were immediately cut short as he noticed the distress on Claudio's face. Claudio explained in a few words the reasons for it and said that he was in great need to talk to Lucianito's father about the problem he was facing.

Moments later, Claudio was left alone with Don Luciano who welcomed him with paternal affection.

He was an honest and loyal man, temperate of character, extremely optimistic and had a good financial situation, all of which had influenced his son's carefree and frivolous character.

"Hello, Claudio. What brings you here so early?" he said. But, observing his stern face, he added: "I could swear that it's a problem with a woman ..."

"It is not what you think, Don Luciano." Claudio answered, as he began to describe his problem.

"I can imagine what you are going through," Mr. Almeida said after listening to him; "I know your father well and I know how obstinate he can be: he sticks to an idea and no one can convince him to the contrary."

"This is precisely why I thought of setting up my own business and let things take their course."

"No! You are young and intelligent and I have no doubt that you can build a good professional career, but I believe that you should not go that far."

"The fact is that I do not see any other alternative, Don Luciano. The only solution is to share an office with one of my colleagues."

"Why is that? Can't you use your mother's inheritance?"

"Father has never spoken to me about it, nor was I ever concerned about it, and with all due respect, I would rather not discuss it now."

"And yet," Don Luciano suggested, "I think that the circumstances now force you to change your mind since you must envision life with the objective of building a home. I know quite well, what moved your father to refrain from speaking to

you about the assets. It is because he feared that a man of your age could misuse such a fortune. Well, Claudio, if you wish, I will speak to him about this issue.”

“I would rather you didn’t, Don Luciano. You already know how sacred this is to me.”

“Then, I would advise you to reconcile yourself with him. Who can say that you would not find him in a better mood today?”

“I doubt it; and since I am not prepared to give in an inch concerning my girlfriend, I am ready to leave my father’s house to avoid further complications.”

“Don’t you think that such a decision is extreme? Avoid being vehement, my boy.”

96 Don Luciano attempted several times to convey the need for serenity and temperance, but seeing in Claudio’s words an unwavering resolve, he finally invited him to come and live in his house until the matter was solved.

“You can tell me later if you need anything, and remember, do not be overly concerned over the issue. You must not despair, my friend,” he added, placing his hand on the young man’s shoulder. “Things do not always go the way we want them to, but if we are discouraged, then, the goals we had honestly set for ourselves become all the more difficult to achieve. For the time being, think about what you are going to do and we will talk later.”

After leaving Don Luciano’s and having decided to take all his personal belongings from his father’s house, Claudio felt grateful for his father’s friend’s noble gesture, which embodied great generosity. Absorbed by his concerns and urged at the same time by the haste to fulfill the idea that instigated him, Claudio walked like a robot,

oblivious to everything that surrounded him. He arrived at his house and ordered Patricio to prepare his suitcases.

"Are you traveling again, sir?" he asked, startled but discreet at the same time.

Contrary to his habit, Claudio did not respond and, for some unknown reason, instead of rushing upstairs to his room, he climbed up the stairs very slowly as if he were counting the steps.

As soon as the suitcases were ready with Patricio's help, he asked him to call a cab.

"What for, sir? Aren't you taking your car?"

"No, Patricio, I will not need it."

Moments later, Claudio said goodbye with a few affectionate words, and asked him to tell his father he would send news in due time.

Standing by the door, Patricio watched the cab turn around the corner. He was aware of the motive, but, now, in face of this extreme measure, he realized that there was nothing he could have done to avoid it and lamented Don Roque's untimely absence.

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It was nearly noon when Patricio informed Don Roque of the unfortunate occurrence, taking the necessary precautions to diminish the gravity of the situation.

"This is madness! Madness I say!" kept repeating Don Roque after hearing him out.

After recovering from the shock, he decided to phone Fermina with whom he had a long and stifling conversation,

which had forced him to bear a hail of impertinent comments discharged at Griselda. Finally, she decided to turn against Claudio. It was then that Don Roque said:

“Well, what do you want me to do? Punish him? Confine him to a college campus? Stop this nonsense! You can see what happened when I wanted to impose my decision upon him. No, Fermina. Claudio is not a child anymore and when he sticks to a thought, I can assure you that he is worse than I.”

98

Don Roque had no appetite for lunch, and was seen later in deep thought as if reviewing the series of events that led him to this situation. Analyzing calmly the cause that made him oppose his son, he admitted that he had no valid reasons to have done so. The expression on his face, when he came to the end of his evaluation, had partially lost the harsh lines, which made him look so stern.

Following these reflections, he immediately began to make a series of phone calls in order to discover his son's whereabouts. The investigation was fruitless. He then spent his time handling his correspondence and, at dinnertime, he suddenly remembered his old friend Luciano, sorry not to have thought of him in the first place. He called him at once, and in a few words told him the family news pleading with him to come to his house that very night.

A few hours later, as both friends sat face to face, Don Roque described the episode of his son's falling in love with Laguna's granddaughter.

“Do you remember the foreman of Tulio’s ranch?” he said, starting to tell his story.

“How could I not remember Don Pedro? He was an excellent man, an experienced horse rider and a *mate* lover. Didn’t he have a son who became a doctor?”

“Yes, sure. And if I am not mistaken he lives close by with his family. It seems that they were in Cordoba, and that is where they met Claudio, and who knows what happened! On his return, the boy was infatuated with his daughter.”

“Listen, Roque; forgive my frankness, but I think you are wrong to oppose such a relationship which, after all, will not dishonor your good name. I don’t know Dr. Laguna or his family but I believe it to be of good standing and respectable. Moreover, I remember, and no doubt you will too, that Don Pedro’s deceased brother was a well renowned doctor and worked on behalf of our government, in a fellowship capacity, in European and American hospitals.”

“You know something? You’re right! I had forgotten all about that. But tell me, Luciano, do you have any idea where my son could be?”

“The time has come to tell you that he is at my house.”

“How clever of you!” Don Roque exclaimed, relieved. “You knew everything and pretended not to, didn’t you?”

“Not everything since I was not aware of your opinion on the matter. Now, tell me, what are you going to do? Let me add that Claudio has already contacted his colleague with the purpose of sharing his office with him.”

“Frankly, Luciano, I don’t know... If I were to be indulgent, he would think that he won and gloat. This is something that would hurt me very much.”

"You should not think of your son in that way. Besides, I will talk to him and ask him to be prudent. Tell me, what should I say to him?"

"Tell him to return home and stop being silly!"

"It sounds good to me but you should not scold him because things will remain as they are. I think you should consent."

"Well, well... we will decide this later."

"No, Roque. You must decide now, once and for all. I can assure you that you will be wasting your time by trying to persuade him otherwise."

"All right, Luciano. Then, let me ask you for another favor: bring him back tomorrow and join us for lunch."

"If it is to celebrate a reconciliation, then I accept; if not, I refuse."

"I agree."

100 The two old friends hugged and planned the return of the son to the paternal home.

Unaware of the meeting held between Don Luciano and his father the night before, Claudio left the house early for a stroll. He walked aimlessly anxious to relieve his mind, which was pursued by a quantity of aggressive thoughts that seemed determined to provoke his misfortune. As it often happens in these circumstances, these thoughts were tightening their grip more and more around him precisely because of his imagination, which in such cases produces daydreams.

Subdued by the influence of this mental image, Claudio suddenly pictured himself handling a thousand lawsuits yielding revenues

that would largely cover his aspirations. Things were being resolved in his mind with utmost ease when, as he crossed the street, he was startled by the sound of a car horn, that was dangerously close, forcing him to take a step back, finding himself once again facing a reality that was quite different from the jumbled illusions of his chimerical abstractions. Taking hold of himself, he began to realize that the process of building a profitable legal practice would be a long-term proposition. His mood, that had been optimistic just a few minutes before, fell sharply and in this depressed state of mind, he arrived at the Almeida's residence without the slightest suspicion of the good news that awaited him.

As he entered, he saw the stout figure of Don Luciano who invited him to the sitting room next to his study.

As he saw Don Luciano rub his hands in a gesture very similar to that of his father when he solved a problem, Claudio's mind registered a slight suspicion that things were not as bad as he thought, but his pessimism, exacerbated by his confusion, erased his previous perception.

I had a long and frank discussion with your father last night," he began, "and I believe everything will be resolved satisfactorily once, of course, you do not expect things to be done in haste or indulge in imprudent deeds."

The impact of this sudden news left Claudio speechless, but after a imperceptible but repeated change of expression in his demeanor, his sole response to these soothing words was a bland smile.

"You ought to be less impulsive;" continued Mr. Almeida "you must pacify that wild stallion we all carry within us and if it is left unrestrained at your age, it will become a difficult and

painful task to control, my son. What I do not want you to do is consider as a triumph what your father will concede.”

“Absolutely, Don Luciano: all I want is to see that things are treated reasonably.”

“Very well said! We have to go now because your father is expecting us.”

Claudio could hardly conceal his emotions. He suddenly understood that this was the only way he could solve this conflict since he believed it to be impossible that his father’s attitudes, which were always noble and generous, could be expressed otherwise in these circumstances. In an instant – oh, how much can a thought do in a brief moment! – he had forgotten everything and contemplated with regret his behavior, which had been impetuous, vehement and uncontrolled. Don Luciano was right: he had to tame the wild stallion he carried within himself. But, what did, in fact, occur internally that made him witness so suddenly, as if by a miracle, the change that had just transformed into light that darkness which clouded his understanding and his heart?

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The voice of don Luciano, who was ready to leave, pulled him out of his eventual meditation.

Moments later, Claudio embraced his father, apologizing for his fit of anger.

“Let’s not talk about it anymore, son. You have troubled me enough.”

Don Luciano, then, congratulated his friend and said jokingly:

“Here is the lost son and I hope everything will lead to happiness for both of you.”

“Thank you, Luciano”, said Don Roque, deeply moved.

Through his tanned complexion, one could see the paleness left by his recent ordeal.

They left the room where this conversation took place and went to the family room that offered, with its wide windows and a cozier environment, a better place to reinstate their cordial relationship.

Pretending to be undisturbed, but still displaying a stern attitude, Don Roque asked his son:

“Have you given any thought to our trip to Europe?”

When he heard that question, Claudio looked, first at his father, then at Don Luciano, and again at his father, failing to understand the reason for bringing up such an untimely thought. His heart was thumping hard, reddening his face as if lit by a flame of fire, but a mild breeze of peace came over him, calming him down and in an eloquence that emerged from his most intimate being, he answered:

“You have no idea how sorry I am to disagree with you, but you must understand my situation and realize that I cannot leave at this time.”

Quite satisfied, and still pretending to maintain his serious composure, Don Roque replied:

“I am sorry that everything happened so suddenly with not enough time for us to think all these things through. But, after all, since there is no other alternative,” he added, winking at his friend, “I will postpone that trip until there are fewer complications.”

“Wonderful!” exclaimed Don Luciano as he and Claudio celebrated the answer. “I too have thought of taking a small trip to these lands, and why not, maybe we could make it together next year.”

Later on, without underestimating his contribution in resolving this family incident, Don Luciano said to his friend in a kind-hearted tone:

“Don Roque, I would like to see the issue of the courtship resolved.”

Claudio sat, legs crossed, and held his breath. Don Roque realized that the time had come to make his statement. The vivacious eyes of his friend facing him were scrutinizing his. He had to make a decision. He started by tapping his fingers on the arm of his chair and finally, having reached a decision, told his son that he had no objections concerning his courtship, and so he agreed to give his consent.

“Thank you” Claudio whispered, and walked towards him, shaking his hand.

“You have given me the greatest joy of my life.”

104 Don Roque asked him to also thank Don Luciano, whose efficient intervention had contributed to dissipate the first disagreement that had occurred between them.

“I have not forgotten nor will I ever forget it. You made a noble gesture, Don Luciano. A gesture that has taught me the greatness embodied in a friendship that is honestly practiced.”

“Young man, friends must be present at all moments. I have done nothing more than what your father would have done for any of my children. Isn’t it so, Don Roque?”

“Absolutely, my friend”, he agreed.

In an effort to clarify all pending issues, Claudio thought it appropriate to inform his father of his intention to get married soon. Don Roque made some preliminary objections, but, inspired by his paternal feeling that was outpouring from his heart in waves of affection, not only wholeheartedly agreed but in a gesture of joy asked that the wedding be held as soon as his son wished.

The unanimous consent created a harmonious atmosphere that prevailed later on, during lunch. Joy had crowned this triumph of affection over formality and rigidity of social prejudices that harden feelings and sacrifice, in a holocaust to Moloch's conveniences, the most cherished aspirations of the heart. However, a small and daring moment clouded the happy family when Nora called and asked to speak to Claudio.

Don Roque took the call himself determined to ensure that his son could not and should not speak to her.

He was visibly disturbed when he returned.

"How thoughtless of her!" he exclaimed, and in an attempt to excuse her, he added: "She has the same character as her aunt Evelina."

"I have always questioned this girl's behavior," Don Luciano said. "This reminds me of others like her who were never capable of being happy."

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When Don Luciano left, Claudio called Griselda who had already arrived in Buenos Aires.

In a circumspect tone of voice he told her in a few words what had happened but left unsaid the big news, promising to tell it later on, in exchange of a more intimate treatment between them: the formal word "you" should be replaced by another one that would convey a more delicate intimacy to his ears.

Griselda could not refuse him such a request.

The obstinate clashes of waves that tried to sink the hopes of the two lovers had only, after so many hours of anguish, put to test the strength of the bond that unified them, and once the waves had ceased they left behind a clear sky and two souls on the verge of sipping the elixir of happiness.

On the other side of the line, Griselda put the phone down and, overwhelmed by tender feelings, ran to embrace her mother.

“What’s new?” she asked, suspecting a favorable reply.

“Great news, mother! After putting up a firm resistance, Don Roque has finally consented to our marriage. Claudio will tell me the rest later when he visits us. What do you say about that?”

“What can I tell you, my daughter? Your attorney has won the biggest litigation of his life.”

106 **P**unctually, as a heart in love claims, and now exalted by unrestrained emotions, Claudio went to Griselda’s house that afternoon. This was the first visit to his beloved in Buenos Aires, and the sole idea of seeing her again filled him with joy.

As Don Roque had said, the Lagunas lived in an apartment relatively close to his house.

A servant led him into the hall. During the few seconds he stood there, Claudio scanned the walls in detail, observing the modern simplicity with which each piece was placed to give maximum comfort. Finally, he held his gaze on a large and beautiful oil painting depicting a scene from the artist’s inspiration that Claudio interpreted as the eternal struggle of science against the empire of death. By virtue of his experience, he associated this allegory to the spiritual incipency of man who, in a desperate effort, tries to defend himself from the

satanic hordes that tenaciously harm and depress him, incited by the invisible and undeniable forces of adversity.

A light shuffling sound of footsteps over the carpet made him turn his head, and his face became radiant as he saw Griselda. In a spontaneous impulse, he took both her hands and raised them to his lips.

She was anxiously waiting to hear the news and Claudio immediately told her what had been left unsaid. The other details, though with a few omissions, came later. For example, he avoided to mention – as he had before in a gesture of courtesy – Nora’s cunning manipulation to thwart his projects. Preferring to attribute his father’s attitude to the influence of Dona Fermina and her daughter, both of whom, in their zeal to dominate and even to meddle, had used ridiculous social prejudices to sway Don Roque’s decision to an unfavorable outcome concerning his project.

Without missing a word, Griselda listened in awe. This obviously influenced her to overemphasize Claudio’s prominent participation, which was, however, compensated by his sincere expressions of his unwavering feelings.

The presence of Griselda’s parents was another incentive for Claudio’s enthusiasm, greeting them like a small boy imitating the heroes who flaunt their triumph.

“Here I am! *Vini, vidi, vinci.*”

Cheerfully, Dona Laura replied:

“More than Caesar, you remind me of the characters of the Iliad. They must have presented themselves in this fashion to their people after the long battle at the walls of Troy.”

"Although they had not done it with the sense of humor I now feel after this modest battle fought within the restricted space of family life."

"The truth is that this 'modest battle' brought us all great tranquility", added the doctor, participating in this happy encounter. "You are to be congratulated for the way you overcame your father's objections."

As it was time to visit his patients, he asked to be excused and headed to the front door with Dona Laura, who gave him a kiss.

"Your mother is very affectionate!" observed Claudio as he approached Griselda. "Will you be like her after we get married?"

"Why shouldn't I be if I were lucky enough to have a husband like hers?"

Using their mental needles, both began from then on to weave, in a profuse variety of stitches, the most selective garments they yearned to wear in the future.

Now Claudio had new duties. He would have to visit his father's ranch very soon in order to solve pending issues, deliver a sum of money and study the changes and the various innovations they planned to undertake.

"Do you have to go?" Griselda asked.

"As soon as I am reappointed administrator. It's only a question of four or five days, at the most, and you know that during that time, my thoughts will always be with you."

That same night, Griselda wrote in her diary:

"As Claudio saw my parents leave today, he asked me a question that no doubt indicated a behavior that was to his

liking. I will bear this in mind in order to please him when we are married.

The nervous tension, the concerns and the anxiety that had thwarted Griselda's sensitivity with threats of adversity began to diminish, being replaced by milder sensations as events started to improve, culminating happily that night with Don Roque's visit to her house. Elated and now free from the apprehensions of fear and uncertainty, Griselda felt permeated by a sweet sensation of well-being.

Having taken leave from Don Roque and Claudio, whom she would not see again until his return from the ranch, the young girl was invaded by a lassitude that forced her to seek the shelter of her room. She fell on her bed and remained motionless as if asleep. Confusing ideas, consisting of whims and suggestive turns of her imagination began moving around in her mind until, overcome by an irresistible drowsiness, she only felt the sensation that her spirit was rising gently into space.

Her vision, initially blurred, started to clear slowly and she perceived, between the fruit laden trees, the silhouette of a young girl who, by her appearance, seemed to be extremely poor. The faithful particle of the conscience, that never abandons life while one is daydreaming, recognized her own identity in this solitary and destitute figure that was approaching. Signs of pain and exhaustion were etched on her face, and yet her beauty was inexplicably greater than her own.

Vacillating, with an unstable gait, the girl continued to approach until she suddenly fell, nearly fainting.

As she drew near the girl, Griselda saw, drawn by powerful stallions, a solid carriage that seemed to glide over the ground as if carried by the wind. The carriage stopped and two men descended, one impeccably dressed and the other wearing a colorful uniform. After brief examination, both men lifted the girl's body and, placing it in the carriage, pursued their course.

A new vision replaced the previous one.

110 In it, that same girl had totally recovered. Griselda continued to see herself in this adolescent and participated in this scenario as if identifying herself with the girl, who was now richly dressed. She was not surprised to see that she lived in a luxurious mansion. On the contrary, she felt within herself a serene calm. Suddenly, something had gently attracted her attention: the quiet presence of the house owner, the one who had rescued her and was now smiling at her with an expression she recognized but could not relate to anything in her memory. She stood still, taken by the respect inspired by this individual whose gaze seemed to penetrate the depths of her soul as if he were in reality the owner of her life.

The vision disappeared with the sound of shutters beating in the wind. Exhausted, Griselda maintained in her memory the sensations that were still vivid. The faces of both these people, one of which seemed to be hers, were so engraved in her mental retina that she searched her memory for some probable link to her life, but could not find it.

Even though the man in her dream bore no resemblance whatsoever with Claudio, his figure overwhelmed her. Anxious, she left her bed and sat in an armchair struggling for a long time with fruitless conjectures. Subjugated by sleep, she changed her clothes, lied down and slept until late the next morning.

When she woke up, she told Dona Laura about her vision, who told her not to give it any importance, even making a humorous remark about it.

Nevertheless, Griselda could not dismiss it from her mind.

Following this psychological abduction that occurred on the borders of her conscience, Griselda began to experience the precursory symptoms of spiritual puberty.

The images contained in her vision, expressed sensitively in her soul, gave her much to think about as she tried, in vain, to discover the link that could exist between Claudio and the ethereal character whose figure she retained in her memory. There were substantial differences between them. Both the assurance and confidence she had felt towards him were not the same that Claudio conveyed to her. In spite of the good qualities she recognized in Claudio, he lacked that firm control over life that the central figure of her dream expressed in his face and attitudes.

In an effort to attenuate as much as possible these differences, she compared Claudio to other boys of his age finding it easy to place him amongst those who stood out for their noble qualities.

Nevertheless, she sadly concluded that it was possible that he could experience future oscillations in his thoughts. She would have preferred an older Claudio so that she could see in him, the mature characteristics of his moral and psychological constitution strengthening over time. But, why think about those things? Claudio inspired in her a tender love and, as all women in love, she finally opted to overlook the aspects that did not conform to the archetype mold of her illusion. Her aspirations were therefore, confined to this reality, trusting that along the years and her efforts to motivate him towards loftier purposes would contribute to transform him into the ideal man. After these reflections, she deduced that when souls become capable of overcoming the fascination of the senses, and are attracted to the affinities of the spirit, the understanding of the respective aspirations expands and allows the building of mutual happiness. So, Griselda's fear of the dramatic changes, that often darken the horizon of marital life, vanished.

It seemed to her that this position had no reason to change. Nevertheless, she later felt her serenity and satisfaction fade again induced by the presence of the previous thoughts in her mind.

Following these fluctuations, she decided to write to Claudio, as she had promised, and tell him how she felt:

“Dear Claudio,

I hope you had a good trip and that you are well. The vivid emotion of the latest event that bonded our families and gave our love a formal approval is still within me. I feel very happy when

I think how your father received me with so much affection and warmth.

Your departure, however, left me somewhat sad and perhaps because of this, I keep thinking of many things. Illusions and fears often mingle in my mind. This may be due to the fact that my thoughts contain exaggerated yearnings. I dream about you, Claudio. I see you virile and above vulgarity, however I am fearful that my aspirations may be excessive and that, one day, you may not be the same as you are today. I have no doubt that you will do your best to make me happy and I am elated knowing that you will make a great effort to please me. Basically, nothing matters to me but the desire to see the one I love capable of reaching the very best.

But you, Claudio, to whom I confide these things perhaps with excessive sincerity, do you think the same of me? As your model I have not yet given you proof of what you like and admire in me. Having no experience of life, would I be capable to defend myself against my own misunderstandings and moderate the power of my defects when I need to? Would the advice received by our elders be enough?

Thinking about all this, I am sure that we both equally need to comfort ourselves by beginning now to get used to adapting our thoughts to this reality, which we may face in the future.

For my part, I am starting this very moment to strengthen my resolution to do whatever is in my power to make you happy.

I look forward to your reply.

Affectionately.

Griselda”

Claudio's friend Luciano accompanied him on his trip to Balcarce. They arrived a little after noon, very tired. The drought had made the trip even more difficult with the northern wind saturating the atmosphere with the dry dust of the fields. They were greeted by the foreman who was expecting them, and had seen the car, visually following it until it entered the ranch.

114 A cold shower and a hearty meal made them feel good. Dressed in comfortable rural clothes the two friends sat down to talk with the foreman on the veranda, a pleasant location between the house and the fields providing an appropriate place for the body and soul to relax. Sitting on bamboo chairs covered by pillows stuffed with horse hair, they could see well beyond the colorful garden with its climbing plants and rosebushes clinging around the pillars, the beaten down fields where the vegetation was suffering from lack of water.

Between a *mate* and another, the foreman, a quiet and cheerful man, used to living in the country for many years, gave Claudio general information and described in detail the event that was to occur the next day, when an estimated eight hundred calves would be put on sale. Claudio wanted to attend this typical native event and promised to accompany the foreman. Luciano quickly agreed to join them.

As agreed, they left at the crack of dawn. They rode cheerfully maintaining a good trot until they reached the location of the round up, which was only a mile away. In the midst of dusty clouds, the last groups of cattle, converging from different points, were rounded up in the enclosure, which gradually acquired the characteristic liveliness of such activities. Stimulated by the morning fresh air, relaxed and extremely well disposed, more so because of Luciano's small talk and the foreman's frequent retorts, they arrived at the entrance of the ranch's ground much earlier than expected.

Claudio and Luciano had often attended similar events, which were frequent in rural areas. Nevertheless, both watched the development of this one as if it were new and particularly interesting during this brief parenthesis away from urban life.

Having observed the action for a while, Claudio, stimulated by the sports of it or simply to relive the pleasure he so often experienced during his childhood, suddenly spurred his horse and galloped behind a few stubborn calves that had wandered away from the herd stirring up a disturbance amongst the cattle. Skillfully, he was able to corner some of them to which the cowhands responded with approving cheers. Luciano also intervened by imitating his friend, which prompted laughter among those simple people.

They then sat in the shade of a nearby huge tree and without missing a detail or the movements of this rural activity, they savored the delicacies of a barbecue and the tasty empanadas* specially prepared for them by Rosa, the ranch cook.

Tired and covered with dust they returned by dusk.

From a distance they spotted the house sitting at the foot of huge trees that served both as background and protection and this sight increased

* Empanadas: a pastry filled with meat. They are very popular in South America.

their eagerness to arrive. The house was spaciouly built. Its roof split into two sections protected the edges, and its front brick wall was whitewashed with lime. Two rows of plants stretched towards the front of the house, their extremities embracing the large veranda. Looking at it from the outside, and later observing the beautiful details of its interior decoration, one realized how successful the intent was to adapt it to a traditional style, to the environment and to the climate, and how, with sufficient funds and good taste, comfort and entertainment can be provided. During the time his wife was alive, Don Roque had rebuilt this house, inherited from his ancestors, striving to provide whatever was necessary to offer joy and pleasure to his family during their stay at the ranch. Yet he enjoyed it for only a few short years, since after his wife passed away, he shunned the place at times, that same place his son was now starting to remodel according to his father's objectives at that time.

The following days were spent reviewing the various areas of the ranch. Claudio's health was repeatedly put to test by the daily activities and he made great efforts to overcome his apprehension. Recent events had produced in him deep emotional imbalances and had overexcited his nerves all of which predisposed him once again to be overwhelmed by his old concerns. However, the memory of Griselda supported and invigorated him to the point of warding off any sign of an ailment.

He received Griselda's letter a few days after his arrival at the ranch. He read it avidly and put it in the pocket of his jacket. Such words would require far more intimacy; he would read it over and over again when he was alone. But this moment had to be postponed on account of Luciano's insistence to have him attend

a party given by Don Marcial Villagra to celebrate his daughter Susana's engagement. Claudio exerted great effort to keep his decision not to attend, in a gesture of loyalty he thought, towards his fiancé. It was getting dark when his friend, sulking as a child, finally convinced him to change his mind; from that moment onwards, better disposed and content, they got dressed and well groomed and left for Don Marcial's ranch, fifteen miles to the North.

Luciano Almeida Jr. did not have a close relationship with the Villagra family, but in their beautiful summer residence he saw several of his acquaintances, some arriving especially for the party from Buenos Aires and others from surrounding areas, and who, upon seeing the lively Luciano, cheered him warmly. Claudio too was greeted cordially, and everybody applauded the circumstance that had enabled him to be present that night.

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He dedicated his first words to the bride-to-be:

"You look ravishing, Susana. My friend could not have made a better choice."

"Thank you, but don't congratulate me too much otherwise I would be obliged to reciprocate," and then added:

"What a pity Nora couldn't be here! She wrote to me saying how sorry she was not to be able to attend the event because Dona Fermina was very sick."

Claudio's brief and laconic answer coupled with his indifferent attitude, induced Susana to say, astutely:

"Soon both of you will give us the opportunity to celebrate your engagement, isn't it so? It has been a while since I last saw Nora. We came here very early this year, so I am not up to date on the latest news."

Claudio was about to answer when Suzana's fiancé arrived and led her to the dance floor at the sound of the first beats of jazz . Disappointed by this interruption, Claudio walked up to Maria Emilia, Don Marcial's charming niece, and invited her to dance.

Overtaken by suspicion and curiosity, Susana later looked for Claudio, and talking to him again, picked up where she left off in their discussion. Such craftiness was not unnoticed by Claudio, yet he was pleased to have the opportunity to deny the gossips that had spread. His categorical statements dissipated all of Susana's doubts and between jokes and subtle references, she ended up by asking if his heart had not yet made its choice. As Claudio spoke of Griselda with great enthusiasm, Susana suddenly changed the subject, and curtly giving the excuse that she needed to find her fiancé, quickly left him.

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That was quite understandable. The Laguna name had no standing in this social environment where in low whispers some wicked gossip may have already been spreading. Upset as he was, he withdrew from the center of the party searching for a place where he could be alone and caress the memories of his beloved. From there, he began to observe couples and groups of young people who laughed aloud probably at malicious stories or spicy gossip. He too had often participated in such conversations, which now invaded family environments, but he wanted his future life to develop in a different mode exempt from such emptiness, which attracted him less and less. He then concluded that young men who become infatuated usually adopt childish attitudes, maybe because they believe to have become wise men.

Claudio could not pursue this line of thought as the youngest daughter of Don Marcial invited him to join in on a game that had been previously planned. By chance, he received moments later from Maria Emilia's lips – as a prize imposed by a joyful jury – a fresh kiss that she gracefully placed on his face.

"I would have never imagined I would take such a pleasant memento from this party," Claudio said to the girl, inviting her to the terrace in order to take her away from the jokes that were becoming annoying.

"The truth is that we should know how to guard ourselves from such surprises," she answered, pretending to be modest.

"Oh! And why is that? I would not have said that, after receiving such a delicate prize from you."

"Be careful, Arribillaga! Don't forget that it was imposed by the jury."

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He was about to answer with another gallant phrase but withheld it, suddenly aware that his reputation as a serious person could be harmed.

Nevertheless, this fleeting episode, which was exempt of second intentions or desire, produced, as could be expected, a reaction in both of them, which made them feel, after the first impression, a joy that they tried in vain to conceal. Claudio was experienced in this type of situation and could have gone further but he understood, just in time, pressured by his intent to hold back, that any slip towards flirting with Maria Emilia would be incompatible with the love he felt for Griselda.

As the orchestra started playing again, the young girl was invited to dance by someone else leaving him alone and that strengthened

his previous resolve. Claudio looked at her admiringly, as she danced. At that moment, he felt relieved to have been spared from an embarrassing situation. He lit a cigarette, which he usually said was a great companion to his reflections, and went out to the garden to breathe the fresh air and savor the victory his reason had had over his passionate nature.

As the party reached its climax, Claudio decided to leave but had a hard time talking young Luciano into joining him.

Luciano kept on blaming Claudio for this unusual attitude as the car rode away following the tracks illuminated by the headlights.

“Can I ask why you were in such a hurry to leave?” he asked, complaining.

120 “I already told you, Luciano. It’s hard to explain.”

“It would have been better if you had not come. Do you understand what it means to me to have to leave the party just as Maria Emilia had promised me two dances?”

Claudio laughed as he understood why his friend was so upset, and tried to justify himself:

“I am very sorry, Luciano, but what do you want me to say? Maria Emilia’s kiss, her beautiful black eyes, well.... Do you understand? This alone would have been enough to disturb the most indifferent of men. That’s why I preferred to leave to avoid any future consequences. That’s all.”

“Yes, of course I understand!” agreed young Luciano though not relenting from his stubbornness.

His thoughts were swirling around making him compare his manner of being to that of his friend. This assessment made

him realize his bad luck concerning the fair sex. He could not understand why Claudio, who was considered serious and reasonable but somewhat bland, attracted women, while he, who went a long way to please and entertain them with playful attitudes, could not find one who would be interested in him. He described this situation to Claudio who said:

“You lead your life as if it were a big joke. So, when you try to be serious no woman believes you.

Luciano accepted this remark and realized that his friend might be right because it coincided with what Maria Emilia had told him only a few minutes before when she had accepted to dance with him on the condition that he behaved. Reviewing in memory his past experiences, he realized that many women found him entertaining but those whose taste and looks really interested him ended up looking for love elsewhere seeking someone more formal. He was not overly concerned, however, with the problem since for him it was far easier to overlook it than to have to moderate his tendency for jesting and mockery.

His mind, however, was not accustomed to delve into such reflections and, by the time they had arrived at the ranch, these had already evaporated into thin air.

Before going to bed, they had a few drinks while continuing to freely air their thoughts on their sentimental concerns.

“I think,” said Claudio “that there are many forms of desiring a woman.”

“Great! You speak as if you made a great discovery!

“Well... I know that it is not a discovery but I simply wanted to refer to the love that imposes sacrifices and abnegation upon us.”

"I disagree. In my opinion, this leads to extremes."

"Why can't you get it through your thick skull that when one comes across a woman who is delicate and spiritual, a woman who fulfills everything in life, one must give this fact its proper value?"

"I agree. But we must also understand that the times we live in are not meant to have us cloister ourselves in such thoughts. Nowadays life offers a variety of attractions and we must not deprive ourselves of the pleasures of parties, nightclubs, and of those provided to us by small inoffensive love affairs! I assure you that after taking care of all this, there will be no time left to think about the strange things you refer to."

"You are wrong! This would be living in a constant daze."

122 "No, Claudio! The point is that you keep on being stubborn. When you fall in love with an idea you expect others to bow to it. After all, each one must worship his personal preferences. And if they are self-fulfilling, each one is free to follow them, like a dog follows its master. I don't think that the fact of having a girlfriend gives you the right to speak in the name of morality or blame others for what they do differently."

"In spite of what you say, Luciano, I still think that life must be lived in a different manner. One shouldn't be led to follow the latest trend in customs. You can clearly see how abandoning the customs that were efficient long ago, has led to a progressive loss of the loftiest feelings in human society. I think we must give our life a higher purpose."

"It seems to me, young man," replied Luciano imitating Sancho's words, "that passion and madness must be fried in the same pan and, when the river overflows, the fishing is plentiful."

The remark hit Claudio like a blow and he answered, slightly upset:

“I think that taming a wild beast is easier than changing your obstinate position.”

Taking nothing seriously, Luciano continued unrelentingly with his sarcasm but in such a pleasant way that it broke Claudio’s formal attitude and Luciano’s verve and cheerfulness entertained him with his vivacity for a little while longer.

They went to bed at the crack of dawn.

Claudio calmed down and, now, alone in his room, read Griselda’s letter once more, remaining subdued by his sweet thoughts for a long time. “There is no doubt” he said to himself “that Griselda is a model of female excellence. She is precisely what I’ve always wanted: delicate, refined, sweet, understanding and intelligent. But will I be worthy of such a precious gift that Providence offers me? A fortune can enrich a man materially, but if he does not also enrich his intelligence, then his life will remain very poor. What purpose then will money serve if it slips through the shameless hands of those who do not know how to climb any peaks other than those around which hungry thoughts seek a morsel to satisfy their senses and their instincts? Griselda seems to tell me that life cannot be reduced to the simple fact of having mutual affections. Sooner or later these end up weakening due to the lack of superior incentives or suffer the influence of other types of incentives that eagerly appear to break the monotony that inevitably settles in. How important it is to escape that risk! Griselda offered me her love and behaves towards me

with impeccable sincerity. Undoubtedly, she always wanted to see in me the man that constitutes her ideal. Have I not also thought the same about her? Should I not also reciprocate that sentiment if I want her to remain the way she is, different from all the others? Certainly, this is what I must do.”

He woke up just before noon and immediately wrote to Griselda saying in the final paragraphs of his letter:

“I want to assure you that I have given my deepest consideration to the words in your delightful message. I know that I am still far from being what you wish me to be, but I will do the impossible to please you, and I will do it with utmost joy.

Yes, Griselda, we must help each other climb the ladder of life, which might seem steep to us today, but, tomorrow, it will be like a celestial walk amidst the most rewarding spiritual emotions as a result of our efforts. I long to see you again. There are more four endless days until I go back home.

Yours, with all my love.”

Meanwhile, Griselda and her mother went shopping for draperies and other items to decorate the house. The accelerated course of events due to the engagement began to produce, in anticipation of the great day, a series of activities in the preparations for the wedding. In spite of this hustle and bustle, Griselda felt depressed at times. Dona Laura, attentive to these changes, correctly attributed them to Claudio’s absence.

On the eve of Claudio's return and in an effort to sound out her daughter, she asked:

"This week has gone by very quickly, don't you think so?"

"Oh, mother, if this were only true! I would say that a century has gone by since Claudio left. And yet, it was not totally lost because during his absence I was able to think and feel many things that may not have occurred to me if he had been here."

"The fact is that such absences are often quite beneficial not only for those who are going steady but also for married people. And I will tell you why it is so. When a couple lives close for a long time, the very fact of seeing each other every minute of every day makes them become too accustomed to each other, which, without implying indifference, prevents one from thinking about the other as one would do from a distance. Then, the affection seems to increase leading one into thinking and planning many things they would do when they met again, inspired by the healthy intent of being more thoughtful and striving to make their lives happier. Many difficult situations have been helped by an absence!"

"Your reflections are very appropriate, mother, but, what can I do? It is difficult for me to admit that such a practice could be acceptable for both bachelors and married people."

"It isn't a practice, my child. I was simply referring to the absences imposed by circumstances like the one that you and Claudio are experiencing now. Don't worry; it's quite natural for you to find it difficult to agree with me now, even though it's true."

"That's not it, mother. I admit it, but it seems to me that there must be other ways to reach the same objectives."

"It's possible, dear. However, you know quite well that I've always encouraged you to follow your heart in order to favor your good objectives."

Dona Laura's words had made an impact on the young girl. "My mother," she wrote later in her diary, "talked to me on how important absences often are when imposed to the married couple by life itself. She undoubtedly has her reasons to think this way and I may even come to understand them later. So, I will not discard the fact that such incidences may become a useful tool in my married life. I remember having heard my mother's friends say they considered it appropriate and even easier to express certain thoughts to their husbands in writing, when they were away than when they were close to them. That was because they would not dare or could not find an opportunity or an easy way of saying it in a natural manner in person. This too I must bear in mind in case such a thing happens to me."

While driving his car at a high speed, Claudio struggled to calm his mind, which was troubled by a thousand thoughts and projects, that mingled with an ardent desire to see his beloved again. As soon as he arrived, he gave his father a detailed account of the rural activities and immediately called Griselda to tell her he would visit her that same night.

As he was preparing to leave, he received a phone call from his friend Marcos Gorostiaga, one of the dedicated members of their private group of intellectuals, who informed him that the group would meet the next day, in the afternoon, and asked him

to attend. Since the invitation coincided with Claudio's state of mind that was exalted by the idealistic aspirations arisen after reading Griselda's letter, it was immediately accepted and his attendance confirmed.

Longing to see Griselda, he found her more beautiful than ever. It seemed to him that her girl's soul adjusted to his more than before and that their respective feelings had merged in affinity and harmony.

As Claudio was at the end of his vivid recount of the events in Balcarce, Dona Laura came in. The conversation quickly focused on Don Roque's and Dona Fermina's health, since she had just recovered from an acute liver ailment. In fact, having been told of her illness, his father had paid her a visit in which, as it would be expected, certain pending issues were explained and clarified, putting Fermina's resentment to rest and eliminating don Tulio's nagging uneasiness. Therefore, the normal relationship between the two families was restored.

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As if unconcerned by that fact, Claudio made reference to the private party that his uncle planned for Nora's birthday before they left for their summer vacation. Firmly believing that he was interpreting correctly the air of curiosity that appeared on Griselda's face, he quickly added that he would not attend. He then gently said that he was sorry for Don Tulio whom he liked very much, and even for Fermina, who had sent him, through his father, a very affectionate invitation.

Do you think you are right in making this decision?" asked Mrs. Laguna. "It would be better if you accepted her invitation in response to her conciliatory attitude."

Griselda nodded repeatedly in a gesture of agreement and said:

“It would be discourteous, Claudio, and I don’t see any reason for it.”

“The fact is that I cannot see things in the same detached manner as you do.”

“I don’t see it that way,” said Dona Laura. What is important is for you to show that you are above everything that happened.”

Seen from their perspective, the argument was unquestionable, yet it was not so for Claudio who had good reasons not to give in. He then decided to just say that he would think it over.

128 “I’m sure that your decision will be for the best,” Griselda said fondly as Dona Laura left.

Claudio embraced her gently and, putting his finger under her chin, made her eyes meet his. Taken by the enchantment of this sublime moment, their lips renewed, without a word, the oath of love that their hearts expressed with great emotion.

As he had promised, Claudio went to the private meeting of intellectuals. Sometimes it was held at the club where they often participated in social events. The meeting was attended by a small group of young men, who had graduated from college around the same time.

When he entered, he saw Marcos Gorostiaga speaking to Justo Vega Monteros and Miguel Garmendia, all three of them attorneys. They all went to a room where small groups of young men were talking while waiting for the others. Claudio, who had seldom been seen recently, was warmly welcomed on his arrival. However, the expressions of welcome were overshadowed by young Luciano's reference to Claudio's engagement. As expected, the congratulations, the jokes and the questions all had the objective of finding out who was the lucky girl.

Claudio responded by describing some of Griselda's characteristics, emphasizing her qualities, all of which satisfied the group's curiosity. He then inferred that he was officially committed.

It was Justo, a distinguished member of the group, who congratulated him with sincerity and good judgment. A coincidence of intimate yearnings united him to Claudio since he too, in addition to exercising his profession with integrity, was motivated by the lofty purpose of cultivating his spirit. Such commendable objectives, which he upheld in spite of the huge fortune he had inherited, seemed to indicate that he was not influenced by it.

"To find a girl as you did," he said, shaking Claudio's hand cordially, "one who possesses so many exceptional qualities, is surely very difficult in our day and age."

"Even though we may lose you as a member of the 'sect' I congratulate you for the lucky find," said Miguel Angel.

Miguel was tall, pleasant, and strong with an athletic build. He had a nice tan, blond hair and blue eyes. Of English descent, on his mother's side, he had inherited from his Saxon blood this particular conciseness that made him say everything in four short words.

"And what about you?" asked Claudio smiling. "When will you follow my good example? I am sure that at least one of you is nurturing the idea of marriage."

Augustin del Campo, who had a cheerful personality, wishing to clearly condone the general opinion that opposed that possibility, expressed his own categorical viewpoint:

"As you see, Arribillaga, the majority here prefers to maintain their quiet and pleasant celibacy."

"I don't share that opinion," said Marcos. "I believe that I would accept the idea if Providence offered me the same luck given to Claudio. You well know", he added turning to him, "how fearful men are regarding the virtues of the fair sex."

130 These remarks reflected faithfully Marco's prudent and formal behavior, which made him enjoy great prestige amongst his comrades, who also held him in high regard for his courteous and distinguished manners.

"When one is open-minded, love reconciles many things," answered Claudio.

"Perhaps," insisted Marcos. "In spite of the best personal disposition, I presume that we cannot exclude, obviously, other important factors."

"If I am not mistaken, Arribillaga," Augustin interjected jokingly, "in cases like yours one must feel a sensation of total sentimental surrender. Isn't it so?"

The remark brought about confirmations and laughter as Salvador Mariani's voice pleaded for everyone to show a more respectable attitude.

“What the hell! When love is expressed seriously,” he said “we must respect its reality. Life is not a question of jumping from one conquest to another.”

“I approve!” said Norberto Aguirre, a close friend of Claudio’s. “And yet it seems to me that many calendar pages will have to fall before we find our own ideal woman.”

“Exactly,” another one agreed “And women are to blame because all of them are frivolous.”

“No! No!” Salvador replied. “This is not true.”

“I agree,” said Miguel Angel, “although I must admit that the world is full of such women.”

“And what makes women frivolous,” declared another who joined the opposing group, “if not the lack of common sense that prevails in the fair sex?”

“Please, gentlemen,” Augustin asked mockingly, “let us not criticize them. We should bear in mind the sweet and entertaining moments we have spent with them.”

“And also the bad moments.” expressed Justo in a serious tone. “Men have often experienced them and it is precisely because of these moments that they distrust women. The majority of women today, amongst whom a man must make his choice, spend their life, from early on, in mundane entertainments, pleasures and futilities that do not conform to the delicate feminine nature. And, soon after they get married, many homes become like unbearable prisons. And we will not even mention the agony they often refer to when taking care of the children! As I see it, the lack of compliance with a more prudent form of behavior makes their lives deviate to

such an extent that, later, instead of enjoying the big or small satisfactions, which derive from doing everything correctly, an inner concealed rebellion is produced against anything that, in one way or the other, constitutes an impediment to enjoying life the way they intended it to be.”

“Are we not preaching excessively?” suggested a participant of the group.

“I was just about to ask the same thing,” said Augustin. “The bottom line is that each one should live his life as he pleases; and we cannot deny that we must provide youth with all the necessary latitude it demands. Why would nightclubs and cabarets exist if not to entertain and amuse young people?”

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It was Arribillaga’s turn to speak:

“I am not opposed to Augustin’s remarks. But we should admit that such places, where sensuality and flirting prevail, aren’t the ones that favor most the woman who considers herself to be honest. Anyway”, he concluded philosophically: “everything seems to indicate that life can be led in a thousand different ways.”

“I agree,” observed Marcos, “but you must admit that many of those different ways of living can only be enjoyed during youth, precisely when the lack of experience prevents us from protecting ourselves against them. Obviously, men generally emerge unharmed from any such adventure, but for women it is different because they retain within themselves some sediment of moral rebellion and liberalities which are characteristics of their surrender.”

“And those are the same women” said Salvador, smiling “who later on parade, very reserved and virtuous, with their fiancés or their husbands, and upon whom we would have to bestow our indulgence.”

This satiric remark drew general laughter.

“There is no doubt that the subject is interesting”, commented Justo maliciously, “but we should remember that the evil has spread so much that we, ourselves, may become tomorrow the protagonists of a similar comedy, hoping to receive this indulgence.”

“And then we end up like the hunted hunter mentioned in the *Dialogue of the Dead* by Luciano de Samosata,” concluded Miguel Angel.

Still on the subject, Justo referred to the need to look at the world and things as being the product of a liberated fantasy of human whim and, striving to illustrate his comment with an example, brought forward the case of a girl he had once known:

“After having led for many years an honest existence”, he said, “devoted to the duties of her job and of her household, one day, thinking about the uncertain future of her life, which offered nothing new, and fearful that her best years would pass by without any other perspective than that of contemplating the same faces and listening to the same things, she decided to change her habits. Yielding to the ardors of the blood, she began to visit stores and beauty parlors, and that was when I met her one day incomprehensibly transformed. Later, I saw her again. I noticed that her dresses were more luxurious and that she exercised with expertise the practice of seduction that disturbs us so much, but that relieves us from boredom for as long as

the novelty lasts. Very well, many like her start out in life with the illusion of catching a future husband, not a lover; and along this path, which is not an easy one, they end up surrendering by accepting the miserable pleasures of sharing our table, riding in our cars, smoking our cigarettes and parading proudly in our company in front of everybody. What these unfortunate creatures do not realize is that this situation is short lived. We quickly get tired of the human celluloid that seems to envelop them. The truth is, that these women are like dolls – very attractive on the outside but if an attempt is made to look for their soul, one only finds a repulsive emptiness. They are the eternal Messalina's who strive to convince us that the only reality in life is pleasure, entertainment and inebriety.

134 "It seems that we insist to attribute this psychological defect only to women," objected Salvador. "Yet, how many men try to dress up their scant and anemic ideas with no other attire than the veil of a monotonous and undefined mediocrity coupled with other worthless things, of course."

 "It behooves us not to try to decide right here," Miguel Angel said, "which of the two parties outnumbers the other in poor qualities. The fact is that in life, men and women, willingly or not, must tolerate each other's fickleness."

 "This suggests," said Marcos, "that both men and women must be very selective in choosing their other half to avoid being saddled with a burden. In taking such precautions we may escape having to join the ranks of those unfortunate people who spend their lives surrendering to the whims of their mate and conceding them everything, even though they regret it."

“God forbid,” said Augustin, cheerfully and always ready to joke, “because you well know how this would end... as the sad lyrics of a tango!”

Young Luciano Almeida, accompanied by his two inseparable friends, Dardo and Tomas, had just entered the room and happened to overhear the last part of the dialogue.

“If I am not mistaken,” he said, taking on a serious tone to cover up his joking intention, “you were discussing issues capable of turning the world upside down.”

Luciano's presence in the meeting introduced a favorable variant in the temperament of the young men, which led most of them to suggest having dinner at the club.

Some expressed their objections, however, complaining that they had spent all their time discussing only one issue while others sided with Marcos who said that, since he had been chairing the day's meeting, he was reluctant to interrupt the debate, which he considered fruitful. They finally decided, upon the request of the most dedicated members, to continue the debate later on, taking advantage of everybody's presence at the club.

Two or three left after dinner to attend pressing commitments. Young Luciano thought of leaving too, but, in spite of his indifference and complaints, he decided to stay.

“I will accompany you as long as you can tolerate me”, he said. “You well know, guys, that the problems you are discussing here are not my main interest.”

Dardo and Tomas agreed.

Eager to take part in the debate, they all moved to a large room where they would not be disturbed by other people

talking. Seated in comfortable armchairs, they were ready to begin their discussions. The truth was that not all of them were equally interested. Some, like Claudio, were attracted by inner inquietudes that they sought to satisfy with the help of the rest of the group; others, a minority perhaps, believing the meeting would be brief, were willing to listen with patience rather than with interest. Whether, because he considered the subject matter under discussion of particular importance or because of a special concern, Marcos displayed a serious attitude, which led the others to keep silent.

136 “What I am about to tell you,” he began saying, “is the result of my meeting with Mr. Faustino Malherbe, my father’s friend whom some of you know. It was only a month ago that he returned from a trip to Europe, the United States and Mexico. I had two very interesting conversations with him, in which he gave me his impressions regarding the atmosphere in the European countries, which have always been involved and committed to several international causes. He mentioned that the disorientation in these countries had reached such a level that people could not find a leverage point to sustain their morality. Unquestionably, my friends, the state of insecurity that affects these people results in the destruction – metaphorically or effectively – of the very contents of one’s life. The specific state, in which young people in these countries find themselves in, consists of a mixture of despondency and melancholy. This was defined to me by Mr. Malherbe as the “ailment of emptiness”, generated, in his opinion, by the lack of a superior purpose or force which would protect youngsters from the skepticism they

had fallen into, and lead them along the paths that guarantee the reintegration of the values of the spirit. The search for the great element that would liberate them from such anguish has been in vain. And, the scarce moral defenses that are left have been destroyed by the madness of passions and of collective neuroses that irresistibly push that part of mankind towards the uncertain paths of moral destruction. For the moment, this is all I can remember of the impressions conveyed to me. In my opinion, they represent the mature assessment of a focused analysis of these countries. But in fact, this was not what I wanted to stress from my conversations with Mr. Malherbe. I am very eager to let everyone know that my father's friend had the opportunity to meet in Mexico a man, whose vast and original cognitions impressed him deeply to the point of considering his friendship a real gift. His name is Ebel de Sándara and he has lived for many years in Mexico, where he has published several books. I was greatly surprised to discover that he is our compatriot.

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After a slight pause, Marcos continued:

“As expressed by one of you today, I also consider that life should be led according to each one's understanding. As far as I am concerned, my interest lies in everything that can be useful to me, so that I can always obtain the best of what life places within my reach. I will now refer to the strange explanation given by Mr. de Sándara about life. Don Faustino mentioned it and I believe that I registered it faithfully in my memory. He said that to de Sándara our life is like the text of a book that carries our name on it, and in which we must be the main protagonist, the prominent character, if we do not want to be relegated to a

secondary position and worse still, to play an insignificant role. In order to achieve this, we must not let our life be driven by chance along the slippery paths of unconsciousness. On the contrary, it must always be guided by our intelligence in lucid states of consciousness so that we do not allow even one day to go by, meaninglessly. In this way, life will be enriched and will incite us to improve our conception of it. The secret lies in preparing, in anticipation, our future, planting today what we aim to harvest tomorrow. We would, then, enjoy, beforehand, the pleasure of managing consciously what the future brings us. If we are capable of turning this into the main and permanent objective of our life, we would be able to convert ourselves into the architects of our own happiness. This is quite different from the “*carpe diem*” stated by Horacio in his famous ode that we studied in our Latin classes when we were young, or i.e.: a life lived in ignorance of what the future holds. And so it seems, according to de Sándara, that life today is the product of yesterday’s life.

“Where does all this lecture come from?” interrupted Luciano.

“From minds that think”, answered Marcos at once.

“And from which we have a lot to learn”, replied Justo, who undoubtedly was impressed by the information.

“I doubt that anybody could say anything exceptional on such a complex subject”, insisted Luciano. “Furthermore, why do we have to complicate our existence by embarking on what may be a fantasy, when one can rest both feet firmly on the ground, enjoying the inexhaustible topics related to what is really meaningful in life? In conclusion, I do not see how these

opinions carry any value. I believe that the true author of this book, that symbolizes our life, is destiny and we are the product of its inexorable dictate.”

“I will surely respond to this by reading some paragraphs written by Mr. de Sándara on the concept of fatalism, as mentioned in the notes given to me by Mr. Malherbe. Listen: “The carriage of destiny, whose allegoric march speaks of the cycles of our existence, is never detained in its course, and he, who falls under its heavy wheels, is truly unfortunate! Destiny lacks sensitivity and is, therefore, cruel and inexorable. Man must overcome it with his intelligence by riding the symbolic carriage and guiding it towards more appropriate paths that befit the hierarchy of his species. Those who abstain from doing so will find themselves forced to pull it like slaves until, exhausted, they fall and are crushed under its wheels. This is what is usually called “fatality”. And for this reason, yielding to the instances of their fate, many remain as they are, without allowing anything to make them change such an absurd belief.”

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After reading these paragraphs a quick analysis was made of its content. Since opinions rarely coincide, the meeting extended far into the night in the midst of cheerful mental activity.

At the end of the meeting, the news about the imminent arrival in Argentina of the author of these cognitions was well received and some of its participants expressed their interest in meeting him.

They were already leaving when Marcos and Miguel Angel, who were invited to Nora’s birthday party, asked Claudio if he was going to attend. Since he had not changed his mind, he told them he had not yet decided.

Patricio was usually in attendance well into the night when Don Roque received his friends, as was the case that night. So Claudio was not surprised to see him up and around when he returned home.

The young man arrived bursting with joy. Upon entering, he gently tapped the butler's shoulders and asked him for a cold drink. And, as if his enthusiastic state involuntarily turned his muscles more agile, he ran up the stairs to his room.

A short while later, Patricio entered carrying a tray and was greatly surprised by Claudio's diligence in changing his clothes while humming a tune.

It was obvious there was a motive for his happiness. Perhaps he was going through one of those moments of sweet psychological exaltation when the soul enjoys, in anticipation, the coming of a promising event.

"I am so pleased to see you so happy!" exclaimed Patricio as he served the drink.

"I have just spent a very interesting evening with the boys. We discussed highly auspicious topics. I will tell you about it later."

After sliding into his slippers and buttoning up his pajamas, he began describing in detail the concepts Marcos had brought up.

"You have no idea how happy I am," said Patricio. "I too, in spite of my limited understanding, have cultivated ideas like the ones you mentioned and that have energized your enthusiasm in such a special manner. By the way, do you know that I have in my possession some books that may interest you? I guard them with my life because they brought me the serenity I now have."

"You never told me that you were interested in matters of this sort.

"That is because I was never given that opportunity, sir! And I didn't know if my ideas would coincide with yours."

"And what do you do with all this?"

"In my own way, I put the concepts I read about into practice."

"You practice in your own way? How do you do that?"

"When I cannot adjust to them, I try to adjust them to me. Does that explain it?"

"Oh, yes! That's a very good idea!" approved Claudio, smiling at such a strange method, and adding: "It seems that I have found in you a great counselor."

"Nothing of the sort. But you can count on me whenever I may be of help."

"Very well; start by lending me some of the books you said that you hold so dear."

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"Sure! But I must warn you that they cannot be read by mere curiosity. Right? Because what happened to me could happen to you. After several readings, I felt nothing but the desire to continue reading. Meanwhile life pursued its monotonous course. This life, that we so earnestly wanted to adorn with all the trimmings of ingenuity, continues to make our faces reveal the same anxiety that appears every time we are disappointed by the futilities of the world."

"And in your opinion, what other way is there to read these books?"

"To tell you the truth, I cannot say. It's something that one learns when what is read generates such interest that one repeats the reading as many times as necessary for its content to be assimilated."

"Forgive my bluntness, but this seems quite obvious."

"You are right. It is obvious that I wasn't very clear. What I meant

to say was that there are things that need to be read more with the heart than with the mind.”

“Why did you say a while ago that you hold on to these books as life itself?”

Patricio’s face lit up as if suddenly, colorful images and memories, that emerged from the depth of his being, like the burning flame of a most intimate feeling, saturated him with inexpressible happiness. How many times he had wished to see Claudio share his feeling! This is why joy filled his heart as he opened up to Claudio:

“There are things, my son, that can only be explained within oneself. I familiarized myself, so to speak, with the thought of the author of these books, and was able to discover in their pages many things that I had neither seen nor understood before. The fact was that, in my eagerness to absorb everything in a simple reading, the best and most valuable parts of its content escaped me. It took great effort to understand that it was I the one, who had to live in its pages and combine the personal formulas that would serve as my guide in the future. This is why I hold on so dearly to those books since, due to the reasons I have just mentioned, I consider them a part of my life. And now, if I may, I will get you the book you requested.”

Claudio sat on the bed waiting for Patricio to return. The butler’s words, filled with common sense and to which he had given little value until that moment, were still ringing in his ears. But this sensation lasted only for a short time. As he waited, he picked up a magazine and began turning its pages inattentively.

“Here you are. This is one of my favorites,” said Patricio entering the room with a thick book under his arm, which showed signs of continuous usage.

Claudio took the book, read its title and then the author's name. What a surprise! It was a book by Ebel de Sándara, the same author that Marcos had mentioned.

He felt that he would read this book with great interest. He emptied his glass and dismissed his servant with these kind words:

"It seems, Patricio, that you and I will carry on many discussions on this subject."

In spite of the late hour, Claudio managed to read several pages. Worn out, he placed the book on his bedside table and slept late next morning.

After two days of involuntary absence, Claudio knocked at Griselda's door.

He waited there attentive to hear the slightest noise from the latch. He tightened the knot of his tie once more for reassurance of his impeccability. Soon, he was crossing the hall as the door closed behind him once again.

"The time I spend away from you seems to get longer and longer," he told Griselda tenderly.

As a response to that phrase – always fresh no matter how many times it has been pronounced – she gave him a sweet look in which Claudio saw reflected identical thoughts.

After the usual reiteration of their promises of love, which is typical of people in love, they addressed other issues that were pertinent to both of their lives.

"I don't know what has come over me during these past few days..." Claudio said bewildered. "At times, I feel deepen in me an irresistible anxiety to know what hidden designs weave each human life. There are moments in which I experience something strange, as if the nebulous spaces of unconsciousness opened up inside me. I, then, seem to perceive mild radiances through its cracks as if a strange light were shining in my soul with brilliant flashes of hope and promise."

"You are truly inspired!" exclaimed Griselda, happy to hear him speak that way. "You are my inspiration, darling, and if I happen to weaken at times along the difficult journey that lies ahead in my life, the incentive of your love will lift me and I will walk like he, who has found within himself this mysterious energy that moves one towards the loftiest levels of thinking and feeling."

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"I can see now how profound was the repercussion on you of what you told me last night. I would go as far as saying this, Claudio: I have the impression that something very similar to the issues that have been worrying you for some time is getting closer to your life. Just imagine how much joy is in my heart to know that there is someone in this world capable of enlightening us on such an important and difficult matter. Now you must tell me – she added after a brief pause – what was your impression of Patricio's book?"

"Good, Griselda, very good. I was extremely encouraged to see that the cognitions contained in it reveal the existence of new and immeasurable horizons. I've felt more than once a psychological need, a kind of yearning evolving within me without my being aware of its cause or realizing how to calm or

resolve it. On the other hand, I now see a series of circumstances that, by affinity, seem to explain it.”

Under the influence of such thoughts, that went back and forth from one mind to the other unobstructed, Griselda expressed in a moment of lucid enthusiasm:

“As you see Claudio, there is something in the depths of our being that manifests itself, at a specific moment, as a pressing need; something like a magnet, which seems to attract human beings, ideas or things to the apex of our objectives, in order to help us in the future.”

“It is truly an anticipation of happiness,” replied Claudio, elatedly “to see how our hearts converge into these spiritual aspirations and how our reasoning coincides even in the most subtle evaluations. This makes me discard the fear of misunderstandings that so often occur when such a communion does not exist.”

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“Oh! Neither you nor I could ever allow our life to become an entangled web of discords and dissensions.”

“Certainly not,” agreed Claudio enthusiastically. “Because we know only too well that, after the struggle, this web ends up as a heap of loose threads.”

As usual, Dona Laura interrupted them by coming to greet Claudio; this time, she contributed with similar points of view as those of the young couple. Moved by something related to the degree of moral and spiritual level that human life must achieve, she said with sadness:

“If I were twenty years younger, I’d do so many things!

“There is always time, ma’am! You still have so much life in you!

"True, but I still am sorry that I have not taken better advantage of my years. Age makes one move ever more slowly, and one's mind does not respond with the same speed or with the necessary lucidity when we try to explain to ourselves the reasons for the things that happen to us."

"However, we must admit that with patience and effort we become capable of reaching, if not everything, at least what is of interest to us."

"How do you know?" asked Griselda

"By simple deduction. If during our youth we were able to explain clearly what had intrigued us as children, it is logical to think that experience and knowledge will explain everything else."

"You may be partially right, but do not forget that it is preferable to know things in advance, when we still have time to correct many errors, than later when time has aged us."

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"Indeed! There lies the unquestionable merit of dedicating our efforts, at an early age, towards the search for knowledge. Nevertheless, Mrs. Laguna, I think that we can achieve a lot, even at a mature age, if we realize that any time is a good time to strive to increase our knowledge."

At some point of the conversation, Dona Laura apologized to Claudio for not having inquired about his father's health.

"He is well," he answered.

And, as if he suddenly noticed that he had forgotten to mention something, he added:

"Did you know that Aunt Fermina visited us at home yesterday?"

"With Nora?" asked Dona Laura.

"No, with Uncle Tulio. They were very conciliatory."

"Everything is clear now, isn't it?" asked Griselda, taking it for granted.

"With them, yes... quite clear."

"Will you then go to their party tomorrow?"

"I couldn't get out of it, but I will only stay a short while, just the necessary."

The arrival of Dr. Laguna, who was returning from his daily activities, signaled to Claudio that it was time for him to leave and this, as always, made him and Griselda sad.

Don Roque was about to have dinner when Claudio entered the room.

"Aren't you going to Fermina's party?" he asked his son who took his usual place at the table.

"Yes, father, I will go, but later on. As you know, I plan to stay only for a short while."

"Do as you please, son."

"And how about you?"

"I have already informed Fermina that I was not planning to attend, giving my ailment as an excuse. I did, however, send Nora a nice gift."

As planned, Claudio arrived at his relatives' party close to midnight, and as he stepped inside he was greeted with affection and cordiality, especially by Don Tulio, that greatly reduced the misgivings he still felt. Claudio then went to the living room to wish a happy birthday to Nora who, upon seeing him, left her group to talk to him.

"I am so glad you could come!" she said in a sad tone after greeting him. "You cannot imagine how sorry I am for everything that has happened."

"It's not important, Nora. Forget it."

The young girl lowered her eyes to escape Claudio's gaze and he was astonished by this attitude that she rarely had.

"You came so late!" she said, like someone who says the first thing that comes to mind to evade an embarrassing situation.

"Yes, I did. I stayed at Griselda's longer than I expected."

Pretending not to have heard nor understood the intentional hint, Nora turned her head sideways as if focusing on some small detail of the party.

"Do you care to dance?" she asked Claudio gently, after a brief pause.

"I will be honored because this is your day", he answered.

"So let us dance."

In spite of Claudio's impeccable behavior, courtesy and amiability, Nora felt his subtle coolness and reserve, and perhaps because this attitude inhibited her or because she could not benefit from this opportunity, she said with a shy gesture that she needed to speak with him alone and urgently.

The request had an enigmatic effect on him. Highly cautious and extremely surprised, he stared into her eyes searching for any hidden motive or second intention concealed in this request. However, she gently lowered her head, and by skillfully avoiding his stare, she let her eyes roam aimlessly as if absorbed by a great concern.

Nora got lucky as she was rescued from this difficult moment by the arrival of Maria Emilia and young Luciano who were near them and by other couples that soon formed

a large group. In the midst of this hustle and bustle of young and enthusiastic people, Dona Fermina arrived to fetch her daughter who was obliged to leave the group for a moment.

Watching her walk away, Claudio identified a great change in the young girl. To her credit, he found her to be extremely simple in her ways and was very surprised to note the absence of that vanity and artificiality that had always deprived her of the natural values she possessed. Her only attire was a plain white dress that molded her body. There were no dazzling jewels or any other detail that was not plain. Even the characteristics of the empty childish and inconsistent woman seemed to have vanished from her.

Next to Claudio stood the authoritarian Maria Emilia who, from time to time, threw expressive glances at him. Fortunately, this only lasted for a few moments as the couples, who did not miss a dance, left him alone giving him time to reflect on what he had observed, and on the probable motive of Nora's request to speak to him in private.

As everybody was having a good time, no one seemed to have noticed when both passed through the rooms and corridors, away from the main party. Both walked in silence and next to each other. They finally entered a small isolated room where Nora, sitting on the sofa began crying in a supreme attempt to move him.

Claudio stood in front of her pretending indifference.

"Why are you crying? Has something serious happened?" he asked, trying not to reveal his natural disposition to share her grief.

"Oh, Claudio, I am suffering so much!" she answered in a lament.

"I don't understand. Explain yourself!" he asked, moved but hesitant.

"You know why I am suffering so much. It is because of you! Because I love you!" she whispered, raising her face, now more beautiful on account of her tears, and looking at Claudio with pleading eyes.

What happened next was totally extraneous to his conscience. This irresistible seduction was practically leaving him defenseless. Unwillingly, for a few moments, he lost the notion of what he was doing and, with a trembling hand, he caressed Nora's silky hair and sat next to her. Skillful in such manipulations, she then cuddled up against his chest and embraced his neck with both arms in an attitude of total surrender.

150 In his desperate inner struggle, Claudio tried in vain to break the fascination that paralyzed him. Not one of his efficient reflections made the previous day appeared to defend him from this eclipse that was blotting out his reasoning. He felt the power of a force that was superior to his own, while captivating thoughts of the most antagonistic origins dominated his mind, pushing him to act:

"She is yours, kiss her! Enjoy this happy moment!" they said instigating him further. "Come on, man, make up your mind! What is the harm in it? One cannot be so morally inclined at your age. Go! One kiss, just one kiss! Do you think it can affect your life? That's ridiculous! If you don't do it, she will hate you forever. It would be better to let her keep a good impression of you!"

All this went through Claudio Arribillaga's mind with such speed that in a few seconds he was annihilated. The psychological collapse produced a virtual annulment of his senses. His eyes

could only see two red, smooth and voluptuous lips that were anxiously searching for his. He still made a supreme effort. He wanted to get up, escape, but his strength failed him and then he kissed Nora with unrestrained impulse.

Other thoughts assailed him and began to agitate his mind. Having satisfied this fleeting intoxication and the ardor of his feverish passion, the same force that had manacled his will and annulled his mind elevated him and made him experience other sensations. The delicate and sensual perfume that enveloped Nora had ceased to produce the disturbing effect it had at the beginning, and suddenly, free from the voluptuous emotion, he felt lucid and himself again. Like someone examining his pockets after being robbed, he searched for what remained of that passionate moment to which he was led, in which neither his feelings nor his desires participated, and found that nothing was left.

Dazzled, Claudio did not know at first what to say, but as he recovered, he realized then that he was in a difficult situation. He abandoned the sofa, and now in full possession of his senses, he said to Nora:

“What was your intention in bringing me here?”

“To give you proof of my love.”

“Did I need a demonstration of this kind? Don’t you know that I love Griselda and that I will never give her up? Why do you insist on putting me in this situation? Please, Nora, do not seek impossible things.”

Nora, who maintained her calm up to this moment, could not hide her displeasure any longer:

"If that is so, then I can only think that you wanted to take advantage of my weakness. Don't deny it!"

"Never! I assure you that even I don't know what came over me."

"What an excuse!"

And, looking at him disdainfully, she added:

"Does that mean you still prefer her?"

"I already told you: it is settled, and not even death can make me change my mind."

"Very well." answered the young girl as she approached a mirror and began to touch up her makeup.

"Aren't you angry?" he asked deeply concerned.

"No! I have no reason to be. Maybe I am to blame for everything that happened."

152 Claudio was about to tell her something related to the causes that make it impossible for them to be closer, but decided to keep his silence.

They left the room and returned to the party, each one coming from a different side. They soon mingled in the groups leaving behind the episode that, thanks to Nora's cautious measures, had passed unnoticed.

Claudio thought it improper to leave Nora so abruptly, and invited her to dance. She accepted. Still under the influence of their emotional states, they both followed the music like robots. Without looking straight at each other, they exchanged, however, a quick glance, and Claudio noticed two tears rolling down Nora's eyes. Touched by it, he gently whispered in her ear:

"Don't suffer, Nora. You'll soon find the man who will make you happy."

She kept silent, but no sooner was the dance over, she fled to her room in a hurry.

Claudio was left alone; he then sought refuge in the veranda where he sat down. From his position he contemplated a clear sky, full of stars that he could see between the leaves that climbed around the pillars, reaching the edge of the roof and fell back down like a curtain. He remained quiet for a while to recover his serenity.

Returning to the party room, he saw Maria Emilia.

"How despondent you are tonight!" she said, stopping him.

"You think so?"

"Not only me, it is the general comment around here."

"Frankly, Maria Emilia, I don't like to be the focus of attention," he said, smiling. "No doubt, those who make such remarks have a lot of time to spare."

"You do realize that I am included."

"Sorry, I wasn't referring to you."

"Thanks for excluding me. What about Nora? I have been looking for her for quite a while and cannot find her. By the way, have you noticed how sad she is?"

"Yes, a little sad. I suppose that it is not due to a lack of entertainment."

"Oh, what good are entertainments when one is sad? Especially when one is persecuted by the memories of a love..."

"Are you referring to your own experience?" he asked, dodging the arrow.

"Come on! Does one have to be a participant to know such things?"

"True. But one must also know how to discard such memories when they become ghosts."

"This is easy when one is surrounded by a love that smiles at you. It is not so for others."

"It certainly is not my case..."

"Look who seeks protection! The one who needs it the least."

"Listen here, Maria Emilia, this is the first time I take things seriously."

"Serious with one, but not with others?"

"I didn't mean it this way, but obviously when a second intention is added to something said, it is nearly impossible to reach an understanding."

"You are right, Claudio," she answered, giving in with the obvious intent to end the conversation.

He pretended not to notice it.

"Since we have come to an agreement," he said "will you dance with me?"

Maria Emilia refused, pretending to have a promised to dance with somebody else, and left Claudio with a friendly smile.

Saddened by the night's events, Claudio decided to leave. On his way out, he met Luciano and asked him to go with him to say goodnight to his uncle.

They were about to leave when Nora approached him.

"Leaving already?" she asked in a natural tone.

"Yes," he answered stretching his hand.

The young girl accompanied them for a few steps and discreetly handed Claudio a small envelope.

"I hope that your romance won't keep you from visiting us as before," she said.

Eager to enjoy the last moments of the party, she returned to her guests. She felt she had put an end to a matter that had been tormenting her until then.

Sitting in his car, Claudio took out a card with an exotic fragrance from

the envelope. In tiny letters, which seemed to have been written nervously, it said:

"At the very moment that we could have been so happy, I felt you were absent. Now, I finally realize that we will not belong to each other. Good luck. Affectionately,

Nora"

He exhaled a sigh of relief. Far from expressing resentment, these lines restored his tranquility.

The next day, Claudio met with his father in the study and discussed his future plans concerning the possible dates for his engagement. He also reviewed in detail the wedding he wanted to hasten.

Patricio suddenly interrupted them saying that Marcos Gorostiaga was on the phone asking for Claudio. He took the call and was surprised to hear from his friend that Mr. de Sándara had arrived and that he and his father had had the opportunity to see him.

Visibly content, Claudio hung up the phone. He immediately gave Don Roque the news, adding that Marcos had invited him to his house the next day for a dinner party that his father was holding in honor of the guest:

"Mr. Malherbe and many of my friends will attend."

"Very good, very good..." agreed Don Roque. "These are good relationships that will help you become familiarized with a category of cognitions that I presume will be beneficial to you."

After a pause, he added:

"I've always liked Marcos. He's a young man who reflects and who has convictions."

"True, father, I hold him amongst my dearest friends."

Don Roque paused to look for one of the papers on his desk and then continued the pleasant conversation he was having with his son:

"Everything that relates to the knowledge of our spirit attracts me. This has always given me real pleasure in life. This was also your mother's preference in which she sought orientation by reading selected books. More than once, I saw her concerned and even saddened for not having achieved, by cultivating her spirit, what she had set for herself."

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"You never told me about this."

"I must have mentioned it a few times, but there are things to which we remain indifferent until, at a certain moment in life, they acquire an uncommon value. And do you know why? Precisely on account of the emergence of one circumstance or another that awakens in us an interest we did not feel before. This is what is happening to you now."

"You have no idea how touched I am by what you just said concerning you and mother. It explains in a way my own inclinations and inquietudes. I would even say that Griselda is now to me what mother was to you. She likes it when we address these topics."

"I am glad, son. Griselda's attitude pleases me and I think that you will be happy with her. As far as I am concerned, I will be very pleased if both of you were to come and live with me after you got married, and kept me company for the rest of my life."

“Oh, father! I am sure that your offer will make her very happy, and she will know how to appreciate the affection it contains.”

Late that afternoon, Claudio was getting ready to visit Griselda. However, an internal conflict was bothering him: while on one hand he was eager to see her and convey as soon as possible the pleasant news, on the other, he experienced other sensations that mortified his feelings. What had happened the night before had kept him morally inhibited. He had consulted his conscience several times, but as he did not detect any recrimination from that end, he realized that he was facing one of those psychological predicaments when the conscience keeps quiet and reserves its sentencing so that one's own discernment would use it in moments of balanced maturity. It must have been so, since his reasoning could not fault him now without being ridiculed. “The ephemeral can never harm the permanent” he thought “and my love for Griselda is well beyond a mere slip up imposed on me by these circumstances that evidently excluded my feelings.” As he came to the end of his reflections, which he kept to himself, Claudio finally recovered his serenity, after being so fearful that it would fail him when answering Griselda's logical questions.

As for Griselda, she would be guarded against the memory of that night's restlessness that had kept her awake. A thought of fear, invading her mind by psychic induction perhaps, had created the apprehensive uneasiness. Nevertheless, she woke up happy, and the sole idea of seeing her beloved Claudio again filled all the hours of her day.

When Claudio arrived, he tried to play down any reference to the party, focusing entirely on the discussion he had had with

his father concerning the wedding, and his wishes that they both come to live with him. Griselda could not be happier, and she mentioned how pleased she was with Don Roque's request, since she had been worried about his living alone. Furthermore, she was glad at the perspective of livening up with her presence and affection the emptiness that the absence of a woman created in his household.

"I could not expect anything less from you, darling! I have no doubt that we will build a happy future together."

"This is what I hope, Claudio, although I know that most of the responsibility will be mine."

158 "Obviously our marriage will bring major changes in our life, as in all new situations. But for us it will be a gratifying and innovative experience since the simple fact of introducing such an interesting change in our daily routine will generate endless joy. Don't you agree?"

"Oh, yes, Claudio. Especially if we are able to always make these changes coincide with our purpose of being happy."

"I think that the key to happiness lies precisely in this."

The most delicate and encouraging hopes flowed from Claudio's heart that night. He had found the woman of his dreams. What more could he ask for? Griselda excelled, he was sure of that. She was spiritually strong and capable of suffering and forgiving. "These beautiful qualities – he thought – confirm the sensitive capability that is never denied to a woman." And, as he remembered that not all women expressed such qualities to the point of being a virtue, he left his soul to enjoy the delights of the inexpressible gifts received from heaven.

As he was going to bed, hours later, Claudio picked up Patricio's book, from which he had already read some parts and decided to stop at the first point of interest. With this purpose in mind, he began to leaf through it slowly, page after page, until he found what he seemed to be looking for: "This shows that the human being has the privilege to be born twice. The first time, through the assistance of the biological laws that determine the genetic act, and the second, by the convergence of two forces: one spiritual, metaphysical, and the other emerging from the individual's psychic potential, both attracted by affinity."

He continued to skim through the pages, and as if his attention was still focused on what he had just read, he returned to the same point and started to read it again: "The first birth, or in other words, the physical birth, is conditioned to substance; the second one, which we will call *above-common*, is a privilege of the human race. It occurs by the awakening of one's conscience that responds to the call of cognitions that activate and enrich it, allowing the human being to emerge as an independent entity from his biological life. This, therefore, constitutes the mental, moral, psychological and spiritual life of the human being."

Claudio was not able to clearly understand the contents of these statements, and trying hard to grasp their meaning, he stopped to reflect: "It is certain – he ended up saying – that each one can come to this world and live in it like animals, except for the refinement that is proper to our human condition, including

the possession of an intellect, which, once activated, allows us to be educated, cultured, sociable and industrious. I understand that all this pertains to the first life mentioned by the author, but, what about the second one? I suppose that it must relate to a new way of thinking, of feeling and of experiencing life. Wouldn't something similar be happening inside me? Wouldn't this be related to that palpitation I have felt for some time, that inquietude to know everything concerning the spirit? Spirit... Here is a word that is often considered with indifference and even with contempt. Some believe to have understood it. Others use it to give prestige to their beliefs. Is there someone who truly knows what is concealed within the folds of the concept that interpenetrates its essence?"

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Having ended his meditation, he closed the book and got ready to sleep but still managed to speak to Patricio who had just entered the room to complete a last minute chore. He said:

"I find your book quite interesting. I'll keep it a while longer, if you don't mind."

In response to the butler's consent, Claudio mentioned the appointment he had for the next day:

"Do you know that I'm going to meet its author tomorrow?"

"That's impossible!"

"It's true. He is passing through Buenos Aires and I am going to meet him at Marco's house."

"How I envy you!"

"I think that meeting him will be of great value to me. I am eager to clarify certain things that are a mystery."

And yet, Claudio was not unaware that to dominate such topics as the ones he was interested in, it was necessary to

have a level of experience and studies of proven efficiency, all of which related to self-knowledge, as stated by the author in his book.

Justo Vega Monteros and Miguel Angel Garmendia were sitting that night in the large lobby of Mr. Gorostiaga's residence. Later on they were joined by Salvador Mariani and Marcos who were close by talking, and then by Claudio and Norberto Aguirre who had just arrived.

Marcos immediately announced that de Sándara was in the study with his father, Malherbe and Don Javier Moudet, a college professor and a friend of the latter. A discussion had barely begun when a servant announced that Mr. Gorostiaga was expecting them. A few moments later, they were all introduced to the visitor.

From that moment on, Mr. de Sándara became the focal point of the meeting.

As previously described by Marcos, de Sándara was tall, alert and nimble. He seemed to be in his late thirties. He had a light tanned complexion, dark and shiny hair and well proportionate features. His bright and expressive brown eyes were surrounded by a light shadow.

Judging by the attitude of the participants at that moment, one could say that he conveyed a pleasant impression.

In his customary serious demeanor, but with utmost courtesy, Marcos quickly said:

“Mr. de Sándara, here are the friends I spoke to you about, and who are eager to listen to what you have to say. They relish, as I do, the pleasures of the spirit.”

“It pleases me to meet, during my world travels, young people with lofty aspirations who are eager to investigate areas well beyond the horizon,” replied the guest clearly and frankly while scrutinizing them.

He may have detained his eyes for a few more seconds on Arribillaga for a deeper observation because the latter experienced the sensation of having been submitted to a radiological examination. Even so, Claudio answered firmly:

162 “We are moved by a deeply felt need, Mr. de Sándara.”

“It is a constant concern,” said Justo.

“It’s better this way, since a simple curiosity wouldn’t favor an investigation that demands permanent interest and effort.”

They then moved on to the living-room, which was big and spacious, richly furnished with refined taste, and where they all sat down to begin the meeting. Mr. Malherbe sat opposite the guest, who was flanked on each side by the owner of the house and Prof. Moudet, while all the young participants filled the remaining seats around the visitor.

Within the group, Malherbe seemed to be the eldest on account of his graying hair and some wrinkles that ran across his face from side to side, which became more pronounced or disappeared according to the mobility of his facial muscles when he spoke. He was thin and of medium height. His distinguished

composure and demeanor gave the impression he was a man of the world. As one got to know him better, one was certain of being in the presence of an honorable and righteous person.

It was he who started the conversation which began naturally and smoothly as if this recent friendship had developed a long time ago. Whiskey and cigars were offered and Gorostiaga repeated once more his regrets that his wife, who was traveling with their daughters, was not present to better attend to their guests.

And then, the host asked the visitor to select one of his favorite topics to present to the group.

"Truly, I don't have any specific preference," he replied. "Anyone is gratifying when it can be beneficial to those who listen."

"Your conception of life is broad and interesting" expressed Malherbe "since everything in it relates to the problems that human beings face in the struggle against adversity, and in the search for the eternal truths. It is unnecessary to say, therefore, that whatever issue you select, it will bring forth something related to this solution which, one way or another, we all need and hope for. Furthermore, I am aware of the depth of your cognitions and of your skill when presenting them, and this is the reason for our being eager to listen to you."

"When we travel along a road, we must be careful not to get blinded by the headlights," replied de Sándara, smiling and adding courteously: "I cannot deprive my good friend Malherbe of the satisfaction of expressing a spontaneous compliment, but it's my duty to consider it as a sign of respect, never as flattery."

“My statement was a sincere and enthusiastic assessment of your merits, Mr. de Sándara, and I would be grateful if my words did not reach you in a distorted way. A flattery from my part would implicitly carry a desire to see it accepted, which is incompatible with my reasoning since I think that, if it were accepted, the area of one’s spiritual dignity would diminish and harm, to a certain point, the concept of whatever our aptitudes were able to convey.”

De Sándara smiled, and responding with a nod of approval, turned towards the young group saying:

“I would like to know some of your inquietudes or what intellectual preferences have attracted you most.”

164 Marcos expressed his desire to know something concerning the real function of the spirit in life. The whole group agreed in unison.

“And what is the reason for this interest?” inquired the guest.

“Perhaps because of the mystery that surrounds this issue” said Arribillaga.

“The investigations carried out by the most prominent researchers have yet to satisfy the logical demands of this question that has been posed so insistently by the human sensitivity. Everything related to the spirit is still an inaccessible mystery to man’s intelligence; not even the most enlightened men have been able to come close to it.”

“I’ll then take your request into consideration,” said de Sándara “ and I trust that my thesis on the matter, which is so elusive to the intellect, will contribute to chase away the shadows that obstinately veil it.”

After a pause, he continued:

“To begin with, I will say that in the advanced scholarly circles, where culture reaches its highest expressions, that is, in art, science, literature and philosophy, the spirit has been, and always is invariably, man’s main assistant, even though it remains a mystery in the eyes of the world. Occasionally, and in rare exceptions, it has been acknowledged as the legitimate author of some extraordinary works. Credit has always been attributed to the intelligence, the genius, when man is able to achieve the halo of glory. It could be said that intelligence and genius are part of the spirit; that they are its most eloquent manifestation in those lives that have transcended ordinary conditions. I agree, but it is also certain that in no case has any trace been found to indicate the presence of a precise and total consciousness of the activities of the spirit or, better still, the consciousness of its direct intervention in the development of the ideas until the final objective is reached. There is no doubt that in this case one has been in contact with the spirit, although involuntarily, without having been, as I said, totally conscious of the fact. Not even the philosophers, who sometimes proceeded with their work as expected, could state that they have understood it consciously”.

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De Sándara paused for a moment to savor his cigar and then added:

“In fact, what the spirit wants is to fully and consciously govern our life; and so, as long as we do not reach the conviction that we must comply with such benevolent demand, it will be very difficult to undertake the task of self-improvement with the possibility of success. Physiology is to the life of the physical

body what psychology, exalted to its transcendental finality, is to the life of the spirit. Consequently, the fact that the spirit remains estranged to what is part of its own nature constitutes an aberration. The three systems that form the human psychology – the mental, the sensitive and the instinctive – must revolve around its mother-axis or central-magnet that is the spirit. With its huge scope of activities and its immense extra-physical possibilities in the mental world, the intelligence is, whether we like it or not, the distinct psychic nerve of the spirit. However, I am obliged here to emphasize that, when the intelligence functions unconsciously, it is frequently annulled by mental inertia and affected in a direct form by ignorance. The case would be different when, induced by intimate and lofty yearnings, it succeeds to overcome the tenacious opposition of certain thoughts like the ones which produce doubt, indifference, pessimism and many others which block its magnificent mechanism. It is then that everything changes and is transformed in man's way of thinking and feeling. In short, the thoughts and feelings are elevated to a "new hierarchy", and cease to satisfy the earth's pleasures to seek the translucent loftiness of the superior world. It is at this time that the spirit begins to govern us confirming that it is far more accessible than we had supposed it to be. We, ourselves, had made it inaccessible by isolating it within our being in the most forgotten corner of our thinking and feeling.

"It is common practice," continued de Sándara "to allude to the spirit as if it were something abstract, and it's imagined as having no specific function at all. This occurs because, in fact, it has none for the ordinary man, as it does not have any for all

those who have not experienced its reality nor come to know its possible coexistence with the physical being. Generally, nobody attributes to the spirit any active participation in one's life, keeping it alienated as if it were a strange being, like a "guest of stone." In such a despicable situation, one will understand why its intervention in the facts that occur is nil. How many times have we heard that one is going to "entertain the spirit" when going to a concert, a play or to the movies. Obviously this is said with very good intentions but ignoring that the spirit does not seek mere entertainment but a lot more. The spirit seeks active and intense participation, as I said, in the human life that it animates."

"You are referring to the spirit as an absolutely tangible reality," said Justo. "This means there is the possibility of seeing this mystery dissipated, mystery which, up to now has been kept in the dark."

"Precisely! However, we should be aware that this mystery will continue to be as impenetrable as it has always been to whoever does not grasp the essence of its truth. We cannot speak of the spirit as being an inseparable part of our being if we are not able to consubstantiate ourselves with it. Similarly, we will never be able to advance along the rugged path of wisdom if we do not grant the spirit the essential role that it must play in our existence. We can, consequently, visualize how important it is to accomplish this objective, or in other words, to incorporate the spirit into the human institution called rational life."

Having interpreted that de Sándara's pause, at this point, was made to give the others an opportunity to intervene, Marcos

expressed his agreement on the concepts presented and was about to ask a question when his father, acknowledging the servant announcing that dinner was served, invited the group to the dining room. The interruption, however, did not prevent the conversation from proceeding with equal interest but in a milder form.

At the appropriate time and close to the end, Arribillaga, sitting opposite de Sándara, asked him:

“Your ideas impressed me a lot. I think it’s because their content seems to go beyond those commonly expressed.”

“It’s possible! Ideas form great families that spread throughout the world. They seek each other through the centuries with a fondness similar to human love. Many of them remain motionless due to the lack of an opportunity to be expressed, until the magic touch of a happy event reactivates them. The circumstance that brings them to life takes on, then, the character of reminiscence.”

“I presume this is what is now happening to me because it is in full agreement with my feelings. On the other hand, Mr. de Sándara, I must say that had I not heard your concepts, it would have been difficult for me to connect to such a remote possibility.”

Miguel Angel, who had some of his doubts clarified during the conversation, declared with satisfaction:

“I truly savored the dish that you’ve served us.”

“Oh! Were it not for the fear to exceed myself...” exclaimed Malherbe cheerfully, “I would ask our friend de Sándara to offer us a very special dessert.”

“And what better dessert,” he replied in the same tone of voice, “than the proof of having cared for our physical being

and our spiritual being at the same time. We have just given each one of them, their favorite food. When we give the spirit the care we usually only give to the body, we already satisfy it. And so, life expands the scope of its experiences, sensations and perspectives.”

As they walked back to the living room, the conversation revolved, with a touch of humor, around common issues and generalities, but once this cordial moment passed, they gradually returned to the topics they had interrupted. Malherbe spoke at length referring to his vast search for the truth and his constant investigations, which never led him to find the long awaited reward.

“Luckily,” he said in his closing remarks, “I was fortunate not to have lost my way in this tenacious search undertaken for many years. Perhaps this was due to the fact that I foresaw the dangers that exist in embracing one theory or another, or to blindly follow the paths advertised in those leaflets that fly around the world. This yearning for knowledge, which originates from one’s soul, makes us want to know everything. If, by chance, we brush something aside, the following interrogations pursue us: “What it is that? Can it be what we are looking for?” It is similar to what occurs when we hear the phone ringing and decide not to answer. “Who can it be? Why are they calling?” we wonder. And how many times has it occurred, whether in this case or another, that when we finally decide to answer the call, we find out it was a wrong number?”

“The true path cannot be found until after much wandering, much suffering and much waiting,” replied de Sándara.

“Must we consider, therefore, that suffering is an inevitable element in the search for truth and goodness?” inquired Justo.

“It will be easily understood that in order to appreciate goodness it is necessary to discover its reality in the midst of the thousand fictions that surround us. This means we must first experience what we believe to be good. Very well! If what we experience shows goodness to be only apparent and, after being deceived, we maintain a naïve attitude, we will certainly face new disappointments that will repeatedly depress us, inflicting each time a more and more powerful blow that will knock us out. After recovering our senses, we will find ourselves obliged to continue our march since life demands it. And this march will become progressively more painful. If however we were able to extract from these successive disappointments something useful for our understanding, we will undoubtedly be free of them in a short time. That alone will urge us forward until we find what is truly good, in other words, that which, far from getting us entangled in a fantasy, will invite us to savor it eternally.

“I’ve just demonstrated in graphic form,” continued de Sándara “that the suffering I referred to originates in ignorance, but I must also emphasize that this same selective process occurs through numerous facts that intervene in each human life. All occurrences ranging from those that bring us great pain and suffering to those that carry insignificant upsets disturb our mood on account of our ignoring their causes. They are commonly attributed to fatality, to destiny, to bad luck, but it still constitutes an error that, being made by many, is a consolation for fools.”

“I deduce from this statement that he who is knowledgeable would be exempt from suffering on account of his own knowledge. Is this true?” Miguel Angel asked hoping for de Sándara’s approval.

“Indeed” said the guest, “but not totally exempt of it. He who is knowledgeable also suffers although his afflictions are not due to the same causes. His own knowledge, which gives him the prerogative of gradually discarding such consequences that originated in ignorance, enables him to fight in very different and superior conditions against evil, against error or against fiction. And in this task man utilizes his cognitions in depth, perfects his technique and expands his will and his wisdom. As he conquers this victory, he also overcomes the unavoidable alternative of the “waiting” period that is implicit in suffering.

“Do you give any special meaning to the word ‘waiting?’” inquired Prof. Moudet, as De Sándara paused.

“Sometimes words contain a deeper interpretation and even a new meaning once they are linked to the individual’s inner reality or to the intimate demands of his nature as long as this does not imply, obviously, in changing their etymology or their meaning. To me, this word constitutes, in a certain way, a key that I don’t mind revealing. I have always considered “waiting” as a force that impels us to be conscious of what we do or how we behave, whenever we are compelled to endure a situation with expectation. When relegated to chance, this force becomes blind and, brings us, admittedly, cruel grief and sorrow. When we are faced with a waiting period, we must be fully conscious of its determining factors. What I mean by that is: we must know if it is an incidental waiting or a consequence of our will placed at the service of ideas or thoughts to which we have assigned a specific mission. In the first case, we must think, during the waiting period, about the means that could

contribute to prevent it from harming us, so that we do not get hurt, disturbed or see the projects we have determined for ourselves thwarted. In the second case, we must be aware that we are solely responsible for controlling the situation, which implies knowing that the “waiting” is the logical alternative of a process whose successful conclusion depends on us. This force that I have named “waiting” must here obey the firm dictates of one’s conscience and act according to the supreme objectives it holds. This means that man must guide this force by being in full control of his will, which will allow him to know also, with adequate anticipation, what the final results will be.

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“Thanks to the assimilation of the essential cognitions – the same ones I am placing within your reach at this moment – we are able to work out a type of mental trigonometry which will allow us to establish, with precision, the periods of time that mark our existence. Visualized from the prominent angle of its moral, spiritual and psychological structure, human life is, in my view, an uninterrupted succession of spaces of short durations, each broken down into three periods: the one used for planning, the one destined for action and the one that requires waiting.”

“Does this definition of life also include the life of an ordinary person?” Salvador asked.

“I am referring to the fecund lives, my friends. I doubt it that there are moments of more sublime greatness and of longer lasting positive effects than those lived while conceiving an idea or a project. Next comes the planning and the study of its execution, also a happy time in which we test our ability with its satisfying consequences produced by the future steps

to be achieved. And finally, comes the waiting, which marks progressively and methodically the development of the project until its final accomplishment. To precipitate the end of a project faster than necessary is to thwart its results. It is as if we remove an egg from the incubator before its time, damaging the normal process of the chick that would be born were it allowed to complete its process of gestation and development. Waiting must, therefore, be done intelligently, and as long as we have to submit to it, we must be vigilant to ensure that the initiated process is completed without any difficulty. Naturally, this presumes the need to quickly remove the problem that might arise so that the waiting does not become sterile.

“The good farmer,” illustrated de Sándara, “entrusts the future of his family to his crop while protecting himself against any eventual contingency by using the resources of his experience and knowledge. He, who expects to harvest the fruit of his talent and work, must occupy his time to create other ideas or put them to action with the aim of spreading out throughout his life numerous incentives and maintain the esthetical pleasures in a permanent and renewed spiritual flux. The man who doesn’t know how to wait or who only entrusts his future to chance, is unfortunate! The waiting, that blessed waiting, can be either a small or a large parenthesis that appears in our life! He, who does not learn to utilize these spaces of time intelligently, risks losing his patience.”

Moudet, then, expressed his interest in knowing the method used by de Sándara to contain his conceptions, which he considered to be vast and different. Calm, and with good

judgment, Moudet's inveterate habit of trying to obtain all types of references and details on matters that interested him, also gave the wrong impression of wanting to absorb things effortlessly.

I do not use any method to obtain my conceptions," de Sándara replied "but I do use the method to teach."

"And what does it consist of?"

"Of simply infusing in those who learn an internal discipline of steel to manage and practice cognitions that transcend common knowledge."

"Evidently, the possession of such cognitions leads one to presume a particular form of teaching."

"The possession of many such cognitions, my friend Moudet, does in fact suggest the existence of a system for their use and application that also requires a clear discernment to sustain that system. In short, the method consists in the ability to use these cognitions in a scientific and conscious manner whether for one's own use or to help others to adopt them."

"I agree," Moudet insisted, "but where does the essence of these cognitions come from?"

"From life and from the world. The essence is extracted from it and serves to elaborate the cognitions that, in turn, give one's intelligence an uncommon power of action and vision."

"I understand, but how was this orientation, for example, generated in you and on what fundamental principles are your ideas based on?"

"You will forgive me, professor, but I cannot answer your question without violating a duty of loyalty and respect towards my own conscience. It constitutes a secret that cannot be

violated. And it is so for the simple reason that nobody, except oneself, can admit and understand its reality. Nevertheless, I will try to answer your question, although partially, without deviating from such reasons. If we start out from the correct premise that each person is the result of his own effort, we are in fact proclaiming that man is the heir of his own self. This being so, we can easily conclude that the one who takes custody of this inheritance and penetrates into it throughout time is one's own spirit. Consequently, when the spirit takes over the control of one's life, the high level of development reached by one's intelligence must obey the influences that originated in same spirit.

“To clarify further, I will now present an illustration somewhat related to the topic under discussion. Let us consider the attitude of a person whom we would be very willing to help financially, yet he, although urgently needing this help, refuses to accept it unless his benefactor explains either the origin of his fortune which would now allow him to help him, or by which means he has developed such a fortune. Even though this does not exactly reflect our case, it is not entirely apart from it either. It does, however, prompt the pertinent reflection that one who builds a fortune knows that multiple factors intervene in this process and, in spite of its importance, he prefers to keep it to himself as a private matter. Should a doctor submit to the demands of a patient, who, as a condition to take the prescribed medication, would have to be told ahead of time how the chemist discovered the formula, how the ingredients were prepared and how their

chemicals reacted? After this digression, I will say that the riches of one's intelligence, when innate, respond to factors of one's own inheritance, which is the result of an evolutionary process followed by the spirit. Who does one, who studies for a profession, inherit his knowledge and diploma from if not from himself? Surely, he does not inherit them from his parents. He inherits them from himself, from his effort, from his constancy and enthusiasm. Why then wouldn't the superior developments of one's intelligence obey the same law? Even though this may seem unlikely, it does justify, in a way, the reservations I referred to a few moments ago."

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"What you said is clear and convincing to me," said Malherbe. "Such riches are those we discover throughout a man's life and work, and that shape the activity of his thoughts which mature after he conceives objectives that animate his efforts."

"Now I understand", exclaimed Prof. Moudet, with satisfaction, "what the starting point of your orientation is because he, who has in his inherited assets the cognitions that you possess, already carries this orientation."

As he then noticed that de Sándara was standing up as if to end the visit, he added:

"You were very kind to answer my questions, and even though I am not very skilled in interpreting your concepts, the explanations given were clear and accessible."

"I was only striving to foster a real spiritual link between us," he replied, bowing as a sign of courtesy.

Moments later, they said good night.

After thanking Mr. de Sándara for his participation in that evening's discussion, the host said:

"Will we have the honor of seeing you again?"

"I hope we will have other opportunities," he replied. And, as he cordially held out his hand, he added: "Mr. Malherbe will inform you when it will be possible for us to meet again. I, too, look forward to repeating this meeting which will allow me to renew such a pleasant and honorable relationship."

It was approximately two o'clock in the morning when Arribillaga returned home, after leaving his friends.

Patricio was napping in an armchair and had not yet retired for the night. He was startled by Claudio's footsteps and said he was waiting to see if Claudio needed anything.

"Well, now! How diligent you've become! exclaimed the young man pretending not to have noticed the subtlety.

Patricio felt embarrassed, but noticing Claudio's kind attitude, he recovered his composure and looked at him. Their eyes met and they exchanged warm glances of mutual understanding.

Claudio began to undress while he told the butler, as a compensation for his having waited up, some of the things he wished to know.

"I can assure you, Patricio that I have returned from this meeting extremely satisfied. As I listened to de Sándara, I felt as if something

awakened in the depth of my conscience. His words revived my eagerness to get to know the world he referred to in his books, which becomes more inaccessible as one attempts to reach it with the whim of our vehemence. You know, I had the impression that he, himself, was a herald of this incorporeal world. I won't even comment on the precision of his concepts and the depth of his thoughts since I have already mentioned them, after reading his books."

"I am so happy that it turned out that way!" exclaimed the valet, unable to hide his joy. And he added, discreetly: "Can I get you something?"

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All Claudio wanted was to rest. He thanked his servant and got ready for bed, promising to elaborate on the subject the following day. Nevertheless, sleep was elusive. Without summoning them, the words he had heard that night were vivid in his mind and kept coming back to him. He acknowledged their effect in this new stirring sensation that was seething within him and elevating his spirit. He compared them mentally to the waters of Juventus, which left the energized sensation of light shed on the souls of those who immersed in them. No sooner had the vigor of his physical senses subsided that he felt being transported to the mental world, this metaphysical space next to which legions of souls struggle desperately, in vain, to enter its huge gates through which only the spirit that was capable of transcending on earth the essential forms of life, enjoyed unimaginable treatments

Even though Claudio's spirit did not have the required conditions to achieve this unexpected ethereal excursion, in this exceptional situation he was able to do it. Once awake, his memory was barely able to retain a few vague notions of it. This is what happens to those whose conscience lacks preparation.

The vigil, by reactivating again one's senses, closes the circuit of

one's intelligence that was opened by the action of the spirit. The transcendent memory, which acts during dreams, is eclipsed, darkening in such a way the mental film that the images become blurred if not totally extinguished. Moreover, when the soul cultivates during its vigil the excellences of its superior nature, the mental devices become undoubtedly more agile during these psychic expansions allowing such experiences to be remembered.

Upon waking up, Claudio had the intuition that the enigmatic dreams, which appeared as reminiscences, in very short fragmented designs, occurred in the area close to his conscience and were very much related to what he had heard from Mr. de Sándara the previous night.

Man does not stop to think what secret designs reign over his mind while he sleeps and ignores what it is that, without any intervention of his will, accomplishes wonders with his psychic being, making him sometimes fly like a bird, other times go through impenetrable walls, or hold, once in a while a king's scepter or a wizard's magic wand.

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A few days later, Claudio had the opportunity to see Mr. de Sándara again. This time it was Malherbe who invited them to his house for the meeting.

In his modern apartment, Malherbe welcomed the participants offering them a quiet and pleasant environment to meet and talk. There, around Mr. de Sándara, in attentive expectations, were the

same people who surrounded him a few days before, with the addition of Augustin and some of Malherbe's friends.

"Allow me, Mr. de Sándara," Claudio was heard saying in the heat of the conversation "I would like to ask a question: Do you assign any specific purpose to the characters created in your novels?"

"It is the same that can be said of my conception of life, of the human being and of the things I consider important for the exercise of our mental and moral aptitudes. I have stated this purpose in all my books and make it evident at every opportunity."

"How do you conceive and articulate the plot of your novels?" Arribillaga inquired again.

180 "The world reflected in my novels is only a fragment of my small universe. The life and movements of their characters acquire through its fiction an effective reality that obeys a plan of vast and 'sui generis' originality aimed at the superior re-education of the human spirit. This being my life's main objective, I make sure that everything contributes to its achievement including the novels that, as I said, are part of said plan.

"Can we then deduce that your ideas originate from a metaphysical inspiration?" Mr. Gorostiaga asked.

"Indeed. There is, my friends, a wonderful world, a mental world, that is, one in which the creating thought lives and acts, and where the great ideas of the universal mind proliferate. I have detected in it more than one of the mysteries that preoccupy the human mind. And it was precisely while I was contemplating this world that I was able to prepare the cognitions that are destined to rehabilitate the souls, not only to contemplate this metaphysical reality but also to integrate it. All my thoughts, as

you can see, wherever they manifest themselves, are related to the universal life palpitating steadily in human beings. Whether in my books or in direct contact with people, these thoughts always have the same purpose. If something makes me different from other writers, it is precisely that.”

“In the small world, I repeat, that is reflected in my novels, my will reigns. The particles of my creation are sustained by my thought, exactly as it occurs in our physical world where, visibly or invisibly, God’s will reigns and where our minds are sustained by His universal thought. I instilled in the characters that inhabit the world of my creation, and who are depicted in my books, an unlimited confidence in the secrets that stimulate life within or outside the corporeal existence, endowing them with the virtue of feeling it and living it in plenitude of conscience and spirit. I must also mention the deep affection I feel towards all the characters that my mind has produced and given birth to and in whom I imbued my ideas and thoughts.”

“They are the exact representation of what I accomplish with those I guide with my knowledge, hence their special significance. In this manner, I feel real pleasure in attenuating the faults committed by one or another of my characters, and, with good reason, simulating their noble actions. If I eventually have to reprimand one of them for misbehaving, I suffer with him thinking of the causes that led him to that. I then review his process in my conscience and discover that, in fact, the sanction was necessary and that, due to a superior reason, my attitude was justified. I then specifically dedicate my attention to him by following him through his insecure steps. When I succeed

in leading him once again on the right path, I experience an immeasurable joy, an indescribable happiness that moves me and makes me love him more every day. How many times have I wondered if this is not the same thing that God does with us!

“This means then,” Marco’s father said at this point, “that you introduce in the lives of your characters a process of psychological education similar to what you have just described?”

“Indeed! In addition to constituting man’s psychophysical and spiritual representation, these characters keep alive the thought of a superior evolution.”

“It is strange,” said Salvador “that many of the beings who animated the world of novels seem to be as real as the corporeal ones. We have seen several of them become as popular and highly acknowledged as illustrious beings of our earthly existence. In some cases, there seems to be no difference between these famous characters and the others, who have already left this world...”

“Frankly,” declared de Sándara, adding a cheerful expression to his words, “I would have preferred to be one of them than to live in obscure anonymity.” And looking at Salvador, he continued:

“Do you know why what you just mentioned happens? Because in the mental world, those beings who once were of flesh and blood mingled with those of pure spiritual essence. Some of them continue to live in that world, where our memory seeks them and ensures that they continue to be present for us.”

Eager to obtain new explanations and focusing his bright keen look on Mr. de Sándara, Prof. Moudet said:

“Since all your thoughts are directed towards a single objective, the characters you bring to life in your books logically possess the ability to exercise a great influence on readers. Very well. I would like to know whether these characters show the alternatives human beings must follow in their gradual evolution towards the knowledge pertaining to the superior levels of the life of the spirit.”

“Of course. These alternatives or episodes show the possible stages that will be presented to the human being as he decides to evolve consciously. While shaping their traits, their characteristics, their peculiarities and their qualities, I reaffirm in myself the conceptual power of the mental projections with which I animate the life of each one of these characters. So, while injecting into them a breath similar to the one that sustains human life, I shape archetypes which are accessible to any man or woman, even in their loftiest and most demanding aspirations. I am obviously referring to the case in which I raise the characters’ hierarchy without ever elevating them to unreachable heights.”

“When writing,” he went on, “I follow most of them throughout their life. Some lives are filled with abnegation and sacrifice and others are gorged by ambitions. The former accomplish great feats, the latter always hold perverse intentions. Suspicion, sometimes mixed with irony and contempt in strong overwhelming psychological reactions or the sarcastic gesture of malevolent individuals that simulate laughter, while chewing the bitter gum of misery, offer a useful contrast to highlight the undeniable reality of the values that the spirit of man can achieve during his passage on earth. The contrast between good and evil,

which offers the artist such great perspectives in the outline of its characteristics, allows me to use this recourse to strengthen the will of each human being in the struggle he must undertake to conquer the evil saboteur of human happiness. When faced with pessimism, rebellion, and negligence, sad frameworks that portray the inner states man goes through, I use my optimism, my enthusiasm and my effort, originated in my own conscience, to neutralize the pernicious effects of the disappointing moral and psychological states of those involved..”

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“Always moved by the same purpose, I describe how to exercise the great virtues, such as patience, prudence, and tolerance, so often mentioned yet so rarely consciously practiced. Motivated by the same stimulus, I teach how it is possible to love with that sublimated love, beautified by the purity of feeling that is substantiated in abnegation. How different is this love from passionate love that is selfish and rarely sincere and that oppresses, perverts, and annihilates, since feelings do not count when the instinct reigns.”

“It will be understood that the characters in my books do not end with the novel itself. As an author, I seek to incarnate their improved lives into the lives of the readers of my pages, stimulating them in their purpose to acquire knowledge and to yearn for progress along the path I have chartered. The thoughts, words, and actions of the characters I have created display teachings and examples that are easily remembered. These would not fulfill their genuine goal if, throughout their action, the image of a process that stimulates and encourages human life were not evident and showed how this process can, in reality, be accomplished to ennoble one’s life. This and nothing else has led me to mold exemplary psychological

structures and traits placed at the service of those who long to escape Tantalus's torture, a torture which nearly all human beings are subjected to since their youth due to the lack of a wholesome and effective mental and psychological preparation to face life. How can one avoid such torture when passion, vice, a frivolous life and licentiousness instead of diminishing the thirst, increase it even more in those who drink from them? What remains of the pleasure, which dazzled the senses once the measure has been lost? Just morbid exhaustion, boredom, and after a brief pause, the dragonfly starts to dance once again around the flame that will burn its fragile wings. My friends, when writing about these things, one is tempted to undertake the task of uniting heaven and earth, spirit and matter, and to kill with one stroke the dragon of darkness, this winged personification of evil that governs man's untamed instinct."

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"It would please me so much to possess the mastery you apply in your writing so that I could do the same!" said Claudio with an enthusiastic heartfelt impulse.

"It's not impossible," he answered smiling. "As a first step, one must know the depths of the mental world and its secrets. Once this is achieved, one must possess... how will I put it... one must have an excess of life to infuse into others."

Claudio laughed, sensing how his vehemence was so quickly restrained, and replied graciously:

"This means that a lot of water will have to run under the bridge before I undertake similar endeavor."

"It will naturally take you some time. Everything is difficult in the beginning," de Sándara replied, in agreement; and suddenly he startled Claudio with a question that carried a touch of irony:

"Why don't you consider, for the time being, dedicating your time to reading? It could be simpler and far more comfortable."

Probably not grasping the meaning of those words, Marcos hinted:

"Even so, the aesthetical pleasure, the emotion, the taste of the creative force and the sensations that emerge from the successful combinations of words are not experienced in the same manner when reading as when writing."

"One could say," replied de Sándara, looking warmly at both young men, "that you have a disposition towards cultivating literature. This is surely a noteworthy aspiration. But I must warn you that reaching a degree of efficacy in this endeavor will depend entirely on the culture of the spirit because it is, precisely, the spirit that gives a strong tonic to the production of one's talent. This means that it is insufficient to just obey a desire. It is better, far better, to exercise the creative forces of the spirit in order to be able to reach the objective set by our yearnings."

Moments later, Salvador intervened.

"If you allow me Mr. de Sándara," he said, "I would like to clarify one point. Based on what you have said, it would seem that the works of fiction, even those created by renowned authors, would have no value or would not carry any truly lofty meaning."

"I certainly did not mean to convey such a thing," de Sándara quickly corrected.

"How could I deny the valuable contribution of those authors whose works have had a preponderant influence in literature? There are many who knew how to portray in brilliant mastery the traits, modalities, virtues or passions of their characters. Many described with such faithfulness the environment, the people, the customs and

events revolving around the lives of their characters that their narratives sometimes result in actual historical documents. In all fairness, I consider them worthy of the halo of glory. However, in my opinion, I find it appropriate to state an objection to their talented conceptions, expressed in the most beautiful and refined literary forms, and that is: although the authors were able to move so many souls, they did not manage – and that’s what is odd – to teach a path which would attract the spirit offering the deeply aspired perspective of a better destiny to the human being. I admire the fertile imagination of such distinguished intelligences, their vigor, their strength, their descriptive powers and their control of style. However, great works should also be assessed by their contribution to the spiritual elevation of human evolution.”

Miguel Angel, who, up to that moment, had abstained from intervening, inquired:

“Can you tell us, Mr. de Sándara, when you wrote your first novel?”

“I couldn’t say precisely. I live so intensely that to me the years take on the dimension of centuries. What I can say is that I was very young. Moreover, my first novel had only one reader: myself. But I should also add that the content of my novels gets lost in the confines of time, or better said, it blends with time itself so that whenever they are read everything in them is reborn like the freshness of a spring morning at the break of dawn. What I am saying is that my ideas are not meant for just one period of time, but to embrace all eras, because the energies of a permanent and renewed feeling throb in them, a feeling that is a true cry of faith and love of life in its wonderful existential function.”

Mr. de Sándara remained silent. It was difficult to detect in his gentle manner and profound serene look whether there was placid sadness or concealed happiness.

While the thoughts of those who listened were still captivated by his last words, Miguel Angel, in an effort to gather more information and perhaps with no specific objective, asked Mr. de Sándara if he had thoroughly read the works of other authors before writing his first novel.

“Indeed;” he answered with a smile as if willingly submitting to the interrogation, “yet I was always careful not to mix other ideas with mine. This was never difficult to do because my thoughts have been substantiated in my own being, that is, they are born in me and are nourished in my own mental life. In each one of my books, I have intensely lived a whole life, filled with emotions, love and happiness. I have also experienced the pain hidden in unhappiness, sacrifice and injustice. I could see myself in all ages and circumstances as I faced a number of happy or adverse situations, which tinge the depths of the moral schemes of human beings in their most subtle and sharpest psychological complexities.”

“And so,” he added after a brief pause, “moved by the purpose to feel within myself the sensitive palpitations of each life so as to extract some instructive element, I once became a beggar. I transported this image to my mental world and chose to live in a shack shared with other paupers. Every day, I wandered in the streets, going from house to house asking for alms. My companions, who were numerous, spent their lives slandering the rich, doing nothing to improve their lot. Every cent collected was spent on their vices, mainly on liquor. They were healthy and strong and could work to earn an honest living, but they preferred begging and idling.”

“I got tired of this depressing and miserable monotony. Each day, I became more dismayed until I decided to change this way of living. Without high expectations, I started working as an assistant in a factory. At first, everything seemed difficult and, as I progressed, I was made a supervisor. One day, I got married and had children whom I raised with care.”

“Sometime later, I ran into one of my old buddies. He looked almost the same, yet he seemed to have aged. He looked straight at me but did not recognize me. I had changed a lot. He asked me for some change and was surprised when I gave him a bill. His tearful eyes, reddened by alcohol, gazed at me with fleeting gratitude. Shaking, dressed in rags and ruined by vice and deprivation, he hid the money in his rags and went on his way. If I had not modified my life, I would have been exactly like him. Just the thought of it made me shudder.”

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“This man, whom I had just helped, led a sterile and miserable life, and this made me meditate and then confirm that under those filthy physical and moral rags, an irritating selfishness was concealed.”

“Selfishness?” asked Marcos.

“Exactly. Selfishness. And I will tell you why. By penetrating the beggar’s soul, I made him seek his regeneration in work. He then no longer squandered carelessly his earnings to satisfy his vice. On the contrary, he established a home and his family made good use of the money he was able to save. This gave me great pleasure because it was used to educate his children in whom I made him inculcate generous feelings. He also helped friends and colleagues. In short, he transformed himself into a useful human being within society.

All this, I repeat, pleased me and made me think how much a human being can do when he decides to stop being a beggar.”

De Sándara paused for a few moments, deep in thought and, after scrutinizing the depth of his conscience, he had found a cherished token, he decided to narrate a new episode.

“On another occasion, I penetrated the life of a disabled young man who had lost his arms in an accident. I shared the anguish that continuously oppressed him and the cruelty of his deepest moments of desolation. By watching those who had arms, he felt his mutilated youth rebel with inexpressible desires to become like them. It was impossible for him to understand why, blameless as he was, he had been deprived of such an invaluable asset. He then observed how these precious gifts were generally misused, as are all the other assets that God has granted to human beings. As I put myself in this armless young man’s situation, I thought of the immense love I would dispense to my arms and how I would take care of them if I had them. I also thought of the many things that I would be able to do with them. With compassion, I remembered all those who placed them at the service of mankind to ennoble it or defend it from evil. I saw a surgeon operating on a patient to save a life; an engineer designing projects of buildings, factories, highways, bridges and a thousand other works that contribute to human progress; a painter, etching on canvas the images that would last through time; a sculptor perpetuating invaluable works in bronze or marble; a musician plucking out sublime harmonies from an instrument. I saw a farmer planting his fields or harvesting corn that would fill boats, indicating abundance. Oh! Hands, divine organs! What could man not do with them? And looking

at mine while writing all these words, I thanked God once and a thousand times for being blessed and having them.”

“When my invalid felt other hands gliding in a gentle caress through his hair he sensed, with concealed feelings, either the blessed tenderness flowing from his mother’s heart, or his father’s exacerbated pain. Sometimes, he felt his brother’s pity, in other moments, the compassion of his friends or relatives. However, how unfortunate was he for not having ever experienced the unmistakable sensation of a lover’s caress! No feminine hand had offered him such happiness, and the conviction that he would never, ever experience this sublime moment extended dreadfully his intimate suffering. Beautiful young girls often came over to his house to visit his sisters, yet, to the unfortunate young man, this turned into sadness as his mutilated members denied him the pleasure of touching with his hands their hair and faces. Who would look at him when his two empty sleeves hung down from his shoulders as tormenting nightmares? He was not even able to take care of himself! One could not deny that his martyrdom was horrible. And to think that there are men who use their hands to commit crimes!”

“One day, the disabled young man’s pain was so unbearable, his despair so excruciating that I could no longer stand it, so, in a stroke of the pen, I transformed his life into a dream. He cried like a child when he woke up. He looked at his hands in admiration and pressed them against his heart. “My hands! He exclaimed. Dear hands! May God bestow upon me the chance to always use them with honor and intelligence! ”

“While you were describing the moral sufferings which tormented the young man,” manifested Claudio, “I could not

avoid observing the existing similarity between him and the mentally disabled. It seems to me that both fuse in perfect similarity. Naturally, the following exception is in order: the disability of the latter is due to the fact that he does not know or does not want to use the hands of his intelligence, or better said, of his understanding with which he could have done so much good to himself and to his fellowmen."

"I congratulate you, my friend Arribillaga. You have just used yours with skill and good judgment. "

Norberto, following Claudio's words, but attracted by other concerns, said:

"We would need a huge memory to retain faithfully the concepts you have offered us."

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"This doesn't apply. The words we hear are like the people we meet for the first time. If we like them, we will remember them and even cultivate their friendship. If we don't, we'll forget them immediately."

"Your answer is quite encouraging since I might belong in the first group," replied Norberto.

At this point of the meeting, de Sándara, noticing how late it was, said he may have overstretched the conversation, but Mr. Malherbe kindly protested and invited him to take as long as he felt was necessary. With these sincere remarks, spoken on behalf of the whole group urging him to continue, de Sándara decided to tell the story of another of his characters.

"Wanting to know in depth the life of a famous swindler," he started saying, "I incorporated him into the cast of characters performing in my mental scenario to observe him during his wanderings. This was how I came to know about these

individuals' hectic and daring lives of deceit and ambition. Their sole objective is to take advantage, without any scruples, of the good faith of their fellowmen. Ultimately, they only seek power, riches, and reputation. They will use any means, no matter how vile, to achieve their goals and turn friends, relatives and whoever is within their reach into victims of their hoax. They carry the seed of perversion and distortion in their blood and have nothing in them that can be rehabilitated: neither the words they use with refined falsehood nor whatever they touch or do. The only thoughts in their minds are those that nurture their contemptuous purposes or the ones that encourage the designs of their debased morals. In order to conceal their adverse intentions, they either excel in dissimulation or attribute to others, with diabolic cunningness, the wickedness of what they say, think, or practice. Whether we like it or not, imposture is the ultimate goal of their deeds. As soon as I realized I could not instill in this man any remote hope of regeneration, I fled from him, disgusted and saddened. I had come to know in depth a category of psychological types that represent real contempt for humanity."

De Sándara accepted the drink he was offered and went on.

"Having freed myself from this fanatic, I ran to the seashore to dive in its clean waters and fill my lungs with the pure air of honesty. Then I incarnated myself in a king. By so doing, I was able to see his ostentatious life at close quarters. My monarch was arrogant, sensual, and given to grandeur and pleasure. I observed how his counselors led my presumptuous monarch into believing in everything related to their personal interests with the aim of

keeping him away from all that occurred not only outside but also inside the country. Estranged from his people, who were being deprived of basic things, this king placed his signature and royal seal on every decree presented to him. These decrees plundered his subjects, mainly those who toiled the land from dawn to dusk, making their masters even richer through their efforts.

I saw his counselors approach him with calculated gestures and flattering words. Without any scruples of conscience, they were subservient in order to maintain their high positions. How evident was the moral misery of these men of the palace who, on one hand demonstrated the most artificial and despicable mask, and on the other, exercised total despotism and cruelty oppressing the people, strapped to the tyrant's carriage.

194 In the four corners of his land, indifferent and a sentimentalist, the king preached about the favors he distributed like alms to just a few. While he proclaimed to all areas of his land the charities he only offered a few, making it known that his favors were extended throughout the entire country, he closed his eyes and ears contemptuously to the discontent and pain that oppressed it.

Here too, I found nothing constructive nor did I think I could rectify the course of these haughty lives that, distorted by millenary customs, have degenerated into the evident decadence of a blood that was far from being blue, like the one originated from a legitimate cradle that had given brilliancy and splendor to memorable kingdoms and dynasties.

I relate this king's psychological profile to those of all other rulers of ancient or recent eras who, once in power, become cruel tyrants, with the difference that those first needed to undergo

a subservient period. What governs them is their absolute will, even when they make their people believe that they act in accordance with the feeling of the majority. Yet, it is so easy to discover the characteristic smell of things in full decay in the power of ostentation that fulfills the conceited intoxication of the all-powerful. A lesson of centuries that nations and each man, in particular, have yet to learn, is how to prevent intelligently and decisively that these diabolic beings, who lack any remnants of human feelings, could arise and enthrone themselves.”

De Sándara paused for a few moments and resumed the narration of a new episode:

“I also penetrated the lives of various workers. I wanted to live their needs and destitution as well as observe their ideas, yearnings and inquietudes. There, I faced one of the most complex and intricate problems of human psychology. The modern worker has become very different from the one of the old days when he felt the pangs of need, exacerbated by the low pay and by the demands of his boss. Nowadays, even though the causes seem to be the same, the problems take on other nuances and configurations. Labor has been transformed into a mass of socially resentful people. Before that, the dedicated worker used to open venues for his sons to follow and a number of them did reach respectable positions. Nowadays, fathers and sons only seek an easy life – minimum work with maximum pay. The willing and capable worker sees himself replaced by one who, far from helping the industry or trade to grow so that he can obtain benefits from it, continuously demands ever growing salary increases. Such claims revolve around a fatal circle in which none of the countless millions realize that these

demands, no matter how fair they may be, would never satisfy them if the worst of their enemies – inflation – is not conquered since it gradually erodes, in a tenacious and inexorable manner, all the benefits acquired by their efforts. It is unfortunate that in the midst of this ebb and flow, in which they are involved, everyone gets hurt, and ultimately, they are the ones getting hurt the most.

What truly complicates and enhances the problem of labor is that people in government and the political parties, rather than search for the solution by addressing the fact from its origins, instigate the permanence of the major conflict between capital and labor. By doing this, they guarantee electoral support or oblige the issue to always return to them to attenuate the seriousness of the problem each time it worsens.

196 There are unmistakably two classes of workers which can be perfectly defined: the good ones, who are devoted to their work and prosper by their own effort, and the bad ones who, posturing as a resentful social group, intentionally usurp the positions of the good ones. Included in this second group are those with dissolvent ideas, whose minds are true forges where the most daring and disturbing thoughts, etched in fire, oppose public tranquility. Perhaps the day will come when this social problem, which is taking on universal proportions, will be revisited with an open mind, giving to some the best opportunities for advancement, and fostering in others the consciousness of duty, which, by withholding their frenetic errors, will place in their hearts wholesome and noble purposes of improvement and progress.

It is sad to see how, since ancient times, more or less similar situations have successively been repeated. Governments and

regimes pass, and the same problems remain. It was thought that wars would resolve these situations. A serious mistake! What remains after armed conflicts is the inability to understand useless martyrdom and total desolation. Most people turn their backs to this reality. As those who preceded us in the past, we, today, throw upon the shoulders of future generations the weight of all the issues we are unable to solve intelligently and decisively. Above all, we should not deceive ourselves by thinking that man's problems will be solved at the expense of his freedom. One can silence the voice of the intelligence, also silence the rebellion of the spirit. However what cannot ever be silenced is the reaction of human nature that will ultimately claim, with unrestrained force, the governance of worthy norms for man's most cherished and legitimate aspirations of evolution.

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I recall that one of the workers in my world was a perfect example of one of those who work in offices and factories. He was often heard badmouthing the rich and blaming them for all the misfortunes of the poor. One day, when asked what he would do if he won the lottery, he affirmed, without hesitation, that he would help the poor. And indeed, he later did win a lot of money in the lottery. "Well," I said to myself, "let us see what he will do, now that he is rich."

"From that moment on, his relatives, friends and neighbors showered him with attentions as each one began injecting in his mind ideas of greatness. Meanwhile, the poor man struggled with previous thoughts that had often made him proclaim humanitarian ideas. The question now was not to dispossess others but himself of what had been before the motive for his vicious attacks. Finally, he opted to retain his fortune and, in order to justify it to his

conscience, he set his goal to develop it affirming that by doing so he would be in a better position to increase his help to others. The goal was not all that bad even though it was contrary to his previous ideas proclaiming that wealth should be shared.

Having decided to put into practice the resolution to develop his assets, he thought about it over and over and, after a thousand roundabouts, he finally opted to start partnership with others for the exploitation of some industrial project. At one point, he was introduced to an expert in textiles and thereafter the negotiations progressed. Encouraged by the business perspectives, which were truly great, he acquired a sumptuous and comfortable house for his family. Not accustomed to live in luxury until then, the family began to spend freely and live lavishly. He, himself, began to change his rugged appearance and his irritable character to match his new position. He began to wear fine clothes and, as nothing was left wanting, he even became amiable.

“The first year’s financial results of the textile business exploited by the partnership showed a considerable profit. Encouraged by the results, he began to plan long trips overseas and expensive summer vacations with the purpose of teaching his adolescent daughter to live amongst other kinds of people in the hope of having her marry into the best of families. From time to time, however, those thoughts, whose demands opposed his current ambitions, appeared in our ex-worker’s memory. “Go on, share your gains.”, they would suggest. “Help the poor. Call your relatives, your poor friends, and ex-workers and help them, now that you have so much. Isn’t now the right time? They should work as hard as you did? Oh! Where have your convictions gone?

Where is your idealism?" He responded to these claims by telling himself: "Hey! This is nonsense! Now, I must enjoy the lifestyle I have lacked for so long. Moreover, I have to think of my children's future. I will help them when my chests overflow with money."

But there was also another worker who nurtured the same ideas and, without wasting any time, I introduced myself into his life. At one point, he received an inheritance from a rich relative and, being faithful to his convictions, like a good man from the Basque country, he shared it with his poor relatives, friends and ex-coworkers, leaving a share, equal to that of the others, for himself. With the exception of some who carelessly dissipated their money, many others made the most of the providential gift to improve their situation by investing in profitable ventures.

During that time, the benefactor felt very flattered by the compliments received from everyone, but he soon discovered that the results of his generosity were not as he had visualized in his daydreams. Those he helped began to disappear. Some moved to hide their growing ambition for more. Others started to look down at their benefactor as if he lacked intelligence and treated him with an air of superiority and disdain. Some even denied having received any help at all from him. The good man suffered, in silence, the ingratitude of those he had helped and cursed a thousand times his idea of helping these turncoats who, among other things, he qualified as mere parasites."

Having assumed that de Sándara had come to the end of his narrative, Mr. Gorostiaga stated:

"It is surprising that no one has yet found a reasonable and fair formula capable of solving the problem which afflicts this

social class, with these and other episodes that so often occur in the lives of poor people.

"I think that in this case nothing successful can be achieved," he replied, "until efforts are made to strike a balance between better treatment, salary, and production, while demanding that the worker utilizes his best aptitudes. True justice would be made in rewarding the merits of each worker, allowing him to improve his standard of living. The opposite will greatly jeopardize the economy of a nation. Because, instead of increasing levels of production, which is ultimately what provides a good salary, an imbalance would occur in the dynamics of the financial situation thus weakening the vital mechanism of the economic structure."

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"This is quite understandable and, as you said, it is the worker who later suffers intensively its consequences," expressed Gorostiaga, particularly attracted to the subject on account of his own activities. "Consequences that are due, first, to the ever rising cost of living and, second, to shortages, unemployment and poverty."

"Faced with this situation," intervened Justo "that is persistently maintained and will continue to repeat itself – who knows for how long – through the course of history, everyone will ask: *What realities, stronger than the ones we know, will have to occur eventually to convince man of his errors?*"

Having understood there was no need for an answer, Gorostiaga then asked:

"In your opinion Mr. de Sándara, what would be the best course of action in this labor issue?"

“Since I am not a statesman,” he replied smiling, “I cannot make a sound pronouncement on such a difficult issue. I have only limited myself to outline or bring up a question that has been debated and experienced in every country in the world. It is, therefore, up to the men who move the wheels of government to figure this out. Our hopes are that, having understood in depth these complex problems, some of these men will find the most efficient method that will guide the worker to become fully conscious of his duties towards society, making useful and sustainable use of his resources and, thus, converting him, and only him, into the master of his own destiny.”

Without pausing, de Sándara carried on:

“Now, if you gentlemen will allow me, I will add one more thing with which I will end my narratives for the night. You will undoubtedly understand it when I mention that it was also in the interest of my purposes to penetrate the life of rich men. And I did so as an Ayacua, the miniature devil from native mythology, concealing myself in a corner of their minds in order to better examine their thoughts. I found, among those born with a silver spoon in their mouth, and whose fortunes were inherited, men who extended their assistance to their fellowmen to the point of making it a cult. These men treated people of an inferior class in such a way that they did not feel the difference in status which divided them. I also found those who were genuinely involved in finding a solution to the economic problems afflicting the poor. However, in proportion to their social group they were so few in relation to those whose hearts and minds were closed, that they could almost be considered exceptions.

I saw them parade in the world as haughty lords, raised and educated as aristocrats, waving the patriarchal scepter of

opulence. I traveled with them all around and even rummaged through their wallets, which were always full, but I could not find in their words any thought of human solidarity. They disdained the poor although expressing sympathy for their misfortunes, especially the ladies who believed that by founding societies, shelters and hospitals to assist the poor they would have largely fulfilled the duties imposed by charity.

Descending a notch in the scale of this hierarchy, I encountered those who accumulated their fortune due to luck or businesses. I inspected the mind of many and listened to their heart, only to find, like I found in that beggar, an atrocious selfishness. I have often seen their generous gestures preceded by inner struggles in which appeared, with amazing eloquence, the reply of the miser to a humanitarian impulse. Naturally, there was also the one who secretly tore up the altruistic check he had signed with his heart a few moments before. Poor mankind! Few are those who think about alleviating the tormenting weight of men's misfortunes and about guiding them along the paths of an ideal, exempt of illusions that would definitively bond man's thinking and feeling in a free conscience and without boundaries."

With these words he ended the meeting. As the participants left, each one seemed to carry in his ears the profound echo of thoughts that deeply moved their sensitivity.

The next day, Arribillaga and the friends who had been with him the night before, met at the club in an atmosphere of sincere camaraderie. The meeting with de Sándara had the virtue of reviving in them the yearnings and hopes that perhaps lay buried in the depth of their souls, just as so many other things, which lie there, are brought into life without the human being ever knowing who placed them in the bag he carried upon arriving in this world.

They talked for a long time, exchanging their impressions of the previous night's meeting, when one of them suggested it would be necessary to meet with de Sándara again in order to obtain guidelines related to the studies they had decided to undertake.

"I don't think this will be possible," replied Marcos, "since he is returning to Mexico in a few days."

"Is he going back already?" said Claudio in a regretful tone.

"He doesn't stay very long in his native land!" exclaimed Salvador.

After Marcos informed the group what he knew, they all began to exchange viewpoints concerning the visitor, and ended up by expressing their opinion on the cognitions he had offered them. There were no differences in opinion.

"I consider that his knowledge aims to pull us out from the routine environment of our intellectual speculations," expressed Justo "and show us the excellence of a reality that was unknown to us. His words seemed to emphasize the objective of teaching us a path, of making us reflect and perhaps awake a new inquietude in us.

"I think he saw something special in us that made him address us as if we were old friends," said Norberto.

"Our good disposition in listening to him may have influenced that," Claudio said. "There is no doubt that he stretched out

his hand to pull us out from the spiritual destitution we find ourselves in and which we often seek to hide beneath accepted beliefs and superiority complexes.”

“If we could only free ourselves of this burden that affects us and makes us so vain...” said Salvador sadly.

“Why shouldn’t we think this is possible,” inquired Marcos excitedly. “now that we see extended to us the threads of a knowledge capable of orienting our efforts?”

“I agree.” Claudio confirmed. “And you, Miguel Angel, what do you say? I see you so concentrated.”

“What can I say?” he replied cheerfully. “I feel as if I were transformed into a tiny Lilliputian, even though I am quite willing to increase my stature.”

204 At this moment, they were all united by a particular state of mind and a sincere feeling of companionship, which fostered enthusiasm.

“It is important,” said Salvador “to know if we are truly capable of achieving this conscious plenitude related to the improvement of our aptitudes. I believe this is not an easy task.”

“Whatever it is,” replied Justo, vividly opposing his friend’s remark, “let us not disqualify ourselves before knowing the probabilities we face in undertaking such an exceptional apprenticeship.”

It was obvious that Salvador was overtaken by a wave of skepticism as he insisted:

“The fear of failure makes one think, however, how wonderful it would be to receive the manna from heaven.”

“Come on, stop looking for the easy way out,” Claudio said amiably. “What would be the purpose of crossing our arms and

hoping to receive by revelation what we must find through our effort and testing our will and our intelligence?”

A little later, they all left.

As they went on their way, each one continued to analyze in his manner the sensations they had experienced and, after sounding their own feelings, they concluded that their spirits were not indifferent to the superior reality that de Sándara had let them get a glimpse of.

Claudio arrived at Griselda's house with these thoughts in mind. He had not spoken to her over the phone since that morning and he knew he was in for some affectionate reprimands.

The engagement day was approaching fast and such an imminent and singular event demanded from Griselda an unusual activity. Like most young girls who give great importance to a task done for the first time, she immediately described all the things that kept her busy, objecting in exaggerated and gracious displeasure to the time she wasted visiting stores and fashion shops. But, quickly abandoning these concerns, which she considered trivial and childish, she became attentive to Claudio who was expected to be the bearer of good news.

“It is hard for me,” he said after telling her some of the opinions expressed in the meeting, “to describe faithfully my state of mind. I feel as if part of my being has suddenly changed, making me think and feel in a different way.”

"You were lucky to have been able to see Mr. de Sándara again," she replied tenderly as if her love for Claudio had increased from seeing the awakening of emotions that had an affinity with hers. "I am convinced that everything that we are now living will have a favorable effect on our future happiness. I say this because I see that it will not only influence our sensitivity but also our mind that is reactivated by the unexpected truths that reach us. My heart tells me that a greater spiritual closeness occurred between you and me. I experience something like a new force being incorporated into our lives, a hope which both of us will have to nourish without forgetting it until the time it becomes a reality."

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"I am very happy to hear you say that, Griselda. I was sure that your thoughts would coincide with mine."

"And I am happy to know that I please you this way," she answered with a smile and, then, added vividly: "But I hope to be even more so, later on, when you will have increased your assets of knowledge."

As he stared at her pretending amazement, she insisted gently:

"The truth is, Claudio, I would like to see you become a magnate of knowledge some day."

"What for? To watch you become my number one client and keep the best part of my resources for yourself?"

"That is not it! In any case, I will be your partner or, if you prefer, your assistant."

Were it possible to scrutinize the mental irradiations of Claudio's soul, using a spectroscope adapted to the human figure, one would observe, as he left Griselda's house that

night, his inner joy. A joy that emerged from the folds of an unrestrained vehemence, similar to the one experienced by he, who discovers the vein of some precious metal or visualizes the actual accomplishment of an enviable position. One could have detected there many projects sprouting almost spontaneously, yet, mixed with the fear of some disappointment. He was well aware that everything required patience and time and that the loftiness of the task he was about to undertake needed effort and even sacrifice. Nonetheless, something told him that he would triumph and that he would conquer everything else – hence his rejoicing. And all this was greatly enhanced by the love expressed by Griselda whom he was about to marry.

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A distinguished group of people, consisting mostly of the friends that surrounded Mr. de Sándara on such occasions, met in a room, reserved for the event at his hotel. He had called them for a farewell dinner on the eve of his return to Mexico.

While the guests, spread out in small groups in the magnificent room, were having friendly chats, de Sándara was speaking to Arribillaga in private. They addressed an issue that would later be discussed by the group and that was related to concepts on marriage that de Sándara had planned to cover on this occasion, dedicating them particularly to the one who would shortly begin this difficult experience.

"This is a very delicate and complex matter," he said with a smile, as he invited the guests to take their seats.

Comfortably seated in the plush armchairs that constituted the main decoration of the room, he proceeded in a subtle tone of voice:

"This is a matter that obliges us to firmly hold on to Mino's daughter's famous thread if we are to avoid getting lost in this labyrinth where so many concealed shadows, so elusive to our examination, hinder our intent to discover their mysterious schemes."

A lively and diverse exchange of opinions on the matter ensued, with many subtle remarks aimed humorously at their target: Claudio Arribillaga.

208 Moments later, de Sándara went on:

"The experience of marriage," he said, "extends along a process that begins when man and woman conceive the idea of sex, even though neither he nor she has yet identified the Dulcinea or the suitor who, with reciprocated feelings, would one day be chosen to marry. Therefore, whether one agrees or not, the process begins at that moment. Thereafter, one's sensitive nature tends to link the dawning demands of one's instinct to the idea of marriage, associating the acts of emotional passion to the intimacy of one's affectionate feelings. The idea of marriage, my friends, prevails in the human being due to the very reaction of the creative and supportive forces of the species. Consequently, the supreme mandate of perpetuity is carried and engraved in the blood.

The early symptoms in the individual that indicate the presence of such predestination are instilled in the first illusions,

in the idealization “in mind” of the future king or queen of one’s heart endowed with the best qualities and the most beautiful physical attributes seen and admired in the opposite sex. It is not unusual for these illusions to be influenced by supernatural beings of archetypical figures possessing extraordinary beauty and virtue. Created by fantasy or by some artistic invention, these figures were made to satisfy the demands of the ideal perfect spouse to be, and which come to represent an intimate aspiration in the individual. Evidently, many factors contribute to modify this image during the period of celibacy because men, as well as women, most often unaware of this fact, live and experience, in this phase, several psychic and emotional episodes which reflect, although dimly, the normal relations of a future marital life. This, however, does not actually alter the ideal image that had been conceived and, with such thoughts, the youth of both sexes begin to conform to the outline of a married life which, naturally, is rarely in accordance with reality.

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The moment the decision about the sentimental future of the human couple is made, a moment which can occur spontaneously or after a somewhat brief period of observation, contemplation and enthusiasm, a delightful sensitive commotion beautifies both parties as the cherished image is definitively placed in the seat of honor of one’s heart. From then on, each one will be responsible for the course their love will take.”

Nearly in all cases, both man and woman dress up with their best clothes, but what do they use to cover their moral being, their spirit, in short, that combined set of values that constitutes the pure essence of one’s own being? It is precisely this conceptual

being that is least taken into consideration, due perhaps to its sensitive nature that later, in vindication unveils to the individual its nakedness that destroys the subterfuge of one's personality. This is when this inner struggle begins. A struggle whose causes very few people are able to define and, to a lesser extent, understand. The ideal part, so feebly sustained, then comes crashing down leaving only the physical aspect of the individual upon which his spiritual qualities were judged. But what also happens is that this part as well gradually loses its enchantments and, sooner or later, the mutual love withers away."

After a short pause, Claudio stated:

"It seems, then, that most marriages are destined to fail."

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"I certainly did not say such a thing, but the enormous number of well-known facts eloquently indicates not the failure of marriage but the failure of both people involved. Lacking appropriate preparation, they undertake the most delicate and at the same time, the most transcendental of all private ventures. The institution of marriage creates duties and obligations, which, in spite of being omitted from all contractual documents, must be fulfilled by complying at times with the moral laws and, at others, with the laws dictated by one's own conscience.

The incompatibility of characters is inauspicious, and it behooves the woman, particularly in these cases, to exercise the function characteristic of her moderate and sensitive nature, so that the harmonious rhythm of marital life will not suffer the consequences of impetuosity and violence. By positioning herself above any impropriety, she must know how to become a noble, loyal, and affectionate companion who, through her

ability to understand, comes to exceed the narrow concept commonly attributed to her mission.”

The great majority of the dramas occurring within the home result unmistakably from mutual misunderstandings or, to be more precise, from the total lack of cognitions related to the basic elements that constitute the monument of marital relations. Dramas often degenerate into tragedies or permanent separations when self-love, always accompanied by intolerance, violence, and stubbornness, oppresses love to the point of suffocating it, that same love sworn to each other as being eternal.

Undoubtedly, it is fair to say that the proportion of such cases is not alarming and that many marriages do exist and last in spite of the commotions they endure. Nevertheless, rarely are the participants able to overcome the conflicts produced by the disparity of characters with a conscious respect for the principles governing the marital life. On the contrary, their reconciliations are due to different factors, for example, situations that arise, their children or to interventions by friends. There are also those who, unable to avoid intimate difficulties, believe to have found the solution by establishing a *modus vivendi*, whether implied or by common agreement, that allows them to make their lives tolerable. This is certainly a solution for certain situations that can harm the stability of the home, but which, in no way solve the spiritual aspect of the great matrimonial enigma.”

“The adoption of an efficient method directed to successfully overcome this great test,” continued de Sándara, “is a privilege granted to everyone, although this affirmation excludes those who merely view marriage as a normal fact in human life to be fulfilled

according to the current norms, not suspecting that, behind the ties of wedlock, lies a vast and very rich zone of human life left completely unexplored. These individuals do not run the risk of suffering from insomnia on account of Milton's poem. In exchange for the *paradise lost* they limit their lives to their domestic needs."

A silence of expectation filled his brief pause.

"It is common practice," he continued, "to confide to chance what escapes one's ability to predict. This is why man quickly sees the specter of unhappiness stalking his home, like the vulture stalking Prometheus to devour his entrails. To successfully undertake the great experience of marriage one must have a complete knowledge of the great spiritual architecture whose moral basis rests upon stupendous formulas and sublime rules of behavior. These formulas ennoble the soul of individuals, beautify the scenario of marital life, dignify the species and open, in human hearts, the doors of confidence in the designs of the feeling, which is so often disdained and reviled by one's misunderstanding.

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I would advise all young people of both sexes, but particularly the young man who is about to be wed, to ask themselves the following question: "Why do I want to get married?" This, my friends, is the question a man should ask himself before attempting such a venture. Few people formulate this question and if they do, it lacks the necessary focus. As we decide to carry out this intimate investigation, we must be aware that it is not a matter of submitting love, (which I place above all sensitive manifestations) or the marital life, (which must be its logical extension) to the rigid scrutiny of rationales that undermine its essence. If we were

to examine the question, guided by our thoughts and discernible possibilities, it would lead us to think that the determination to marry responds to the desire of adopting the sort of life offered by marriage. We will necessarily be led to that conclusion after finding that chosen woman who responds to our aspirations and, therefore, meets the necessary requirements to make us happy.

A man wants to build a home and devote himself, with spontaneity springing from his heart, to the beloved beings that will live in it, that is, his wife and children. For this to become a reality, however, the love that the woman has inspired in him must always prevail to the highest degree above his sexual condition, which tends to excite his senses and deviate him from this objective. This way, the image reflected in the mirror of his feeling will never be obscured. Yet, how can one preserve through the years the enchantment of this pure, noble and deep love which the soul breathes during the days of courtship?"

Mr. Gorostiaga intervened at this point, saying:

"I would like to bring up a fact that just occurred to me. It often happens that after having had relationships with a number of women, the man suddenly decides to shut his eyes to all of them and looks solely at the one he has chosen to face the struggles of life with. What mysterious particularities did he see or detect in her that made him select and place her in such a privileged position? What is amazing is that this same fact repeats itself in every man in similar circumstances. One is obliged to think, therefore, that all women possess these special particularities, which are only revealed to the one who is destined to discover them. And why do men so frequently believe that they were mistaken in their choice?"

“If they were to stop and think about their own deficiencies and culpability,” answered de Sándara, “it is possible that in the majority of cases such a thing would not occur. There is a lot that man must learn and, obviously, the same goes for the woman, so that the mandate of the Creator, which determines perpetuity be carried out within the established norms that govern and direct its lofty objective. Moderation must reign so that the image of the wife, that same image visualized by the man when subjected to imaginary esthetic impulses, does not lose its ideal beauty. Two things are essential to maintain pure and fresh the love for one’s beloved and prevent it from ever weakening. The first one is affection, which being less impulsive than passion, ensures its durability, because if passion injects life into love, affection is called upon to defend and preserve it. The second one, which is as indispensable as the first, is our ability to dignify ourselves in the eyes of the loved one. This can only be accomplished through the efforts and concerns for the well-being of one’s family. This reaches its maximum expression when we elevate ourselves, through constant self-improvement, above commonness. Under these conditions, one will no doubt enjoy prerogatives far greater than the ordinary ones, generating a considerable increase in one’s mental capabilities that will gradually enrich one’s life saturating it with happiness. This is something that can and must be done in whatever age or condition we may be in, since the more prepared we are and the more cognitions we acquire, the more our well-being will increase, allowing us to hold in our hands the threads of our own destiny.

I will not refer to the nature and character of the behavior of those who join their lives to march in harmony along the paths of

the world, since I consider that this matter, in all fairness, is up to one's own discretion. I will speak, however, of the matrimonial ideal as I conceive it, as a result of my observations. Since love is a force and a power, no other circumstance is more appropriate to exercise its virtue than to use it to consecrate definitively a home that could serve as an example to all other homes. Love is the great element that fills the emptiness produced in our sensitive area by our deficiencies and is additionally what infuses confidence in our own forces permitting us to wait, for a loftier reciprocity to the demands, often silent, of our moral being. In some cases, we imagine that these demands are just and, in others, they are truly so. This is where tolerance fulfills its elevated and instructive objective."

"The woman who will accompany us throughout life's difficult path," he continued, "will have to adjust to our way of being if she yearns to be happy, but we must be totally devoted to her. We, man and wife, must fight together as equals in order to achieve the greatest progress in our individual self-improvement. In my judgment, in order to achieve this, nothing can be more efficient than for each one, individually, to prepare the circumstances and opportunities that one wants to live and enjoy in the future. In so doing, the hopes that we entrust to our souls and hearts will acquire real beauty and obtain indescribable charm and logic and, also, ensure that our sweet waiting will not be disappointed.

Never have I contributed to foster illusions in others and even less when matters, as fragile as the most delicate crystal, are concerned. On the contrary, I have always warned against illusions of chimerical origin produced by imaginary daydreaming,

hence unreachable, since there are also those sublime illusions stemming from one's rational inspiration. For example, when I prepare for a task, I foresee the delightful satisfactions that its completion will offer me and I keep on nourishing this illusion, which I call rational, so that it influences my being while I move towards the objective I have set for myself. If we were to accept this as a principle and apply it to married life, we would realize that happiness can be conquered by a couple as long as neither of them distances himself from what I would call the law of common sense.

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Undoubtedly, the objective sought by granting a legal form to the union of human beings was to protect their heritage, making it slide down the genealogical channels. Each being, whether conscious or not of his historical responsibility, will reencounter himself in his own blood throughout the centuries. What leads us to think this way is the fact that it is in the genetic cell that the lineage is engraved and that it defines, in the descendent, the unmistakable similarity to his parents, regarding their preferences, inclinations, inquietudes etc. As a result, the impulse of his own evolution, imposed by the universal laws, obliges him to transcend. This statement alone speaks with dazzling clarity of the role to be fulfilled by the family institution and the importance that the firmness and the improvement of its structure assume in the progress and advancement of the human community.

Very well. We can only conceive a family as an indissoluble nucleus when parents and children identify with each other regarding the similar yearnings and ideas they sustain and when all its members, in cooperation, dedicate their efforts towards forging a

superior destiny, which could not be forged by those who walk along different and opposite paths from this lofty ideal. Even though this might seem incomprehensible at first, it will cease to be so as soon as one thinks that this does not imply depriving man of his freedom to go wherever he wants as he accomplishes his individual objectives. On the contrary, he will be able to broaden to a maximum extent these same objectives without infringing the order and harmony of the family. The beauty of it is that each member can achieve this, assisted by the other members of his family."

At this point, de Sándara paused:

"Gentlemen," he said in a gesture of open cordiality, "I hope I have not overburdened your attention. This is an inexhaustible topic and it truly deserves the effort of deep investigation, but I prefer to postpone the addition of new concepts to a future occasion."

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Afterwards, they made their way to the dining room.

Hours later, when the meeting ended, Arribillaga approached de Sándara, and bidding him goodbye, said:

"I hope to tell you one day which part of your advice I was able to put into practice."

"There will always be an opportunity, my friend, as long as we are in this world," and added with a smile:

"I wish you great success in this undertaking."

After a warm handshake, they parted.

From the time Claudio started to walk home until the moment he went to sleep, he felt enveloped by a sweet and placid state of joy, a kind of gift from life itself during these prenuptial days with the difference that on that night, he felt it with greater intensity.

How could he doubt that the images captured during the previous hours had definitely enriched his assets? Having been warned, as he had, about the situations that occur during the marital process and having grasped the importance of these new and better means to face them, his heart rejoiced in confidence and happiness. He would not face any risks in this serious adventure since he would know how to protect his home from the painful experiences produced by ignorance of their origin. And how soothing was the perspective of avoiding them without having to learn through pain! Because there is no doubt that many dangers would stalk the marital vessel from the moment it raised its anchors that kept it still on the calm waters of the engagement period, until it set sail. However, he would know – and why not? – how to face, with skill and courage, the variations of time as well as the swelling of the waves that so often would put to the test his resistance and command.

Griselda and Claudio celebrated their engagement on a joyous November day.

The threads woven by destiny within the souls of these two people in love tied their first knot and they both were already living this inexpressible joy of the prenuptial period.

After taking this important step towards the physical and spiritual union of their lives, the time each one had available was reduced. Later, they would both have to learn to move in a way as to allow each other more freedom of space, which they will

both need once married to avoid the anxieties of slavery. Slavery that, in spite of being mitigated by affection and goodwill, could generate those inner rebellions that shatter the marital harmony unless deterred in time.

From this day on, the relationship of the Laguna family with Don Roque became closer and more intimate. By mutual requests, the visits between both houses became more frequent and this allowed Griselda to become familiar with the environment in which she would later spend her life.

Claudio contributed with his joy in this burgeoning cordiality. In fact, his happiness would have been complete were it not for feeling disturbed sometimes at some inner need urging him to clarify his ideas, put order in his thoughts and be receptive to the assistance of this line of cognitions that had led him to glimpse at the new reality offered to his mental and spiritual possibilities.

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Yielding to the influence of such demands, he repeatedly promised himself to firmly begin to study these cognitions. Ready to create his own inner world, he tried several times but he interrupted his attempts after facing the first obstacles. Nevertheless, without changing his objective, he exerted himself toward new attempts in an effort to get as much orientation for himself as possible. However, discouraged by the ghost of his inability to overcome difficulties and considering this task to be of Herculean proportions, he eventually gave up. What knowledge or concrete image did he have of the world he wished to shape? None. Moreover, he would have to create a central figure who would animate this world, which was not easy to do since it was not merely a question of having him stand on his

own two feet, but also of keeping him alive and active in that environment. Claudio tried in vain to dissipate such difficulties during his brief moments of solitude, earned at great expense during these days that rushed towards happiness. He always felt that same uncertainty about what he wanted to do, and the same frustration in his efforts.

Unexpectedly, and with amazingly good timing, he received a letter carrying a stamp from Mexico. It was from Mr. de Sándara. Opening it eagerly, he read:

“My dear friend:

I still recall the anxiety with which your spirit responded to my concepts when, in Buenos Aires, I presented some of the phases of the creative process that my thought developed in the mental world. I have no doubt that you will attempt to undertake something similar and this is precisely what moves me to write to you. It is not an impossible task, yet it demands constant effort since the objective is to promote the development of one's aptitudes in an integral form.

The norm I have followed and which I suggest to you is not to create whimsical characters. You will begin to undertake this process of knowledge I have spoken to you about on occasion. You will find in it all the elements you need for everything you wish to develop in the future. This requires exercising severe vigilance in conducting life along the new course one has determined, a task that offers optimum results since, in addition to developing a conscious ability with this type of cognitions, it allows one to enjoy, in anticipation, the delights of a promise that will be fulfilled proportionally to the increase of one's own merits.

Simultaneously, with the enhancing of one's conditions and qualities, it is imperative to create a character whose archetype could be oneself. Induce him to accomplish all kinds of noble deeds, exploits, virtuous gestures and observe the situations he faces with the purpose of helping him emerge from them gracefully in the event he misbehaves. When idealizing him, blend into his life a touch of legend and even a bit of heaven, of that heaven that shapes the mental world, which nurtures the intelligence, which, in turn, makes it accessible. Having done that, compare him to yourself and decide whether it is you who should imitate your character or if it is he who should be granted the grace of imitating you."

After meditating consciously upon what he had read, Claudio Arribillaga concluded, more formally this time, that he would follow these recommendations to the letter. They would allow him to give birth to this intimate world of new projections where, not only he, but also Griselda and others participating in it, would fulfill important objectives. His heart overflowed with joy, as he perceived how much he could accomplish assisted by the genial guidance of Mr. de Sándara who, by writing to him, showed that he considered him his friend. It was therefore necessary to begin the task.

While enjoying the delights of the promise he had just made, he began to recall passages from Genesis when God had created the earth and breathed life into the first man for whom he designed, in wonderful symmetry, the beautiful outline of Eden. This Eden or Paradise had a central figure, man, who was given a woman to be his companion, and to whom he was lord and master.

Claudio foresaw that, in his projected world, he would have to reproduce a similar image according to the law of analogy. He

would guide Griselda, when she became his wife, with tact and prudence, along the paths of the world and she would have to be understanding and follow him throughout the whole journey. Only he and she would reign in the paradise of his creation. But how could such a miracle be achieved? Would the ominous snake not appear to tempt his beloved, inducing her to abandon the sweet and peaceful Eden and have both of them end up rolling like Sisyphus and his rock on the paths of hell? Oh, no! Nothing similar would happen if he were able to acquire the cognition that would immunize them against such danger. The old fable of Philemon and Baucis is a lesson to a woman's soul, and he would help Griselda learn from this. There would be no reason to doubt it. He would guide his wife resolutely to the sources of knowledge.

These reflections purified in his spirit everything he had felt, experienced and lived during the past months. Yet, any average attentive observer could perceive that Claudio's mood, like the charts depicting the feverish oscillations of a patient, showed evidence of the ups and downs of his psychic state. These variations, produced by the temperamental fluctuations suffered by every man at different degrees, are nevertheless normal in the individual who strives to evolve, as he marches towards the highest levels of conscience.

With refined tact and making use of the experience acquired on the subject, Patricio had warned him against the increasing frequency of such psychological anomalies every time they occurred. Patricio had shown him, in an effort to help him avoid being overtaken by any of them, the deplorable consequences these

often produced when they dominate the mental field. This simple and good man, helped by a knowledge he had extracted from his favorite books and also by the affection he felt for his master, was very often his efficient assistant. He intervened at the right moment, by detaining Claudio's outbursts of excessive enthusiasm, by stimulating him when he was depressed or by facilitating his discernment in the analysis of problems of his conscience.

"In issues related to one's spirit and intelligence," he would often state among other things, "constancy, not haste, must prevail, and in all things the active participation of one's conscience is required."

A short time later, one day before the wedding, Claudio received a second letter from de Sándara, which brought him much joy.

"My friend," it said in eloquent terms, "whatever we do here on earth must be gratifying to our spirit and contain a positive value for our existence. What I am saying is that all our acts must be intimately related to each other in a permanent creative function. The inexpressible joy of living cannot be experienced until we begin to regard our life as being the principal task we must undertake. From it, a work of art that will belong to us eternally will have to emerge. And what satisfaction could be more sublime than to feel within ourselves the honor of our merits forging the judgment of posterity? Let us contrast this instructive proposition to the one presented by the selfish behavior of the individual who, speculating with his wealth, satisfies his appetites and becomes intoxicated with passions that blind his understanding. These individuals are unfortunate, as are all those who continuously undertake different projects without ever bringing any of them to term. My young friend, you are about to get married and this means that your responsibility doubles. Ensure

that your future wife understands and links this event with the prerogatives offered by evolution.

Do not forget that the woman who has pure feelings and a true concept of the home is the first to adapt to the requirements of married life. Men, generally free and wandering, do not experience this reality at first. They do not always behave as married men outside their home and, since no external changes can be detected, they tend to act as freely as when they were single. This sometimes brings about many dramas, causing profound repercussions in the soul of their companions.

I picture the newly married man as a bird that, imprisoned in a huge cage, still carries the illusion of his lost freedom. Only when he bumps into the bars of his prison does he notice the reality indicating his duty to adapt to the conditions to adapt to the conditions of his new status. I obviously include in this harsh category only those who, lacking common sense, are subject to the severity of this situation.

He, who builds his home depositing in it his dearest aspirations, soon adapts to being married. There are also those who raise their thoughts and feelings above these aspirations in search of loftier horizons. To the latter, the passage through marriage takes on a different significance and transcendence. I want to include you amongst those because your spiritual inquietudes, which I observed during my stay in your city, induce me to think so.

Make the most of the grand opportunity that is being offered to you to edify your life's work, and that of the woman who will soon become your wife, upon eternal foundations."

Arribillaga read the letter over and over again eager to grasp its precise meaning and did not forget to thank God for opening the doors which would allow him to tread successfully in the world, in search of the happiness that was now getting closer to him and which now offered such promising perspectives.

In addition to the stimuli Griselda received from Claudio, she saw in her mother a counselor who watched over her future happiness at every moment. The frequent conversations they held constituted a true preparation for life because her mother's aim was to assist and protect her from her inexperience in the step she was about to take.

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Intelligent and deeply perceptive, in addition to being endowed with a natural disposition towards the well-being of her family, Dona Laura had known how to make of her home her husband's favorite place, surrounding him with affection, peace, and joy. She sustained him with her strong spirit during difficult times and had achieved an intimate reciprocity in her efforts to elevate both their lives to higher spiritual levels.

Griselda, who was aware of the delicate qualities that beautified her mother's soul, and who had inherited part of these virtues, felt such admiration and respect towards her that her heart quite often overflowed with sensations of daughterly tenderness.

"Never have I underestimated my parents' advice", Dona Laura would say to Griselda during one of the many moments they spent together, "and this has helped me a great deal because during the

various moments of uncertainty and disorientation it was their word that guided me. I would surely have been a very unhappy woman had I rejected or forgotten that. Even though it might seem strange to you, dear daughter, there were recurring incidents between your father and me soon after our marriage due to differences in character.”

“No one would have believed such a thing. You get along so well together!”

“The truth is that in our case, as in many others I know, this difference did not exist. What was lacking was to simply try to recover a mutual understanding that had eventually been altered and to obviously maintain it from then on.”

“And how did you clear up this situation?”

226 “As I mentioned before, my parents’ advice especially that of my mother, whose example taught me a lot, was of great help. Her influence was instrumental as it allowed me to correct, in time, the mistakes caused by my inexperience. Her advice often appeared in the midst of my vacillations, indicating the honorable and just course to take.”

Moved by the evocation of such thoughts that had been raging then, Dona Laura began describing to her daughter, this time narrowing the focus, the melting pot in which she had cleansed her prejudices and due to which she was able to give transparency to her previous opaque and false valuation of herself.

“You can imagine, dear, how deeply sad I felt during those moments. Yet, I soon discovered that my own defects were the ones responsible for my unhappiness. My self-love rebelled against any harshness expressed by your father and that induced me to act with intentional neglect towards him. You must understand that in

pursuing this path, the disagreements accumulate and multiply, creating a distance between the couple, which in many cases lead to a definitive separation. Fortunately, I perceived, in time, the danger of this situation and was able to convert it into an instructive experience. And, with a wholesome reaction, I decided to sacrifice my foolish pride for the happiness I yearned to see prevail over my home. You were very young then and your presence constituted a powerful stimulus that reinforced my resolution. As a first step, I made great efforts to bring up the true motive of our disagreements. But don't you believe this was easy for me. Oh, no! Nevertheless, I was able to accomplish it, and after some time, I realized one day that my attitude towards your father had been ridiculous even despicable. Nevertheless, I needed something more, something that would give greater substance to the decision I had made. In conversations with my friends, I eventually came across what I was looking for, and it was as if I had discovered a great secret. I stumbled over it as I was criticizing within myself the domineering attitude of one of them who was referring to the arguments she had with her husband and was flaunting the retaliations she had taken against him. Let me tell you, Griselda, that I considered the indiscretion of this good woman to be the ugliest defect a married woman could have. I also know today that on account of it, she often suffers the greatest misfortunes. Very well, upon reflecting on what I had heard, I found, as I said, what I had sought for so long, and what represented the main motive for all my marital difficulties."

"What was it?"

"Misunderstandings, my dear, misunderstandings. This is the product of those hidden reactions which occur in us, often due

to childish motives, which overflow at a given moment generating unpleasant episodes in the home. What generally happens is that we do not give any importance to our participation in such episodes as we trigger in our husbands violent reactions, which we consider unfair and even abusive. These things happen, my dear, because we are unaware that the starting point of such incidents lies in other causes, which are imperative for us to know.”

The expression of expectation on Griselda’s face made her mother smile and, determined to be more explicit, she went on:

“In most cases, my dear, the married woman ignores that no matter how good and loving the man may be, after some time he withdraws, which in no way means that he has ceased to be good and loving. These are simple variations, which are characteristic of his sex. This is precisely what usually brings forth the consequences of the conflicting purposes I referred to, and which are recurrent in married life in proportion to the degree of disharmony they create at home. Generally, the woman interprets such changes in her husband as neglect and therefore, when his affectionate manifestations are aroused again, she acts coldly and evades his caresses. This is, Griselda, one of the great mistakes made by women, who are unaware of the disastrous consequences it causes. Since the misunderstandings, which at first follow the same pattern as the withdrawals, end up by becoming permanent. The lady of the house, – and I have seen this happen many times – then begins to contradict her husband’s preferences. So much so that in her narrow-mindedness, as well as in her foolish intent, if he has a preference for a dish, she eliminates it from the menu; if he likes a special dessert that too is taken away; if he invites her to go to the

theater, she refuses; if they decide to see a movie and he thought it was bad or boring, she becomes overly complimentary about it. So you can see, Griselda, that without being aware of it, one can fall into a vicious circle. This circle keeps on tightening more and more until it weakens their conjugal love to extremes.”

“How happy you must have been when you got rid of this predicament.”

“You cannot imagine! When I understood that it was up to me to do something to avoid these bitter moments resulting from my own behavior, I felt a new enthusiasm, as if I were reborn!”

“And how did you achieve this? Because I could never have suspected that even the slightest disagreement existed between you and father.”

“Oh, it cost me plenty! You will see that shortly. Urged on by my objective, I began to be more affectionate towards your father. However, no doubt remembering the many times I had mistreated him, he responded coolly. This hurt me and I cried, I cried a lot. I soon realized, however, that my previous behavior deserved nothing less than this kind of treatment and that helped me avoid repeating such painful events. Unabashed, I aimed to please him by offering him everything he enjoyed. I was so successful in doing so that the task of surrounding him with all those small attentions, which so much please and comfort a man, turned into a motive of joy for me.”

“But I don’t think father was totally exempt from blame.”

“I agree, but if he had any amendments to make in his behavior, I am sure that it would be much easier for him to do so with the presence of an understanding and loving companion. What happened in the end was not difficult to predict when the

participants of such episodes love each other and have similar inclinations. In other words, I felt reciprocated in everything I did."

"And I suppose those misunderstandings did not occur anymore."

"Exactly. Because I learned to look at your father in a different manner and, rather than feeling mortified when his withdrawals occurred, I felt more respect towards him and even tried to make them more pleasant for him."

"Oh, mother, you are so intelligent!" exclaimed Griselda covering her mother with a grateful and affectionate look. "How many mistakes I myself would have made had you not given me these crystal clear warnings!"

"You cannot imagine, Griselda, the number of times I blessed the hour in which I realized that the key to build my happiness and that of my family was within me. The truth is that I felt happy, very happy and could no longer consider this secret as something individual, as something that belonged exclusively to me. I had seen similar episodes occur in other homes, and once the peace was recovered in mine, I decided to help, with due prudence, women who were of course my friends. I don't believe that my suggestions were always welcome. There were those who scorned my advice and I remember that I was once labeled as lacking in character. However, these friends continued to be unhappy and, as time went by, they sowed this same unhappiness in their own daughters' homes."

Griselda left her mother for a short while to take a telephone call and upon her return, the subject matter had changed focusing their attention entirely on issues regarding the wedding preparations.

Hours later, when Claudio Arribillaga visited Griselda, he found her the happiest of all creatures. Her mother's instructive thoughts

had made a favorable impact on her soul. In addition to constituting a real preparation for her upcoming change of status, these thoughts, acting as moral and psychological reactivating elements, had the virtue of becoming powerful stimuli. This was the reason she was so effusive with Claudio as if she had suddenly acquired a greater self-confidence. She herself was so surprised, that she blushed.

“How happy you are, my dear!” he said upon seeing her.

“Do you know why?”

“If it is not because of me...”

Without denying it, but at the same time inferring that there was something else, Griselda confided in him, with the emotional exuberance of youth, but with the necessary reservations, the reason for her joy. Making him, this way, participate of that gift, which Dona Laura offered them in an effort to make them both live happier futures.

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“I like your mother as if she were my own.” he said reciprocating with a sweet smile.

When Dona Laura entered Griselda’s room the next morning, she found her still asleep.

“Get up, you lazy girl...” she said with a kiss.

And, sitting on the bedside, she handed Griselda a charming little package saying:

“Here, darling, it’s a book. In its pages, you will find a collection of observations and reflections that I put together during my lifetime. More than once I thought of you while writing them.”

“Oh, thank you, mother!” exclaimed the young girl with joy as she quickly stepped out of bed. “This is a precious gift! The best one you could have offered me.”

“I was sure you would appreciate it.”

Dona Laura then walked to the window to draw the curtains that obscured the light, and after examining in detail several pieces of Griselda's trousseau, she began rearranging some boxes that were open and stacked up in disorderly fashion, revealing some graceful details of its contents.

Meanwhile, as Griselda browsed through the book she had just received from her mother, she stopped at the paragraphs that said: "I cannot conceive that the human heart can feel real happiness if life is not endowed with the moral and spiritual resources that beautify it. These resources constitute the sum of the benefits we have been able to extract from our experiences and meditations, while striving to give the ideal we pursue a concrete form. In my case, I can vouch that this ideal was strengthened upon the discovery that the cause of my unhappiness stemmed from my own mistakes, in other words, I faced a reality that made me change my points of view fundamentally. And it was precisely when I was on the verge of believing that life was losing its greatest enchantment that my heart began to beat in a different manner: more strongly, more cheerfully, with more confidence and without the inquietude or the unrest that dominated me before. How foolish I had been! I contemplated my dead illusions but without sadness, without nostalgia, without claiming to bring them back to life. I understood that they belonged to a time when many fantasies revolved in my head, many dreams and whims, like those that thrive in all the women who desire beautiful and pleasant things without thinking that something must be done to deserve them. Then, I began to visualize that above these illusions, or better still, by replacing them, I found inner resources that could certainly help me to become happy. By using them, I dedicated myself to strengthen and increase them,

stimulated by the love of my family. So, I was able to persevere and in this daily task I found the most wonderful incentives. Since then, I became more understanding, more tolerant and patient, and could enjoy the rewards of a great inner peace and intimate joy.”

Griselda closed the book and smoothly slid her soft small hand on its cover. She had always recognized her mother’s great moral values, but at this moment she regarded her as an exemplary soul guiding her with live elements extracted from experiences of her own life. There, she had deposited her memories, which she presently placed in her daughter’s hands so that such a valuable content could be used to avoid the anxieties that youth’s inexperience and candidness usually create. How grateful Griselda was for this priceless legacy! She would spend days and nights enthralled by reading it.

“What did you do to learn so much, mother?” asked Griselda, genuinely interested.

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Dona Laura gave her an affectionate smile, as mothers do when answering their children’s innocent questions and, sitting again next to her, said:

“You are asking me something, my dear, that I myself don’t know. It might all be the result of a tenacious, constant and orderly effort. I remember that when I was able to learn something I ignored, I regarded it as a fragment of a new life that incorporated into mine, giving me a unique and intimate pleasure. My whole purpose was to be able to feel more worthy of myself.”

“One day, I would like to know as much as you do, mother!” exclaimed Griselda enthusiastically.

“Oh, I am only a beginner! But you, yes, you can become what you desire to be. Making a serious effort, strengthening your will, and

maintaining alive the thought of what you want to become, you will achieve your objective. Indeed, try to be conscious of all your acts, even the simplest ones so as to closely feel the reality of everything you live.”

“I assure you that I will not spare any efforts to reach such a beautiful achievement.”

“And whenever you notice that the love you felt as a bride, for example, has lost strength, weakened by controversies which never fail to occur during married life, seek within your own self the expression of other forms of love. At times, you will resort to the maternal tenderness that will put an end to an insignificant controversy. At others, you will become the daughter who seeks refuge in her father’s heart. And, whenever necessary, you will also become a sister and a friend. I came to understand, dear daughter, that the woman must captivate twice the man who shares her life: first, with her body and her visible qualities; second, with her spirit, her intelligence, her tactfulness and her abnegation. Unfortunate are those who follow other types of thoughts and search for different paths!”

Griselda kissed her mother as a tribute from her heart for the protection her words had given her.

On the deck of a ship that haughtily plowed the waters heading for Europe, two newlyweds evoked, with tender emotions, the latest events, filled with affection that culminated on their wedding night.

Staring at the point where the eyes lose their physical sensation, they seemed determined to scrutinize the beyond. But the mystery of life offers hues of colors that are so different from

those that can be captured by the physical senses, that man is not allowed to tunveil by simple intent the hidden shades that appear in the depths of his existence.

“I feel elated,” expressed Griselda sweetly as she put her head on her beloved’s shoulders. “Can so much happiness be perhaps an advance given to us by God on account of the fulfillment of our promises?”

“Maybe...” he said, pulling out of his abstraction, and added:

“But let us put these thoughts aside until we are able to settle such a huge liability. Life is smiling at us, Griselda. Let us reciprocate by being happy.”

He offered her his arm and they both walked gladly to the ballroom where, moments, later they mingled with the dancing couples.

Several more days between sea and sky, followed.

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From Pernambuco, Griselda sent her mother these lines:

“Dearest mother:

We have had a wonderful trip so far. We are about to cross the ocean. Entertainments abound on board and in order to find time to be alone we frequently have to elude commitments.

Your recommendations have helped me a lot. Claudio is very nice and has responded very gently to my apprehension. You can imagine how deeply thankful I was for his gentle manner which was as understanding as it was affectionate. It was only on the fifth night after our wedding that I was able to register in my conscience the exact notion of my new reality.

I strive to please Claudio in everything. A few days ago, he mentioned that he had much appreciated the expansive character of Suzana Lemey, a very nice French young girl who, with others,

has contributed to making our voyage more pleasant. Since then, I also decided to act towards him in the same manner but, of course preserving my own modalities. I think that my disposition to please him did not escape him because he seems very, very happy. You have no idea, mother, how happy I am with this first success.

Give my love to father and tell him that I always think of him. Tell Don Roque that I send him my love and, to you, dear mother, a big and tender hug from your daughter.”

Claudio felt ill when they arrived at Dakar and, although most of the passengers went ashore, they had to remain on board. That day, the heat was suffocating.

The afternoon was waning into a melancholic dusk as the ship lifted its anchors. It was a relief to be sailing again.

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No sooner had the boat left the harbor, the temperature suddenly changed and the air, unexpectedly, took on a gloomy aspect announcing an oncoming storm.

Suddenly, the sky darkened with heavy clouds, which as if in battle formation, came rushing from the north, propelled by winds that, off and on, gushed furiously. As a result of swelling seas, the cresting waves, laden with increasing water, seemed to have a cosmic fire raging beneath them. The indescribable crack of a thunder suddenly shook up the atmosphere, unleashing from the skies confusing shades that were enhanced by the diminishing light of the sunset.

A few minutes later, the storm intensified with the power of a deluge, forcing passengers and crewmembers to put up with its harsh consequences.

In her stateroom, holding on to Claudio who was seasick, Griselda shared the general anxiety. They endured this situation all night long

and all of the next day. It was late afternoon, after the violence of the sea had subsided, when the passengers were allowed back on deck.

Although not completely recovered, Claudio was able, nevertheless, to accompany Griselda. She had insisted that he leave the stateroom knowing too well that he would recover once in contact with the calm that was beginning to prevail. Sitting behind one of the small windows on deck, they could see the storm withdrawing as its last gasps seemed like the tails of monsters lost between clouds of sulfur and iodine.

As night was approaching with a totally clear horizon, millions of stars returned to their eternal sentry posts. The newlyweds went to the top deck to enjoy the serenity of the spectacle in open air.

Claudio gazed at those scintillating eyes suspended high above and he thought about the storm that had just calmed down. He associated the blissful sensation of the lull that enveloped them with that which occurs in the sky of one's conscience and character when mental storms, unleashed by adversity in sudden surges of violence or despair, are appeased. Perhaps due to a special state of his soul, he incorporated in his mind that sweet sensation of something infinite which comes up when man's spirit blends in with the incorporeal nature of Creation, which intervenes in the deep processes of human evolution. As he scrutinized the depths of this incommensurable and undulating ocean, it seemed to him that impenetrable designs were concealed in its bosom. Recalling passages of long forgotten writings, the following imperceptible words came to his lips and were lifted by a breeze to be offered to the hungry waves as the early fruits of a strange and unexpected invocation:

"Oh, legendary and remote Atlantis, you withhold the secret of your enigmatic existence within the depth of these abysses! Will you not

one day emerge from your cosmic depths bringing the magnificent keys with which man will unveil the mystery of destiny?"

His gaze searched for Griselda's eyes. Undefined expressions appeared on their faces as if, by a strange intimate occurrence, the same thought of anxiety, related to the unexpected movements of chance, arose from the depths of their souls.

"What are you thinking about?" Claudio asked Griselda a moment later.

"There are emotions that lose a great part of their enchantment when they are put into words..." she said gently.

In this intimate frontier that defines the limits of the inner world, each soul reigns supreme. To penetrate it without the explicit consent of its owner is not possible. Even the human being, who shares it, must limit himself to what is possible to be shared. This world becomes a paradise when one knows how to care for it and protect it from all strange intrusion. It becomes hell if, lacking the norms imposed by discretion, it is left exposed to the greed of others.

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A few days later, the ship dropped anchor at Le Havre. They left at once for Paris, the great city where the fate of the world had so often been at play.

For a brief time, Paris would become the stage of their happiness, their joys and everything their souls were capable of enjoying in this dazzling environment, which they partially knew having both been there before. Griselda had been there accompanying her father on a lecture tour and Claudio just before starting college.

Yet, everything now seemed new as if the happiness of visiting these places together had the virtue of making them see things completely changed and more attractive, as if for the first time.

Discreetly and without surrendering to the vertigo that usually incites the tourist's curiosity, they decided to admire as many of the numerous marvels of the great city as they could and, in so doing, found many motives to express their spiritual inquietudes in most varied conjectures. They were particularly moved by their visits to museums and monuments and all those works of art, in which history's chisel etched the thought of the great artists who had enriched the artistic lot of mankind. With evocative and esthetic emotion, they contemplated and admired this collection of splendid masterpieces, which had captivated the amazement of the whole world throughout the ages.

"What a contrast between that dazzling past and the darkness of today's reality!" Claudio said, one day, as they strolled down the streets heading towards their hotel.

Griselda, who seemed to follow the melancholic tone of these reflections, said:

"I truly feel ecstatic by what we are seeing. Everything seems wonderful to me, yet, have you noticed that, in spite of being surrounded by this infinite variety of things, something is missing, something more real and more positive? I would say, the lack of an art capable of shaping man's thought and feeling, making him more worthy of the lofty quality of his nature."

"I was thinking along those lines too... It is a pity that so many manifestations of human talent have not been able to liberate man from the obscurantism and the moral misery in which he is immersed. What was lacking, no doubt, was a great intelligence that could be

able to enlighten human beings and help to emancipate their souls to the point of reaching their utmost conscious plenitude.”

“Undoubtedly, all this can instruct the human being and can even move him deeply. Yet, does it serve any purpose regarding his evolution? Can it be useful in changing the course of his life? That is the sad part. When I admire all these wonders, I feel that, instead of experiencing the exaltation of the possibilities of reasoning that one possesses, one feels, on the contrary, diminished.”

“You are right, Griselda; this is the sensation that our souls perceive.”

240 Such dialogues frequently took place between them. They emerged from their intimacy and constituted a most appropriate bridge for their mutual understanding. The affinity and similarity of opinions during these dialogues were so close, that it was not reckless to foresee the best in their future happiness.

They decided by mutual agreement to have dinner at a different place every night so as to get to know the Parisians’ nightlife in its most typical sites. With that in mind, one evening, they went for dinner in one of the most luxurious restaurants of the City of Lights. Claudio, an excellent “gourmet”, in whom Griselda placed her complete trust, was examining the menu carefully. After suggesting a few dishes, he ordered the most appetizing ones. Lucullus could not have made a better choice.

At this moment, seeing the “*maître d*” bow reverently, greeting someone who had just arrived, made them turn their heads in that direction. There are certain movements in people that are so eloquently expressed that they unwillingly trigger one’s curiosity.

A very beautiful young woman, dressed with refined and

elegant taste, had entered the restaurant accompanied by a distinguished elderly woman. They sat at a table not far from them.

“Who are they?” Claudio asked the “*maître d*” in good French.

“Americans, sir,” he replied. “It is strange to see these ladies alone. They usually come accompanied by a gentleman.”

As the young woman turned to her companion with a smile, her face revealed a very pleasant expression.

Her presence in the room triggered in Griselda some curiosity and, at the same time, sincere admiration. The young woman seemed content and spoke in a cheerful manner.

“Have you noticed how attractive she looks and how distinguished her composure is?”

“Yes, very attractive, he answered, feigning indifference.

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Griselda looked beautiful that night in her elegant low-necked black dress adorned with a glittering diamond necklace. However, that magnificent young lady seemed to have something that distinguished her from all other women.

During dinner, Claudio could not resist the temptation to turn around many times to glance at her and this upset Griselda who concealed her discomfort clearing her throat significantly.

When both ladies, unexpectedly, left somewhat in a hurry, they passed by their table. The youngest looked at Griselda with a friendly smile, which she reciprocated, feeling somewhat shy on account of the disturbance she had been experiencing.

As if drawn by something stronger than himself that compelled him to stare at the young woman, Claudio followed her with his eyes until she was out of sight.

When he, somewhat embarrassed, turned around to speak to Griselda, she hinted she wanted to leave. Suspecting that he had hurt his young wife's sensitivity, he did not object and, once in their hotel room it was confirmed.

For the first time, Claudio could see an intimate protest on Griselda's face, which made her look more adorable than ever.

"I'm sorry I've displeased you," he said affectionately.

Confused, she laid her face on Claudio's chest, who embraced her with a tenderness that spoke volumes about his eagerness to chase away that small cloud.

Deeply worried by the circumstance that had just created a concern in Griselda's trusting heart, he was determined to adopt thereafter an attitude that would erase all traces of that unexpected event. He was still thinking about it, when a providential idea seemed to occur to him. Approaching her, he said cheerfully:

"What a coincidence, darling! Last night, as I was reading some passages from Mr. de Sándara, I found something that I believe could explain this circumstance. Let me show it to you right now."

Having said that, he went in to get a book and read to her from one of its pages: "In our innermost self, which is inviolable, occur the smallest to the greatest variations of our sensitive nature, which do not affect, in most cases, the feeling that we have deemed worthy of reigning in our heart and in our mind. The intervention of others is not always timely at this point, when there is a kind of metabolism of our emotions and mental sensations, which serves, like it or not, the purposes of our nutrition and spiritual development."

“Darling,” concluded Claudio, “incidences like this recent one, which we may call accidents of our moral life, are sometimes produced involuntarily, obviously, due to the deficiencies that we still have to overcome and eliminate.”

His words seemed to have given great comfort to Griselda, who replied with her usual serenity:

“There is no doubt that this has to do with what occurred when I couldn’t control the impression I felt tonight. I understand that I may have overreacted a little and I am sorry, but the truth is that I felt a little worried.”

“There was no reason for that,” he said with relief, caressing her. “We must always remember that our intentions carry such fleeting movements that we don’t even notice. We would continue to remain unaware of their existence if future facts did not reveal them to us. For example, this very case,” he added with an expressive and cheerful look, “in which I had to face an extremely unpleasant consequence.”

The exchange of two beautiful smiles erased all remnants of that small disturbance.

Both had understood, more by intuition than by reflective means, that life presents us with signs that are perceptible to our sensitivity, but not to our senses. These signs can protect and guard us from greater dangers.

They left Paris for Switzerland and from there to the French Riviera – a privileged area where all of nature's beauty is shown in unmatched profusion.

Cannes, the princess city with its majestic palaces and luxurious life of its clubs and entertainment spots, offered them all the satisfactions demanded by the most refined tastes.

The days went by calmly and happily in that part of the world. When it seemed that nothing could possibly affect them, they received an unexpected cable informing them that Don Roque was gravely ill. The news led them to decide to cut their voyage short and fly back to Buenos Aires.

They quickly began procedures at the Consulate and at other agencies in order to resolve the normal inconveniences of an unexpected departure. Their return flight was scheduled to leave two days later, giving them enough time to finish up everything, but also leaving them with many hours of distressing and endless waiting.

They were exhausted as they returned to their hotel that night.

Claudio fell on the sofa with evident signs of apprehension. The news had caused a profound impact on him.

Griselda tried to attenuate his concerns with encouraging words, but nothing seemed to have the power to comfort him.

"In the midst of the happiness provided by our voyage, how sorry I am for my lack of foresight!" he said bitterly. "I should have known that my father's health could have taken a turn for the worst and that he would need me. So much apprehension! I hope that God will not deny me the joy of seeing him again!"

His words bore so much pain that Griselda was moved and urged, perhaps by some comforting premonition, she said:

“It may not be more than a mere relapse that Don Roque has often had. You will see that everything will be alright.”

“The kindness in your words, my darling, may have appeased my heart, but is unable to dissipate the anxiety that torments me.”

“Of course I understand, Claudio. Is there anything comparable to our parents’ life?”

At that moment, someone knocked on the door.

Unaware of how it had happened, since such intense emotions were oppressing her feelings, Griselda suddenly found herself holding a second cable.

“Oh, God!” she whispered with increasing anxiety and fear as she opened the envelope.

But, as soon as she read its contents, she cried out with indescribable joy:

“Claudio! Listen! ‘Don Roque out of danger. Love. Laguna.’”

He ran towards her and they embraced joyfully.

Once again, the horizon of happy perspectives appeared exempt of clouds.

Nevertheless, they decided not to postpone their return trip, but rather than flying, which affected Griselda, they would take the first ship sailing out of Marseilles. This being the final part of their honeymoon, the crossing on the ship would compensate for the interrupted stay on land, reassuring them with the certainty that each passing day would reduce the enormous distance which separated them from Don Roque.

That afternoon, attracted by the ocean's serene beauty, many passengers strolled on the deck of the ship that carried Claudio and Griselda back home. It was not difficult to spot the pleasant couple who, returning from a trip that seemed to be the end of their excursion, stopped every now and then to observe through their binoculars, a faraway ship sailing in the opposite direction, probably heading to the coast they had left the previous day.

From the ship's bow, Griselda was looking around the deck when, turning her head slowly she happened to focus with her binoculars on a group of people who conversed cheerfully, some standing and others sitting comfortably in their chairs. Her insistence in maintaining the focus clearly indicated that something very special had caught her attention. A slightly perceptible surprise flushed her face, beautifully iodized by the sea breeze, and then, certain about what she had seen, she exclaimed unable to restrain herself:

"Look who is here, Claudio! The same young woman we saw in Paris!"

"It's impossible!" he said, taking the binoculars offered by Griselda. Confirming it, he exclaimed:

"What a coincidence!"

If at that moment someone had had the power to observe from a distance, he would have perceived how intelligently the threads of destiny interweave in order to help those who, lacking control of their mental life, ignore how certain thoughts, acting outside of one's will, aim to satisfy the whimsical demands of one's instinct. Man could avoid so

many unpleasant and ungrateful moments by having an exact notion of the invisible influence such thoughts have upon him, and could be able to escape their traps every time they attempted to deviate his noble feelings. Human nature is complex, and in order to dominate its secrets, one must detect them one by one, as their enigmatic force provides the live elements that reveal them. By examining the weaknesses that slacken the individual's resistances, one can clearly perceive how much the human creature must advance in its quest for self-betterment.

Unable to avoid it, Claudio experienced that subtle quiver that arises from a change in mood. There was no doubt that this young lady's presence on board caused in him a certain commotion once again, since he remembered her particularly beautiful. Nevertheless, he was able to restrain himself and, satisfied with his vigorous reaction, he gently embraced Griselda as soon as they entered their stateroom, saying:

"My dear, you are the only woman who will occupy the highest and most sacred place in my heart because you will know how to ensure that the feeling that unites me to you will constitute a reality throughout my life."

Observant and sharp, pretending not to understand the cause of this sudden outburst, Griselda nodded and promptly offered him encouraging words.

There was so much purity and sincerity in each other's expressions that an indescribable joy made them forget the fleeting change of rhythm in their hearts.

As the ship was well on its way in the Atlantic waters taking them back to their country, it began to dip and rise in its typical manner. A cloudy sky and the fleeting presence of repeated lightning announced a forthcoming violent storm. Suddenly, the ship was whipped by a powerful gust of wind that sent a furious whistling sound throughout the decks, forcing the few passengers who were still outside to quickly go below. Following the strong wind, which lasted a short while, came moments of expectation, and soon large drops of rain began falling as a prelude to the strong storm that was to develop later.

Prone to seasickness, Claudio suddenly felt indisposed and consequently was unable to have lunch. Griselda agreed to his request to go on her own to the restaurant, although she would have preferred to stay in the stateroom. She gently protested her husband's whim but, having decided to comply, she left him thinking of returning promptly.

Having finished the light meal she had ordered, she glanced at her watch and was pleased to see she had taken little over thirty minutes.

She was leaving the restaurant when, after a few steps, she was suddenly surprised to notice a person she seemed to recognize. In her mind, the image of this person who had just appeared was the same as the one who had helped her during her unforgettable dream.

"What a resemblance!" she said to herself.

Upon entering the stateroom, she found Claudio asleep under the effects of a tranquilizer. Her first impulse was to wake him up, but she restrained herself and tried to overcome on her

own the emotion and the rush of ideas that were springing up in her. Dressed as she was, she lay on the bed and gradually took hold of herself. She was then able to review her dream while trying to link the facts. However, she could not find sufficient basis to reach a conclusion.

“What are the hidden mysteries concealed in the depths of our life,” she wondered, “which leave us perplexed when we are overtaken by situations such as this one in which manifestations of two interrelated worlds seem to mingle as if both obeyed inscrutable laws that shape or change destinies and lives in an endless succession of facts extraneous to our conscience?”

She looked at Claudio who was asleep and thought: “What I had then was a vision and what I am living today is a reality.” She decided that for the time being she would not mention anything to him of what was happening to her.

Outside, the violence of the rain had subsided and the ship was sailing calmly under a sky that was about to recover its natural translucency.

The next day, as they went up to the top deck, Griselda, unable to keep her little secret to herself any longer, chose to reveal it to Claudio. As she did, she couldn’t help but display a certain air of mystery and concern as if in reality she were attributing an extraordinary significance to this event.

“It seems to me,” he said casually, “that you are giving too much importance to a simple imaginative issue.”

“Perhaps...” she answered, smiling at him.

Nevertheless, she observed Claudio’s withdrawn attitude. This made her understand that her spontaneity had not received the

expected response. From that moment onwards, she tried hard to erase from Claudio's face this sudden shadow, which was totally unjustified. She was so successful that, moments later, they were talking in a friendly manner without letting the slightest variation affect her joy.

In the hustle and bustle of that marvelous floating world, where anything could be motivation for fun, they did the same as those who knew they had a lot of spare time on their hands. When worries occurred, they vanished as if by magic, dissipated by the outflow of joy expressed tenderly and affectionately. Don Roque was remembered frequently. The latest news that had arrived before leaving Marseilles, however, had kept them relatively calm.

250 It was on one of the happy days spent on board that Griselda, stopping in the corridor adjacent to the hall, pressed Claudio's arm and nudged him to look at a specific person.

"I don't quite see who you are pointing to," he said trying to spot the person.

"That gentleman in the light colored suit, Claudio... He is now talking to the one next to him."

"Oh, yes, I see now!" he said. But, as if a sudden interfering thought crossed his mind, he asked Griselda apprehensively: "Is he the same man who passed by you the other day?"

"The same..." she replied undisturbed.

Claudio turned again towards the person in question and stared at him with a determined look, while Griselda waited to see his reaction, noticing with surprise that his face had cleared and unexpectedly changed expressions.

"Griselda!" she heard Claudio exclaim radiantly. "Do you know who that is? You cannot imagine... It is Mr. de Sándara!"

"No! It can't be!"

"Yes, Griselda, it is him." And containing himself, he added: "It would be better if he saw us at another time so we could talk to him when he's alone."

As they returned to their stateroom, where they had decided to discuss the matter, both looked at each other not knowing at first what to say.

"This is incredible!" Claudio finally exclaimed, surprised and concerned. "How can such a coincidence be explained? Let me tell you something, darling. Under different circumstances, meeting de Sándara would have been a reason for great joy, but today, it is not. I feel something inside that I cannot define. It is as if his presence on board triggers in me fear, uneasiness, discomfort. In short, I don't know what it is."

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"It is strange. You have always spoken about him with enthusiasm, affection and kindness. Why are you overtaken by this inquietude now? Could it be perhaps because you relate it to what I described in my dream?"

"Not exactly" he answered, avoiding his wife's stare, "but you must agree with me, darling, that all this has a strange and upsetting connotation. First, my father's illness, forcing us to hasten our return. Now, Mr. de Sándara traveling with us on the same ship and, to top it all, your dream! Don't you see that these facts suggest something unusual?"

"I can't deny it, but considering that this refers to Mr. de Sándara it must be significant and should serve more as a motive of joy than concern, although I can't imagine what it could be."

"For the time being, I can only see that his presence on board adds a special interest to our voyage."

"You will see, Claudio, that even though this might seem strange to us, something good will come from this encounter."

Just then, they heard the call for lunch.

Griselda, delicately retouching her hair in the mirror, skillfully enhanced the beautiful coloring of her lips and, having concluded her makeup she asked, in a flirtatious tone, for the approval of Claudio who was watching her.

A little later, they both stepped into the dining room with great expectations that would surely be satisfied if they met their friend. But this was not to be, since he was nowhere to be seen.

"He must have had his lunch in his stateroom", Arribillaga assumed.

"Perhaps, but it certainly is a disappointment!" Griselda replied, slightly upset.

"If we were to follow the sequence of events, we would have to allow for the encounter to occur naturally. Don't you think so?"

"I also think it would be best."

Nevertheless, what they were expecting was not to happen that afternoon or that night.

The next day, as Claudio was talking with a traveling companion close to the winter garden, he spotted Mr. de Sándara heading his way. He was overtaken by an indescribable surprise when he noticed he was accompanied by the same young woman and the distinguished lady he had seen with her in Paris.

He left his friend as he watched them passing through the door and stop on the opposite end of the room with the apparent intention of sitting down, but he then realized that he had been wrong because the ladies took leave of de Sándara and left by the nearest exit. Evidently, they had gone that far just to accompany him and, judging by the familiarity with which they treated each other, he had no doubt that some kind of affection existed between them.

At the end of these conjectures, he realized that this was his opportunity to approach his friend since he was just sitting comfortably in an armchair and seemed to have no other commitment than to savor the delights of a cigar.

He walked towards him without giving it another thought.

"Mr. de Sándara," he said respectfully, "can it be possible?"

"Oh! Arribillaga!" he exclaimed in turn and standing up, shook Claudio's hands effusively. "What a great pleasure to see you!"

"In fact, Mr. de Sándara, it is extraordinary how long it took us to meet again. I was really looking forward to seeing you again."

He promptly mentioned that he had come to know of his presence on board only two days before.

"In contrast, I knew of your presence on board well before..." said de Sándara. "By reading the passenger list I found out that you had boarded the ship in Marseilles; as I knew you were on your honeymoon, I didn't consider it prudent to deprive you of even one minute."

"And yet, you would have given us enormous joy. You have no idea how eager my wife is to meet you. My frequent references to you have greatly awakened her interest."

"I hope that after you introduce me to your wife, she will grant me the honor of not being disappointed. The descriptions people make about others, as accurate as they may seem, don't always coincide with reality."

"Not in this case, where reality will absolutely correspond to the information I gave her."

Since de Sándara had met Arribillaga in Buenos Aires, he had often remembered him. De Sándara had observed that he possessed certain conditions that were favorable to his initiation into this science of causal cognitions that he dominated. Based on this observation, he had made plans for him in the event that circumstances, which he had no doubts would occur, put them in contact again.

254 Talking about the trip, Claudio explained the reason for having anticipated his return and his friend told him that he was not heading for Buenos Aires but for Rio where he would spend two weeks before going back to Mexico. He was sorry that, contrary to what he thought, they would not arrive together at the same destination, yet, eager to clarify what was intriguing him, he asked at the first opportunity:

"Are you traveling alone?"

De Sándara, who seemed to expect the question, answered:

"I am traveling with two members of my family."

"You refer to the two ladies who accompanied you when you arrived here?" Claudio asked with enthusiasm.

"Correct. The elderly one is my aunt and the young woman, whom you have seen with her, is her adopted

daughter. My aunt's name is Christina de Sándara, Landover's widow. I have a great affection for her."

A very suggestive expression appeared on Claudio's face, one of those that anticipate a thought in full communicative movement, as he narrated to his friend the series of surprises that had occurred during their trip, now added by the fact that these ladies had a family tie with him.

As de Sándara did not seem to respond to his words with the same enthusiasm, he decided to change the subject.

"You were saying a while ago, Mr. de Sándara, that the trip you have just made to Europe was merely for tourism."

"Indeed, my friend Arribillaga. When the body resents the extreme care we sometimes give to the spirit, we must, from time to time, turn our attention to it and provide it with some pleasures by taking it on a trip."

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A silence followed his words, said in a cordial tone of voice.

De Sándara was deep in thought as if he were consulting something within himself. Reserved and impenetrable by nature, he was being needled insistently by the thought of opening up for a few moments the doors of his intimacy to young Arribillaga. His aim was to disclose a part of his life so that the young man could closely evaluate the moral essence of his way of being.

The affection he had felt for Claudio since they met, now reactivated by the circumstance of meeting again, led de Sándara to hope that he may one day be converted, like a son, into a loyal trustee of his ideas.

Staring at Claudio, who was eagerly waiting for him to speak, he said:

“My aunt’s adopted daughter, whose name is Mariné, has all the qualifications that honor a woman’s soul. Since she was a child, she has had a strong inclination to go beyond the incipient reasoning of her age. It was precisely this inclination that has always made her very receptive to learn everything I taught her. Her grandfather was my aunt’s late husband’s cousin. He had come to Argentina from Spain as a vice-consul. Marine’s father was born there. He was an intelligent young man; however, he was amongst those who started a thousand projects without ever finishing any of them. More than once, s it was very difficult for him to pay for his family’s expenses. A wanderer in a somewhat restless life, he did not have his head screwed on straight, as goes the saying, when his father died. His father’s death depressed him deeply and, from then on, he began to act more reasonably and accepted a position as a traveling salesman for an important commercial company of Buenos Aires. One day, he took his wife and daughter for a ride to a location far away from the city. On his way back, he drove his car at a very high speed and, when there was nothing to indicate a tragedy, he crashed into another vehicle. The fatal consequences were such that only Mariné survived the catastrophe. Fortunately, she was saved because she was ejected through the window and ended up with only a few bruises. It was difficult to comfort the poor orphan who was only nine at the time. Her only relative was my aunt Christina, a widow with a good financial situation. Mariné was brought up surrounded by deep affection.

“I used to visit her frequently,” continued de Sándara. “That same year, my father was transferred to Mexico as a representative of an

important maritime corporation. There he remarried. Since I was left on my own, my aunt invited me to live with them, which I did for some time. I was so enchanted by the girl's kind and cheerful character that I developed a strong affection for her. Her uncommon intelligence easily absorbed all the cognitions she aimed for, allowing one to foresee, as she was growing up, that her aspirations were not obstructed by the walls that surround common possibilities."

"Mariné was already grown up when I had to leave for Mexico to take possession of the assets my father had left me. When I arrived there, I negotiated with his widow to pass the house they had in the city to my name. I had decided to live in Mexico for a while since this was essential for me to be able to pursue certain studies and investigations that I had to accomplish. Having been accustomed to my aunt's and Marine's company, I urged the former to come and share the house with me. After strenuous efforts, I was able to convince her to make the move, which she finally did. Since then, we have been living in this part of the world."

"Do you like Mexico more than Argentina?"

"Naturally the attraction to my country is predominant," replied de Sándara, "but this does not keep me from recognizing that Mexico holds certain peculiarities and enchantments which captivate us with irresistible force. On the other hand, each country, according to its geographic location and its telluric adjustment, has in its physical and psychic composition something, which carries an affinity that is revealed to our contact. This is undoubtedly, what enables the human being to live in any of the various parts of the world that is to his liking.

Following those words, Arribillaga broke the silence saying:

"Your story is very interesting, Mr. de Sándara! I regard it as an expression of trust on your part and I do thank you very much for it."

De Sándara went on:

"As I was saying, everything was admirably solved and this allowed me to triple my efforts in the pursuit of my projects. Since we moved to Mexico, Mariné has been my efficient helper. I must also emphasize here her docile and understanding nature that has contributed so much in creating a perfectly harmonious environment around me. As the years went by, her inclination to know all, which corresponds, to the life of the spirit was accentuated. This inclination helped her assimilate with great benefit all that I placed within her reach. This brought her very close to me and it was to this fact that we initially attributed her preference for my company over that of younger people of her age. I say initially because later on the circumstances led us to other conclusions. Mariné, whom you have seen occasionally, is now engaged to me. This may be the logical consequence of two parallel lives that are sustained by the same ideals. This, my friend Arribillaga, is a summary of what I wanted you to know."

De Sándara seemed to have ended his narrative, yet, he added:

"I have always given Mariné the greatest freedom to dispose of her heart as she saw fit. She was never denied parties and entertainment. On the contrary, I tried to favor every opportunity so that she would not feel deprived of the incentive that is brought about in every woman when courted. Over the years, I have kept this attitude unaltered in order to allow her to decide for herself about her own destiny."

"With such an advantage it's obvious nobody was able to beat you," said Claudio, attempting a smile.

A moment later, he dared ask:

"When you were in Buenos Aires did Ms. Mariné accompany you?"

"Yes, my friend, I had also made that trip with her and my aunt. I would have introduced her to you had I not known that you were engaged. At the time, Mariné was free."

De Sándara had just detected in Claudio the fierce battle between two antagonistic thoughts. This reminded him of the suggestive story of the pregnant woman who feels within herself the tough conflict between two enemy creatures, and wishing to prevent his friend from facing a similar struggle in his feelings, he said:

"Please, don't feel sorry, that would be ingratitude. Based on your own references, I presume your wife is an enchanting woman and I do not doubt she will know how to make you very happy. Don't you think so?"

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"Oh, yes! Certainly!" exclaimed Claudio, promptly attempting to come back to his senses.

"Very well, my friend, I have just described to you a young lady who is one of the best endowed by nature and the one whom I will have the pleasure of introducing to you in a moment."

And as if putting an end to the discussion, de Sándara got up from his chair.

"If you agree," he suggested to Claudio, "we could meet again in the living room in half an hour."

"Just the two of us?"

Gently tapping his hand on Claudio's back, de Sándara smiled and said:

"No, the ladies will be joining us."

When Claudio entered his stateroom, the noise of the lock awakened Griselda who had fallen asleep while reading.

"Darling!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm as he approached her.

"What happened?"

"What was supposed to happen. I met Mr. de Sándara!

"I am so happy! Was he very surprised to see you?"

"He showed as much pleasure as I did. We talked for a long time. This is why I was late. Do you know who is with him?"

"Who?"

"I'm warning you, you'll be surprised."

"Who is it? Tell me!"

"Do you remember the two ladies we had seen in Paris and who are traveling on this same ship?"

"It can't be!"

"And yet it is and you will see for yourself very soon. Mr. de Sándara has invited us to get together with them this afternoon."

"Is this true? Oh, what pleasant and exciting news!

A thought of fear crossed her mind and held back her joy for a moment, yet, quickly getting rid of it, she stared at Claudio through the brilliant transparency of her eyes and asked:

"Are they related?"

“Oh, somewhat... You nearly guessed right.”

Then Claudio gave a brief account of what de Sándara had told him, but realizing they were late, he urged her to get ready.

Now, more relaxed and cheerful, she took off her robe and began to dress hastily.

“Darling, I will try to be ready as fast as possible, but I may not make it on time. If you don’t mind, you can go ahead and apologize for my delay because I wouldn’t like for both of us to be late.”

“I see no other alternative,” he answered, as if protesting.

He tightened the knot of his tie, kissed Griselda and left cheerfully saying he would be back to get her.

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Arribillaga was the first to arrive at the designated place. A little later, de Sándara joined him.

Seeing each other unaccompanied and suspecting the reason, they both burst out in a spontaneous laughter as they presented their apologies for the absence of the ladies.

“A woman takes more time to approve her hairdo than she does to dress,” said Mr. de Sándara.

“It is quite understandable since according to her, this approval is essential to please the eyes of those who look at her,” said Claudio.

Meeting his friend one more time pleased Claudio to

such an extent that he once again expressed himself, in a courteous tone, stating he attributed this fact to the influence of his good star.

"Stars are good, especially when they have a particular interest in serving their favorite earthling," replied de Sándara.

"And what interest could they have in us?" inquired Claudio.

"Some, no doubt, since you just bestowed upon them the honor of intervening in this circumstance."

The subtlety confused Claudio who could not avoid blushing.

"Don't give it any importance," said de Sándara quickly, without revealing that he had noticed.

"But it has!" replied Claudio, changing swiftly from confusion to an open cheerful attitude. "This happens as a result of having accumulated in our minds, over the years, ideas that were never examined."

"And this was not due to a lack of time, was it?"

After a short silence, Arribillaga smiled and, exchanging an intelligent glance with de Sándara, said:

"I will try to assimilate the lesson" and, added:

"If I may, Mr. de Sándara, I will go and get my wife."

When he returned, this time with Griselda, he found de Sándara still alone, but at that very moment, Mariné and Mrs. de Landivar arrived and joined the group. Naturally, the first subject discussed was the coincidence of the encounter.

Seen now at close range, the traits on Mariné's face reflected a certain air of self-control and seriousness, which beautified her young age. Contributing to that was undoubtedly the gaze of her lovely black eyes with their long eyelashes that revealed her good and exquisite nature. Graceful black curly locks adorned her face of pearly complexion and of harmonious features. Her body was slender, proportionate and her demeanor was extremely pleasant.

Mrs. de Landivar, who irradiated a blend of distinction and simplicity, was one of those people who immediately and effortlessly awakened feelings of friendliness and affection in others. Her joviality and optimism were such that her advanced years passed unnoticed. Furthermore, her body maintained its vigor and still preserved the signs of the great beauty she must have been in her youth. Her pale, highly expressive oval-shaped face was in harmony with her neatly combed white hair. In her very particular way, she soon made those who were present feel the effects of her social and entertaining character, which appealed to everyone.

De Sándara also joined in the conversation in timely interventions even when the issues turned trivial. As everyone present contributed with their skills and talent, this encounter of people who had never met before soon became very cordial.

Smiling at Griselda and Mariné, who seemed to delight in their conversation, de Sándara surprised them with these words:

"Seeing you together would prompt anyone to say that you are daughters of the same mother-of-pearl."

"Well said!" Christina replied. "Two pearls that are not part of the same necklace but seem to have been united, by chance, under the same sign of friendship."

"I thank you for the kind comparison," replied Mariné nodding gracefully.

"And particularly for the comments you made about us," said Griselda in turn.

The welcome given to Griselda and Arribillaga was deeply felt by them at that moment. It was not a matter of having made another simple acquaintance as those that often occur by convenience. No. This was an extraordinary event to them and Griselda felt that it could be perhaps the opportunity to satisfy her long-felt inquietudes.

It was, perhaps, her own face that revealed the intimate yearning or intention to ask a question, which made de Sándara reply at a given moment:

"There is no doubt that human beings wander around in the world until they find, just like the stars, the orbit of the great guiding spirit of paths and destinies... Until then, they must roam on earth, as the stars do in space, searching for the elements that, when integrated, will propel their progress forward to other higher forms of existence."

"Are you referring to the theory on the afterlife of the soul?" asked Griselda who was attentively following his statements.

"Not exactly. To me, the only afterlife that should, in principle, interest the human being is the one he can achieve during his lifetime

by being reborn as a result of elevating himself to a maximum level above his old being. This “robot”, I would say, who lives in each human individual when the mechanism of his intelligence has not yet been perfected, must develop his conscience, which is the one that allows the free function of the spirit.”

“I didn’t understand very well the meaning of the word “robot” you have attributed to all people,” Claudio objected. “I think there is in all of us, in some more than others naturally, a basic responsibility that obliges us to measure our thoughts and deeds. Doesn’t this relate directly to our conscience?”

“In my view, the conscience, my friend Arribillaga, doesn’t hold the same meaning that is generally attributed to it. When it possesses the cognitions that enable it to fulfill its lofty mission, I consider it to be the central government of our inner world. Nothing that occurs in it can therefore remain extraneous to its intervention and acquiescence. I will be more explicit: if through my conscience I were to govern my thoughts and my deeds so that, at all moments, I would be aware of the progress made by my ideas as well as of the movements operating in me, meant to support everything I plan to do in the course of my days, wouldn’t I be achieving something that doesn’t exist in most people? Despite the references made by science and philosophy, neither of which has clarified the issue, here, therefore, is the evidence, the indisputable reality, which is: that one lives more automatically than consciously.”

“By virtue of what type of stimulus would man then be able to move on?”

“At times by psychological and sensitive stimuli and, at others by stimuli originating from the instinct, as it is well known that

the sensitivity, like the instinct, usually replaces the conscience and acts spontaneously driven by natural demands of different types. Nevertheless, the human being is also moved in a much more positive manner by the influence of the stimuli originated by the cognitions his intelligence accumulates. It should be mentioned, however, that these never allow one to have an exact awareness of the conscience's intervention because, when the cognitions are kept on a theoretical plane, they do not always move or are expressed with the approval of one's conscience."

"According to you, what would be the most efficient means to free man from being overtaken by this deceitful conceptual illusion which, in a way, implies a presumption?"

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"The means exist although you will agree with me that it would be very difficult to achieve such wonders with the sporadic help of some casual advice. Real changes cannot be accomplished, my friend, by mere accidents of chance. They are accomplished by the profound, tenacious and continuous cultivation of one's understanding. We mustn't forget that man has accustomed his life to a routine, to an intimate and social "modus vivendi" which he is reluctant to alter. This is why we see him insistently resisting changes, which, in one way or another, would modify his way of life. Haven't you frequently observed how people feel the sensation of having lost everything when some circumstance breaks their routine or changes their habitual preferences?"

"No matter how costly these changes may be," said Griselda with enchanting conviction, "I think that there is great need for the individual to pull out of such inner positions and achieve happier forms of existence. Will this be difficult, Mr. de Sándara?"

When the soul yearns to enrich life spiritually, I don't believe it would be..."

"Well said. However, it is necessary to add that the conscience, referring to it with authority, is always a source of activity and must not remain, not even for an instant, on the sidelines of what the individual aspires, thinks or does.

"You can be sure that the advice will not pass unnoticed by me," replied Griselda pleasantly.

"You can assume Mr. de Sándara," insinuated Claudio, "that from now on I will not find it very pleasant to behave as a 'robot'."

"Nor will I," stated Griselda "although it will be difficult without Mr. de Sándara's assistance."

"To show you how much satisfaction this gives me, I will begin by saying, as a mere suggestion, that the aspirations in the process of achieving your objectives, like plants in the greenhouse, must not be exposed externally. Later on, when placed outside in the sunshine, they will flourish, but, first, they must adapt gradually. This means that the cognitions, whose virtue is to convert these yearnings into reality, need to be zealously guarded within the individual's inner self. Exposing them to the curiosity of others, before they become an inseparable part of one's life, is not recommended."

At this point, de Sándara extended a cordial invitation to his friends:

"If you all agree, we will now savor a few selected dishes I specially ordered to celebrate this encounter."

The invitation was received enthusiastically. It was obvious that in those hearts a real desire to get closer prevailed and this

undoubtedly provided the appropriate setting to address more familiar issues once the social formulas were done with.

Griselda and Mariné led the way to the restaurant followed by the others at a slower pace, giving Christina the opportunity to talk about the art of maintaining one's youth, an issue that was her passion.

Claudio had rarely seen de Sándara as communicative and happy, as he appeared to be that night during dinner. He spoke cheerfully adding his effusiveness to that of his guests. One could perceive that in his way of expressing his sentences there was a deliberate intent to sound out the young couple's souls. He was faced with two different psychologies that complemented each other admirably. He observed in Claudio a great mental vivacity and a slight tendency to exceed, with his imagination, the limits of reality. He was easily suggestible and still lacking the maturity of a man truly molded by life's struggles. He had vulnerable spots that could easily become the targets of hazards if strong and resistant thoughts did not assist and guide him along a secure path that would provide him with the inner defense he lacked. Griselda was of a sensitive yet strong nature. No one could make her change the course of her convictions nor weaken her forces when facing life's great difficulties. Her intelligence depicted beautiful perspectives favored by the influx of inner qualities that enhanced her psychological and spiritual being with harmony and beauty.

Nothing escaped Mr. de Sándara's attention. He had just formed a clear idea of the reality of these two human beings who, seeking to lead a spiritual life, placed themselves under the protection of his cognitions and experience.

Back at the hall, where coffee and liqueurs were being served, Mrs. de Landivar, who usually retired early, began to bid

goodnight and headed to her stateroom accompanied by the two young ladies.

Silent, Claudio smoked a cigarette as he watched them leave. In that inner gallery, where the soul brings together the occurrences that have most impressed it, there was a recollection, an image that had just undergone a splendid transformation. The image of Mariné, which had previously managed to unsettle his senses, was now, after an intimate struggle with his masculine nature, being admired by him with dignity and virtue. Face to face with it and in the presence of the spiritual fortress that enhanced extraordinarily her charm, Claudio experienced a sensation that was unknown to him until then: the energetic replacement of a possessive or passionate thought by another that provided him with the insuperable force that emanates from beauty and truth. As this transformation was taking place, he felt its judgment reprimanding him and, suddenly, his friend's figure appeared in his memory as the active executor of that transformation, teaching him a lesson he would never forget.

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Next to him, de Sándara seemed to be meditating. After a short while, Claudio uttered a few words indicating his willingness to go on with their conversation. This made de Sándara decide to pursue his probe, this time more directly, regarding Claudio's future projects.

Claudio was not able to define them with the clarity of those who know for sure what they want, but it was sufficient for de Sándara. He understood with greater precision than Claudio did, the importance of putting forward several propositions, all of which were aimed at guiding him to exit the labyrinth of illusory paths often undertaken

by human beings, who believing them to be true, never satisfy their aspirations.

“If what you indicate is essential to reach this paradise that is reserved for the altruistic, strong and free spirits, I shall not hesitate to follow your advice Mr. de Sándara.”

“And you will not find it difficult to do so. However, you must always remember that one enters it not with one’s body but with one’s spirit. This part of our being, above the physical, when assisted and guided, will enjoy the invaluable prerogatives offered by the frequent incursions into this world.”

Claudio’s understanding seemed to absorb his words, one by one.

Meanwhile, after leaving Christina, Mariné and Griselda went up to the deck, but overtaken by a sudden change in temperature, they quickly sought shelter inside.

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Moments later, after getting their overcoats and covering their shoulders, they felt more comfortable indoors, although their faces were red due to the whipping cold they had endured. They fully recovered as they walked slowly back to the hall. It was obvious they were in no hurry at all.

They confided passages of their lives to each other, with particular emphasis on the recent events in which the sentimental experience and the emotions were predominant.

The unmistakable expression provided by the cognition that allows for a lucid narration of the events that constitute one’s existence exalted, in Griselda’s eyes, the image of Mariné, as an exemplary woman. In these moments of intimate expansion, the true identity of Mariné had become visible revealing the excellences of an evolution that was far above hers. The references she made on the indescribable beauty of

the cognitions that had been placed within her reach by de Sándara and her identification with his thoughts and concerns as well as the enthusiasm with which he imparted his altruistic work, soon showed her that they lived in two different worlds: Marine's, which she perceived between sighs and dreams and hers, which was of pleasures and common alternatives. How great a distance existed between the spiritual heights achieved by her beautiful friend and how little she had been able to accomplish! She lacked so much to transcend her reality! A reality that had never reached the point of satisfying her completely! But far from causing her sadness, this stimulated her because of her premonition that Marine's friendship would bring great benefits to her endeavor. At last, she could clearly see the path she would have to follow. She would not lose any more time with attempts and vacillations in uncertainty. A venue was now opening within the fog that enveloped her life and, through it, a ray of light appeared in her soul and it momentarily became more promising. Noticing that Griselda was totally absorbed in her thoughts, Mariné said:

"You look worried..."

"I was thinking of your words. As I listened to you, I felt the hope of leading a life similar to the one you've just described..."

"A very achievable hope, Griselda. All you need is to want it every day with the same intensity as I wanted it and you will see how quickly your aspirations will be fulfilled."

The conversation ended as they joined de Sándara and Claudio who were expecting them.

"Did we take too long?" asked Mariné.

"Just enough time to have three cups of coffee," de Sándara answered smiling.

"That long?" she replied in disbelief as she lowered her head to check his watch. "One o'clock! This is what happens when the minutes are put to good use: time flies."

"I agree," replied Claudio, "it is as if they discreetly fade away from our life so as not to interrupt our happiness with their monotonous and implacable persecution."

Moments later, bidding the newlyweds goodnight, de Sándara left with Mariné towards their respective staterooms. She then realized the degree of esteem that Griselda had inspired in her.

"I am pleased that you have found a loyal friend in Griselda," he said. "You will share with me the happiness of helping them walk along the path of superior human accomplishments that are so far above common desires."

272 De Sándara kissed Marine's hand and they parted, wishing each other sweet dreams.

Inhibited to talk about the joy that moved their hearts, Claudio and Griselda finally expressed their thoughts and feelings, revealing to each other their impressions and emotions, interspersed every now and then with the most affectionate and delicate secrets. Hand in hand and, with the sweet expression of the unpronounceable in their eyes, they felt the happiness of being united, as they never had before. They also realized that they had never experienced such security concerning their future, which they now contemplated with renewed confidence.

In his stateroom, de Sándara did not lie down. He put on his comfortable robe, sat at his desk, where all the necessary writing implements lay, took a pen and let it glide over the white pages that seemed to be waiting for him. He interrupted his work at the break of dawn, overcome by sleep.

It was already noontime and Mariné was very worried because he had not yet arrived to pick her up. She was telling Christina about it as they walked together contemplating the ocean.

"You know too well how Ebel is, my dear!" Cristina said. "When he dives into his papers he forgets everything... even you!"

"I know that, but don't you think that today he's taking longer than usual? Do you think something happened?"

"We can check."

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So with that intent, they went through the nearest door, hastening their steps towards the stateroom area.

"I am sure that he is working" the steward informed them. "He ordered breakfast at nine o'clock and later he was still writing."

"You see, silly girl."

Mariné nodded with an understanding smile, showing how beautiful her soul was at that instant!

Christina then insisted they return to the deck. Reluctant to accompany her, Mariné excused herself and asked someone else from among her acquaintances to replace her. She then sat in an armchair next to the one de Sándara used and started reading the book she had brought along. After glancing over several pages, unable to focus her attention,

she dropped the book on her lap and sat there thinking. She knew how he became remote from his surroundings when his pen glided over the paper, filling page after page. The recollection brought to mind the echo of a few words he used to say when she was still a teen-ager and that she frequently remembered. "Never interrupt me when I am thinking or writing. You can stay by my side as long as you want, but quietly, so you don't distract my attention." She then relived the happy hours she used to spend in the study in their house in Mexico, keeping him company during his work, occupying herself in doing something or other, waiting patiently until he would talk to her or give her a text from his production to read.

274 She remembered that one day, when she was close to him, as usual, she had dropped on the carpet a heavy paperweight that she was holding. It fell with a clattering noise. It was a beautiful rectangular piece made of ebony and bronze and with a shining antique effigy artistically carved in jade engraved in its center. De Sándara had bought it on one of his trips and it had served him for many years. Intimidated by the incident, the young girl tried to escape, tiptoeing quickly. However, he stood up, ran after her and reached her before she had crossed the small room next to the study. Mariné seemed to feel, to this day, the pressure of his strong hand holding her arm to detain her from fleeing. She still seemed to hear his voice when, in an affectionate persuasion rather than with discontent, he said: "I have a lot to talk to you about, Mariné... Let's go back to my study."

This occurrence resurfaced in vivid detail in the young girl's memory and one by one, the words he had said then, as they both sat on the large sofa, came back to her: "You see, Mariné, what happened would not have been important were it not for what it represents in the domains of my thought. Let me be more explicit. You know that I have created my own world. I am, therefore, the lord and master of this creation, which is animated and sustained by my will. Nevertheless, I frequently make concessions to the demands, inevitable at times, of the world in which everyone lives and which I am part of. I conciliate then, effortlessly, the cordial and sincere treatment that I owe my fellowmen with the one I extend to the subjects of my world, that is, the beings, the thoughts and the things that I animate in the spheres of action of my intelligence and those who live in the pages of my books. Hence, whether inside or outside of it, I benefit from the prerogative bestowed by my absolute freedom whose secret resides in never exposing it to foolish ostentation. This puts me on guard against another class of interruption, which due to negligence or misunderstanding, you may incur in during the moments I am absorbed in the care demanded by my attention to this world. This would undoubtedly produce commotions that would cloud and sadden the horizon of our happiness."

"I will never do this again!" she had exclaimed, relieving her emotion with a sob while he, softly touching her hair, caressed her gently. "Don't cry, Mariné. I was only trying to show you that it might be perhaps a sacrifice beyond your strength to love a man who, like myself, cannot even offer you

the enchantment of youth, nor dedicate a lot of his time to you as would any other man. The recent occurrence was merely a casual one, and I assure you that it does not deserve from my part any further amendment. I only mention it as it relates to a negligence of another nature you may incur in, so I wanted to warn you.”

These and other words paraded in Mariné’s mind. All of them related to the forms of behavior that were required of her if she wanted to follow him and one day reign happily in his heart. He then concluded cheerfully with these last words expressed with his usual demeanor: “Now you may drop the paperweight as many times as you please...”

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This episode, to which de Sándara had given particular significance and from which she had extracted several elements that made her understand, was a frequent motive of concern to her soul during several days. What more did he want to say that she had not understood? On quite a few occasions, she was about to ask him but held back. He often advised her to retain in her memory everything that was not understood and, then, remain observant until circumstances, linked to what was not understood, clarified it. It was precisely in moments like the ones she was now living, attentive to the oscillations of her soul that she tried to contain her impatient impulses as she felt her intelligence illuminate and reveal the thought of her beloved. How clear and beautiful his words appeared to her now!

This had occurred several months before. Now, retrenched in a voluntary and peaceful waiting, Mariné was gratified

by remembering the thoughts that had helped her then. She understood why Ebel had used the trivial incident of the paperweight to make her relate it to the possible deviations of her own conduct and understand that the most insignificant acts and details of her life moved him and were to him a motive of specific concerns. "But it will be up to me," she had said to herself at times, "either to make him aware of the smallest oscillations of my thoughts or feelings, or to let him be indifferent to them. In this last case, it would be useless to drop the paperweight or any other object a thousand times, or even throw myself on the floor and desperately beat it with my hands and feet, because he would remain impassive.

Mariné felt a subtle joy as she associated this recollection to what she was presently experiencing and as if reaffirming her self-imposed decision, she strongly promised to become what he so much wanted her to be.

Her soul surged with confidence and, looking at her watch, she realized that lunchtime was near. She took her book and with determination went to look for Ebel.

To her surprise, as soon as her knuckles brushed the door of his stateroom, she saw him ready to come out.

Hand in hand, they both walked through the corridors and, at one point, de Sándara suggested they sit down.

He delighted in scrutinizing Mariné's soul, detecting the most varied aspects in it. This is why on that day he told her in a tone of apparent concern:

"While I was working this morning, I experienced a deep disappointment in you."

As he stared at her with sadness and, at the same time, with deep affection, she, who had learned to guard herself against such ruses, could not overcome her affliction this time.

"I don't understand."

"Don't worry, dear. It was not your fault, but mine. I will explain what happened. As I was absorbed in one of the deepest parts of the book I am writing and of which you are the protagonist, I realized that the Mariné, who plays the role in it and who had evolved to a maximum degree as a result of my thought, demanded of me such superior ideality that I realized it was impossible to achieve it in you."

"Why?" she asked, taken by surprise. "You think I wouldn't be able to elevate myself to such heights?"

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"There is still something else, Mariné. In this mental world, where the esthetical delights of the spirit are fully satisfied, everything moves, lives and is stimulated by our will. Thus the Mariné of that world longs for her beloved because I imposed it on her, making me, as I mentioned before, deeply disappointed. I would have much preferred that she love him with the spontaneous determination of her feelings."

The young woman remained silent, unable to conceal her confusion at first, but once recovered, she immediately uttered with enchanting spontaneity:

"Does this mean that I am different from that Mariné because I loved you and still do as a result of my own will?"

"I have failed incurably!" he exclaimed in a mellow and happy tone. "I thought that the Mariné in my novel would be better than you, but I was wrong."

In fact, de Sándara had perceived in her something that he could never create in the character of his conception. Something that only

God had the power to conceive and etch in the delicate nature of a woman: the sublime enchantment of candor that is impossible to see, feel and breathe in a world in which human beings have distorted so much with their excessive passions.

As he gazed at Mariné at that moment, and feeling her heart palpitate in harmony with his own, de Sándara saw his own conceptions, as they related to spiritual rebirth, become more illuminated. He would certainly not make his protagonist die in his novel to become idealized in memory but rather make her live with all the power of the ideal conceived by his thought. He thought about it while scrutinizing in depth the marvelous process that can allow souls to evolve to the pinnacle of self-betterment, a discovery that made him extract useful keys whose power he utilized in the grand experience of his life.

“Sometimes,” he said to Mariné, still following his train of thought, “the power of a feeling can do more than a thousand thoughts put together. This happens to me at this moment, when I begin a new phase, as if by the special grace of Providence, I have to live a glorious rebirth of the youth that I did not have during my adolescent years. And you, Mariné, who have penetrated so deeply into my life, I will take to my kingdom. You will live in it because you possess the imponderable virtue of discretion without which it is impossible for anyone to pass through the gates of mystery that conceal the secrets of wisdom. As you can see, my darling,” he added smiling, “following the ‘disappointment’ and the ‘failure’ come happy moments of pleasure and triumph, in which I am celebrating my decision to accelerate our wedding date.”

“Are you serious?”

“Why not? You will set the date and I will ensure that you become the happiest woman on earth, if this were possible.”

After this endearing moment, they smoothly passed onto the immediate realities and noticed they were suddenly late for lunch.

“Mother Christina must be waiting for us!” Mariné said nearly jumping out of her chair.

De Sándara asked her to go ahead to keep his aunt company, promising to join them soon.

Mariné assumed that she would meet Christina near the restaurant, and she was not wrong.

She joined her instantly and apologized for the delay giving her reasons that were totally justified.

“It was due to something very, very important, mother, I assure you. I’ll tell you later.”

“Why not now?” she answered, changing her air of curiosity to a forced gesture of resignation adding: “I see that I am forced to stretch my patience today.”

Mariné looked at her and smiled gently.

A few minutes later, de Sándara joined them and all three sat at the table eager to have lunch.

De Sándara’s eyes reflected the clarity of an autumn sunset, one of those that announce days that invite you to breathe the air with full plenitude.

His aunt stared at him with a scrutinizing look as she noticed the imperceptible expression on his face that she never missed when he wanted to share some piece of news. With the intent to be heard, she whispered:

“I don’t know why I sometimes get this sensation of being excluded precisely when I least want to be indifferent to what surrounds me...”

Her words nudged her nephew’s thought triggering, at the same time, the recollection of a happy family event. As if, mentally transported simultaneously to the scene of what had occurred, he told his aunt, between a bite and a sip:

“At this moment, I remember what led you to call me ‘savage.’”

“Savage...” Christina repeated, pretending to prod her memory to attract the image faithfully. “Oh, yes... I remember now! But I had said it then thinking it was someone else who wanted to rob me of Mariné, not you.”

The fact de Sándara alluded to was an unforgettable event to all those involved. This descriptive word had been uttered in anger by Christina and referred to the presumed presence of a suitor who, according to her, was the instigator of Mariné’s strange states of mind that often kept her silent and worried.

“He must be a savage,” sustained the old lady on one occasion when she was with de Sándara in his room, “to begin to burden this girl’s life at such an early stage. Did you know anything about it?”

Savoring this happy moment of feeling intimately linked to that secret, he only pretended to enjoy the swaying rhythm of his body on his aunt’s rocking chair.

"Truly, Mariné has two suitors," he had said, "one is young and a good boy and loves her very much, but he planned to take her far away, because he could not tolerate you!"

His aunt's energetic protests, affirming and reaffirming that she would not allow it, led de Sándara to calm her down by saying:

"According to Mariné, she too doesn't want him, so now you can relax. As to the other suitor, he is a savage, as you qualified him a short while ago. He is a mature man whom she fell in love with. It so happens that he doesn't dare claim her, fearing that she could change her mind after a while..."

"Surely, this one must be stupid!"

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"Exactly! Yet, my dearest aunt, it must be said that this stupid man feels a great affection for you."

"Do you know him?"

"I believe I know him, although after what you just said, I really don't know what to think..."

"What did I say?"

"Oh, nothing! You first called me a savage and then stupid."

Needless to say, having reached that point, the ruse was celebrated with an explosion of laughter, a laughter that was open and communicative, reflecting very clearly the intimate expressions of the soul.

The happy outcome of this episode, which turned an innocent ploy into an event of virtual transcendence for Mariné and Ebel, was now remembered as preceding a second event, more important still, to be announced to Christina.

"I don't doubt that you will be happy with the news that we are about to tell you," said de Sándara looking at his aunt. After an intentional pause to enhance her expectation, he added: "On the matter in question, the person we were talking about and, who luckily happens to be your relative, intends to marry Mariné very soon, as soon as she agrees to set the date."

"I suspected it. I had already suspected it!" she exclaimed happily.

A little later, as they left the restaurant, they met a few acquaintances, forming a group that grew with the presence of the Arribillagas. De Sándara finished his cigar and, feeling the need to rest, he promptly retired, encouraging the others to do the same, especially Christina who considered a siesta to be her best tonic.

"I too will accompany you, but not to rest." Mariné said taking de Sándara by the arm and telling those who stayed behind: "I will be back shortly."

And, as they walked away, he made her a compliment, saying:

"These attentions you have shown towards me please my heart, and I would be saddened if you didn't possess this small yet pleasant virtue."

"I owe it exclusively to mother Christina who, since I was a child, taught me to be friendly to everyone. However," she added with gracious insinuation, "it's true that I made a point of being so with one and only one person."

As they parted, Mariné took the small stairway to the next level to meet her friends, gliding down with such amazing speed that her feet seemed to float on air. Only Griselda

and Claudio were waiting for her there and, even the latter soon left them, allowing Mariné to share with her friend the happiness she had felt that day. They then parted so as to also get their rest.

Recognizing Ebel's usual light knocks at her door, Mariné came out of her stateroom that afternoon and was received by his affectionate nod of approval.

Accepting this as a compliment, she joyfully bowed with innocent grace making a small reverence.

"Are you alone?" he asked. "What about Aunt Christina?"

"Wandering, as always! One would say that she is in her early youth..."

Since it was still early, they decided to take a walk outside. The sun was shining brightly on the water as if wishing to stamp the chromatic variations of its vibrations on it. Unable to tolerate the scintillation of this turbulent and immeasurable surface, they changed their mind and headed back inside the ship where they soon found Christina chatting with other ladies.

They had an appointment with the Arribillagas at teatime and for that reason they later met in the living room. They were joined by Christina who had left her friends to be with them.

Life on board was always fertile ground to weave and unweave comments about any topic, no matter how private it might be. Evidently, Mrs. de Landivar must have experienced a strong disturbance that afternoon, judging by her tone of voice as she referred to a very negative social practice.

"It's inconceivable," she expressed, slightly annoyed, "how people feel compelled to investigate the history and the lives of their fellowmen."

"True," said Mariné, "and, when they don't succeed in satisfying their curiosity, what do they do? They begin to turn the spindle of fantasy to build the most extravagant yarns."

"Undoubtedly this is meant to avoid discrediting the profession of unofficial correspondents," Claudio emphasized, laughing.

"I don't understand," insisted Christina, "how these remnants of lack of culture still exist in good people. Precisely where I believed I would find affection, sincerity and reciprocity, I often suffered crude disappointments because of this..."

"Why do you get so upset, mother?" inquired Mariné. "You have often said that when we listen to the advice given by our experiences, we become wise and prudent."

"Yes, my child, yes, but in spite of being forewarned against surprises that overcome our good faith, we cannot always avoid the ill effect that certain things produce in us."

Mrs. de Landivar then went on to describe the series of disappointments suffered by her friends before she was able to rely on her own reflections and illuminate her conscience with many facts that were, until then, the cause of her sadness.

Mariné was aware of some of those facts and knew with what integrity her mother had faced them.

Having followed the course of the conversation with interest, de Sándara drew a conclusion from all he had heard and said:

“It is common to observe within the circle of people who live close to each other episodes which can be compared to the philosophical dialogue of Cervantes’s dogs in their lengthy debate and conjectures as they stared at the effigy of man.”

“After all, why should we care about what others want to believe about us?” asked Claudio.

“Naturally, this is something that shouldn’t worry us.” de Sándara replied. “What matters is being capable of discovering the degree of honesty and common sense the people who judge us may have.”

“I think this is how it should be,” Claudio affirmed. “If we were always able to put things in their right perspective and exact place, could people’s gossip have any damaging effect on us?”

“None, absolutely none. And, in contrast to the ungrateful facts we are referring to and whose knowledge protects us from an excessive good faith, we would be more than comforted by the incomparable satisfactions we get from our real friends, those who are dear to our hearts and offer us, through their friendship, the fruits of their affection and sincerity. This is why I have always given immense value to friendship, to this process that is forged in the intimacies of oneself and is confirmed by the consolidation of affection through progressive degrees of confidence.”

"Would it be wrong to say that this is a consequence of mutual understanding produced by numerous proven deeds?" Claudio asked.

"No. Using other terms to refer to it, we could also describe it as a mental communion of affections, established by the bond of thoughts and feelings."

The dialogue's final comments had dissipated the shadows of Christina's mood, as she promptly recovered her cheerful optimism. In an excellent inner state of cordiality, everyone went up to the deck and ended the afternoon by contemplating the infinite reflections of light projected on the sky and the ocean by the setting sun.

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This crossing, which had given rise to so many new and unexpected emotions to the happy couple, was quickly coming to an end.

In spite of their eagerness to reach Buenos Aires in order to be close to Don Roque, Claudio and Griselda were nonetheless quite sad to see the ship arrive in Rio on account of their friends' imminent departure.

As they strolled indolently on the bridge, they saw the afternoon taper off into the twilight and with it the moment that would bring to an end this succession of days, which had been so happy and placid. They had also been days of gratifying and profound friendship, and of particular benefit due to the

projections that they would no doubt have in that life they had just begun. They seemed to feel as if the ship, which was already slowing down, was doing so with unusual haste, rushing towards the bay that was unraveling before their eyes displaying a succession of panoramic scenic beauty, now clearly defined as if an invisible hand from beyond was gradually unfolding the celestial veil enveloping the scene.

On the verge of being deprived of Mr. de Sándara's valuable assistance, the clear and precise indications that he had given them on frequent occasions had produced a wholesome feeling of confidence and optimism.

288 They knew that to access the world of the spirit they would have to start by penetrating into their own selves. This would, therefore, be the compulsory step that would later allow their ascent to the planes of the superior world that is denied to the foolish, to the believers, to the deceivers, and to the pretentious. It is only open to those who are pure of mind, psychologically healthy, free of prejudices and dogmatic beliefs and, finally, to the souls of good will.

As they were waiting for their friends to say goodbye, they spotted de Sándara.

"What about Mariné?" asked Griselda, seeing him alone.

"She is coming with Christina. They are still packing."

"I will go and get them." And having said that, Griselda left.

Urged no doubt by the imminent separation from his friend, Claudio wished to reaffirm his interest in understanding more precisely the concepts related to this organized inner world, whose movements the individual can govern at will.

"These concepts," de Sandara began as he invited Arribillaga to take a seat, "will become gradually clearer and more defined as soon as you start putting into practice the essential cognitions that I have partially been making available to you. By means of such practice, this organization is totally possible, allowing us to govern successfully this world while, at the same time, converting it into a place of rest and incentive to life. I would remind you that it is formed by our mental and psychological life, by our conscience, by the thoughts, which are animated entities whose autonomy I have already mentioned to you, and by the feelings that act in the sensitive regions of our being."

"Nevertheless, I am still concerned and find the possibility of accomplishing such a feat, in such an abstract area, difficult..."

"You are mistaken, my friend Arribillaga. There is nothing more real and positive to human possibilities than this stimulating prerogative of knowing one's own mental world. And this is not the privilege of intellectually disciplined people. No. The law of evolution excludes no one. I can assure you that very often a person lacking intellectual erudition usually feels and experiences this truth well ahead of others because the sensitivity, which is a precious aid to his understanding, usually acts with greater force in him."

"By the way, why is the educated intellectual so prone to reject such truths in spite of the numerous unobjectionable demonstrations presented?"

"For a very simple reason. The educated intellect fears everything that has not yet entered the orbit of its domains, especially when it suspects that, in order to undertake investigations of a transcendent nature, it must change its rigid attitude and impose upon itself efforts which it considers as already made."

"It's obviously not a question of just accepting truths,"

"You're right. It's a question of penetrating them with one's understanding. In order to do so, we have to make use of all the harmonious elements that constitute the unit of this truth, even when these elements seem to be dispersed. Nevertheless, let us disregard these side considerations and talk about this inner world, which no one is barred from creating for oneself. Read again, every now and then, the letters I sent you to Buenos Aires. You already know that this world doesn't consist uniquely of one's life but also includes the people we love, the things that are dear to us, and all the manifestations that maintain a permanent contact with our thought and our feeling. In this world, one experiences the emotions felt by the soul, whether sweet or bitter, being fully conscious of their causes. The individual lives in it with his thoughts, using the intimate contact with them as a powerful stimulus for the functions they must perform in favor of his life and also in favor of the people connected to him whose spirits are delighted by the good he offers them. When this world has been created, he will never feel alone and will always have spare time to assist those who need to be helped."

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Listening to these words in an attempt to retain them, Claudio felt more confident than ever before that the support needed to apply what he had learned on that trip could be found in the immensity of the mental developments that, in one way or another, de Sándara used in order to foster the inclinations so that man could be elevated by means of gradual advances in the evolution of his conscience.

The arrival of Christina and the two young women, added to the increasing restlessness around them, due to the imminent debarkation, put an end to the conversation.

“Is everything ready?” de Sándara asked.

“Everything...except the willingness to leave Griselda’s gentle and good company behind.” Mariné said quickly.

“It won’t be for long, I hope.” Christina said. And, lowering her voice, she added in a slightly mysterious tone: “I am told that soon, very soon, we will be visiting Buenos Aires.”

Claudio and Griselda sought confirmation from de Sándara, who nodded with a smile.

The emotion of saying goodbye, mingled with the great joy of the unexpected news, enhanced the moment of the final embraces.

Nightfall was gradually enveloping the city. It was a hot and stifling night in spite of the proximity of the sea. After the hectic disembarking activity was over, one could clearly hear the horns of the cars in the city traffic and the passengers and crewmembers heading ashore, eager to seek the attractions of the large metropolis.

In an effort to mitigate their melancholy, Claudio and Griselda also decided to take a short walk. The magnificent view of the Rio bay induced them to delight in contemplating the brilliant spectacle of the night.

The following day, close to noontime, the deep siren of the ship announcing the release of moorings could be heard mingled with the engines’ trepidations. .. Being close by, the Arribillagas hastened to observe the maneuvers and bid goodbye, in thought, to the friends they had left on shore. The ship began to slowly pull away from the coast while gradually following its course on the path that would take them back to their homeland.

“Now,” said Griselda as the ship was well underway, plowing the solitary immensity with its bow, “we will fully dedicate ourselves to building our future happiness. I am extremely anxious to get home. Once there and, surrounded by our parents’ love, I feel we will find the most stimulating reasons to accomplish our projects. We both know that the future depends on what we think or do in the present, and everything in turn depends on something that is extremely essential that neither you nor I must forget.”

Here, Griselda stopped, looked at Claudio and waited for him to complete the rest.

“Let us see if you remember!”

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“Maybe not as well as you, but I believe I have not forgotten. What you call extremely essential is to know what we want to be and to do. Once this issue is settled, any change of thought should be avoided so as not to spoil what we set as our objective. Is it good enough?” he asked, hoping to have done well.

“Very good!” she confirmed, gazing tenderly into Claudio’s eyes. She then continued:

“Judging from what I could observe, I think this is exactly what Mariné must be doing. She breathes his aspirations into her life and is docile to the chisel that molds her. I saw how concerned she is by the great problems of human knowledge. I observed her constant interest to live in the world that he has led her to know and the eagerness with which she participates in his tasks. It would be so good if we could be like them.”

“Why not, Griselda? Isn’t this, in fact, the aspiration we cherish?”

“Yes, but we will need much zeal, much effort to follow their footsteps. The wanting in our hearts will have to be firm and unaltered. You know, I am happier now. Let us plan, Claudio, this happy future we want to live and let us try to be to each other what we dreamed of. Isn’t it true that we will succeed?”

“With all our love, darling, and today with more enthusiasm than ever before.”

As soon as the happy couple stepped off the ship in Buenos Aires, they were surrounded by a group of relatives and friends while Patricio remained discreetly at a distance. His narrow face and sharp features reflected the mixture of tears and smiles that the first embraces brought to those present. Immobile, nearly static, he simply stood there watching the scene until, finally and with great effort, he pulled himself away and quickly went to pick up the luggage.

Moments later, the newlyweds were in Dr. Laguna’s car, happily going home with Griselda’s parents.

Don Roque soon took part in the happy event.

Due to his recent illness, he welcomed the travelers still in his bed. There, with emotion, he received his son's embrace and that of Griselda who, bending over, felt for him a great tenderness as he caressed her saying:

"At last, I can have both of you here again."

"And may God want it to be so for a long time because we plan to make you very happy," she answered with an encouraging, affectionate and sincere smile.

That day, the Arribillagas' home became unusually lively.

The couple's happiness was even greater when they saw the apartment that Dona Laura had just finished decorating according to her daughter's recommendations and tastes and having in mind their comfort.

294 Ensuring that nothing was left undone for the newlyweds, Don Roque had dedicated a large area of the house to them having remodeled and adapted it to their convenience. His illness had greatly restricted his efforts. His friendship with Griselda's parents was at its height and everyone had contributed enthusiastically in preparing this small paradise for their children.

The couple's suite, with its small antechamber, consisted of a spacious room decorated with cheerful light pastel colored walls that blended nicely with the delicate tones of the furniture. Facing the entrance there was a double bed above which hung a huge painting as wide as the headboard. Covering the floor there was a blue wall-to-wall carpet, and, next to the bed, a rectangular light gray rug, served as a base for two comfortable armchairs and a small table. The light from the outside flooded one side of the

room filtered through the curtains that hung over a large glass door. On the opposite side, between two doors, one opening to a small intimate study and the other to the bathroom, stood a dresser with a mirror decorated in refined feminine details.

“Everything came out better than we had planned,” Griselda said enthusiastically as she walked through the rooms stopping here and there to observe the details.

Lively and cheerful, wearing a light low-neck white dress, well chosen to enhance her delicate beauty, Griselda seemed to be moving under the influence of a new sensation. It was obvious that she was happy in this first contact with the environment in which her life would now unfold. She would be taking on the responsibilities of a home in which she planned to infuse, day after day, the fruit of an effort dedicated to achieve a happy existence for the both of them.

Although bedridden, Don Roque listened with pleasure to their account of the trip. Prematurely aged, his face brightened now and then comforted by the joy he felt. Dona Laura, in turn, was overflowing with satisfaction that day and, prompted by her daughter, she replied happily to the thousand questions she was asking. This induced Dr. Laguna to exercise his rights, from time to time, by demanding his daughter’s company, since he too needed to satisfy his longing after her extended absence.

Among the news awaiting the couple’s return was the persistent rumor of the Larrecocheas’ financial ruin, which occurred as a result of the dubious maneuvers of their manager. At the same time, they were told of Nora’s engagement and of the breakup almost immediately after, following the disappearance of Don

Tulio's millions. His uncle's disgrace deeply impressed Claudio and no less Griselda who got a clear picture of the huge bankruptcy.

How unexpected can the twists of destiny be when, at its own discretion it governs the lives of human beings! How unfortunate are those who, lacking the cognitions that empower them to forge it for themselves, are incapable of consciously avoiding the deplorable ordeals they must face. Unknowingly, they are swept by a force that pushes them sometimes gently and other times violently, with no mercy whatsoever, towards a common, non-transcendent goal, which, unless known, induces indifference.

That evening, after the activities of that memorable journey were over, Claudio and Griselda, sitting close to each other in the small terrace that led to their bedroom, rested from their recent emotions, brushed by the still warm breeze of that stifling summer day.

"What are you thinking about, Griselda?"

"About our happiness...It would be impossible for me to think about anything else today. I think of the life awaiting us in this house where you lived as a child and to which God seemed to have brought me to fill all the empty spaces with the warmth of my affection. The very thought of this sweet mission fills my heart with joy."

"You're very kind, Griselda!"

"I aspire to be so, which is not the same. I feel that this aspiration is fueled by thoughts already nestled in me, suggesting new ways of feeling and behaving. It is as if a different life is being offered to my senses, delighting my sensitivity. The horizon

that separates the sky from the ocean has often made me think of the similarity to the one which separates the two worlds, the transcendent and the other, the common one, in which my soul is reenergized by just knowing that the former exists and that its possibilities are within the reach of my will and effort.”

“I also came to think that both had fused into one line, forming a transitional zone. A zone which, once penetrated by us, will demand decision and skill because that is where the difficult steps will have to be overcome when we undertake the task of finally surpassing its limits and open the gates of the most yearned for and attractive of all worlds.”

“I have a premonition, my dear Claudio, that you and I will penetrate this transitional zone very soon...”

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Located on Reforma Avenue, Mr. de Sándara's residence in Mexico had resumed its normal activity with the return of its owner. Surrounded by its white walls and windows, the house, built on a dark stone base, stood out with its colorful background of fashionably designed gardens. The flowers seemed to have saved their most wonderful hues for that moment as a welcome gesture to their owners.

Everything inside the house tended towards the beginning of a regular life. Mariné was very efficient in handling the activities she undertook. She assisted Mrs. de Landivar in those functions which, after a long absence, are always required by the renewed

contact with the things that surround us. She also attended to other tasks that are created by demands of recent needs, which often generate new projects or produce changes in the plans already underway. Her greatest concern, however, was to help Ebel in the reorganization he was planning to undertake in his work. The young woman's diligence increased in proportion to her desire to please him and to fulfill whatever requirement was needed to accomplish his work under the best or most comfortable conditions.

During the first few days following his arrival, de Sándara decided to relax, but rather than submitting himself to a rest, his mind seemed to concentrate on profound elaborations of the thought. He barely spoke and, every now and then, he seemed aloof.

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Well aware of these states of mind which de Sándara sometimes immersed himself in, Mariné observed him with nostalgia, waiting patiently for it to go away, confident in the inalterability of his affection. Yet, this time, she decided, with prudence, which was a virtue in her, to resort to a simple ploy. In order to carry out her plan, she waited for one of those moments when he usually sat on the sofa in his study and, as if she were trying to avoid disturbing him, she silently entered the room with the obvious intention of rearranging his books.

That morning she wore a tight dark plaid skirt and a red sweater. Her hair, tied high above her head for a change, allowed her face to glow in all its freshness and youth. Mariné was very beautiful, yet she seemed to ignore it. She was sweet and simple and this was perhaps the greatest reason for her charm. Everything in her was essentially wholesome and lofty. Her beauty, which outlined the characteristic traits of the strong spirits that surpass the limits

of common aptitudes, far from disturbing the senses of those who looked at her, inspired the respectful reverence and admiration that are expressed in sweet and delicate emotions.

The rustling of her footsteps attracted Ebel's attention as she crossed the room and, although he was delighted to see her, he did not show it nor did he alter his meditative attitude, pretending not to notice the young woman's movements in the task of rearranging the books.

Suddenly, Mariné, seemingly absorbed in the careful dusting of the paperweight, dropped it intentionally and, as if surprised by the "accident", looked at de Sándara with a frightened expression.

He burst out laughing and, taking this as an unmistakable sign of benevolence, Mariné ran happily to him, pleased with the success of her ploy.

As he embraced her cheerfully, Ebel said:

"I was expecting this! But this time the episode pleases me." And, as if to reward her recent efforts, he added:

"On other occasions, I have spoken to you about the sadness I feel at times in depriving you of my time. But do not forget, Mariné, that the transcendence of the propositions that are circumstantially required in my work, forces me to sustain a dedication that totally absorbs me. This implies that many of my natural movements are restrained or are expressed with certain reluctance. What happens is that when the cognition broadens the active power of our thoughts, the immensity of our mental domain extends indefinitely, forcing us, in order to maintain our authority over them, to devote a significant part of our attention to them. Nothing would please me

more, dear Mariné, than to make you participate, one day, in the lofty and sacred duties imposed by wisdom.”

De Sándara was certainly not overstating his activities. He was organizing in the mental world, which interpenetrates our physical world, a system of spiritual bonding. This system, responding to the central directives of his conceptions, would progressively spread throughout the world for the benefit of all human beings. His plan extended from the profound knowledge of one's own self, which man must possess, to that which the supra-sensitive area of the metaphysical world. In order to execute a plan of such magnitude, he had to transmit to every mind that came in contact with his, thoughts that would not only convert it into a genuine base of cooperation and intelligence, but also become an organ to defend their humanistic cognitions that were yet unknown to the rest of the world. The task of revealing this truth to each individual until it penetrates his understanding, would allow him to later ensure he had connected one more mind to his system and simultaneously to a new base of operations that would act successfully within its orbit, using the powerful assistance of his cognitions to extend to his fellowmen the goodness contained in them. Whoever was able to bond with the active force projected by his thought would, in fact, establish direct contact with him. The movement in question represented the beginning of a new era for mankind. “Human beings,” he affirmed, “will gradually awake to a reality that will deeply influence their spirits and fill their hearts with happiness.” The greater the number of minds integrated in this outstanding organization, the greater would be the efficiency and force in discarding the dissolvent ideas and the extremisms laden with violence. His was a delicate and arduous task, but he had absolute confidence in the noble reserves of human sensitivity. Once

this movement, which he called the Civilization of the Spirit, was underway, nothing could induce him to change his mind.

Mariné had listened to Ebel's words with great pleasure. In every one of his gestures, in each of his smiles or sentences, she had always perceived his permanent assistance and a constant discovery to lead her to the sources of knowledge. However, this love that was offered her was not exclusively hers but rather carried altruistic feelings of an extensive scope of action. Having identified herself with this feeling, the young woman was deeply moved as she detected that her love for Ebel was growing to gigantic proportions and so was her willingness to subject the tastes and the demands of her youth to the requirements of a life like his, inclined towards such an elevated mission..

"I'll do my best to be more and more understanding every day, even though I may find it hard," she told him.

"Oh, I know you are capable of making me happy, Mariné, and from my part I am sorry that I cannot dedicate myself to you as you deserve."

"You shouldn't feel that way. Can you, by any chance, be blamed for it?"

"Actually, I cannot, but what am I to do? I am displeased that you cannot enjoy those periods of time that are the sweetest to any woman in love. For example, those moments waiting for her beloved to visit and, then, the placid hours filled with illusions that she spends with him..."

"I don't know why you say this."

"I say it for the simple reason that since we both live under the same roof, I am unable to pay you the kind of visits which undoubtedly would please your heart."

As de Sándara said those words with a smile, Mariné also gave him a playful and joyful grin, saying:

“Oh, but this can easily be arranged! All it requires is that you dedicate one or two days a week to that, alright? You’ll visit me as if I lived elsewhere. You will come at tea time or later if you wish and I will wait for you trying to look as pretty as possible. We will talk about our wedding, our future projects and you will not attend to anything else but me. Do you agree?”

“Excellent!” he exclaimed, adding his joy to hers. “I promise to be as punctual as a clock. You know that I do not have the habit of changing my mind.”

“Then, this is how it will be, otherwise I’ll be very upset“

“Is there anything more beautiful than seeing you upset?”

“Why is that?”

“Because you have such sweet eyes that don’t know, and will never know, how to express the harshness of displeasure or resentment. This is why, even if you were to pretend, they would unmistakably betray you.”

And putting an end to the dialogue with a kiss, he pointed to the paperweight and said gently :

“Now, you can pick it up and put it back.”

Mariné promptly picked it up and, as she was placing it on the desk, she wondered: “What magical power can this piece have to promote so many things linked to my happiness?”

De Sándara was writing tirelessly, preparing a new book. He had thought about it for years, maturing this objective in his mind as he gathered observations and gave coherence to his cognitions, linking them to the idea now incessantly flowing from his pen.

Having created the central character in his mind, an idealized figure endowed with a vigorous spirit and a robust intelligence, he had this character conceive an ingenious plan that de Sándara had to review in detail considering all the pros and cons.

In preparing his undertaking, he initially read every book published about this theme and became more convinced than ever of their authors' fantasy, concluding that Scheherazade's imagination was no exception. Absolutely certain, therefore, that no one had registered any precise data on the subject, he decided one day to begin his task. Aware of the dangers he would be subjected to in the venture of exposing his thoughts, which he considered to be real powers that animated and fulfilled the great purposes of human existence, he added to his fearless talent an iron will and an unyielding patience.

Equipped with such an invincible armor, he embarked on his metaphysical vessel, like the ones used by the Argonauts. He was sure that his expertise would lead him to the indescribable shores of the incorporeal world, home of the spirits, which animate the human race. He ignored the ineffectiveness of the baths of the

Stygian lagoon and looked with indifference to those of Juventus. As long as man was nothing more than a man, he would continue to be vulnerable from head to toe and his biological process towards senility would be so inexorable that he would be grossly mistaken if he attempted to detain it by extra-natural means.

He wrote down all those things in his travel chart. His aim was to reach, just like the first navigators who roamed the seas, very distant unknown places that he would later reveal to the astonished eyes of his readers. His purpose was to demonstrate the existence of a new path, defining in his map the dangerous zones where the reefs, forming barriers similar to enormous traps hidden below the waters, lay in wait for the promised victim. How often, as he penetrated this path, had he eluded obstacles that were insurmountable to so many navigators!

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Progressing in his explorations, he had reached several sound conclusions.

There was no doubt that God, having made the human creature, had equipped it with a perfect physiological organism. It was so perfect that it performed its functions fulfilling its objectives without any need whatsoever of the individual's intervention, except for those produced by the constant activity required for maintenance of this wonderful human machine. But God still had to bring His work to a culminating point and so He decided to satisfy, what was for His thought a need that could not be postponed: to establish the permanent bond of His Divine Nature with the material nature of man.

The human creature must have caused so much work to the Lord that, after completing His sublime labor and the dawn of

His creation had emerged, He decided to rest. His offspring had created the first of many complications that he would still cause Him and which had been resolved for his own exclusive benefit.

The coupling of the spirit with the physical body had solved the problem of the uncertain destiny of man. It was implicit that, equipped as he was with a mental system capable of reaching the highest levels of efficiency, he would have to forge, according to the deductions of the intrepid navigator, the lineage of semi-gods that would turn the Earth into a faithful copy of the celestial Eden.

He was able to discover, that at the moment of their descent to this world, the spirits possessed a lucidity that had been gradually eclipsed by the material light and, consequently, had to adapt their existence to the laws that ruled over the face of the planet. It must have been hard for them to rely on their physical limbs in order to move about after having marched in space without them and their initial period of physical adaptation was marked by distress. The grief was such that they wept bitterly for endless days and nights, and when the crying finally ceased they saw the torrential tears rushing below their feet, a fact that made them call earth the “valley of tears”. But there was nothing that could be done. They had no other alternative but to live on earth and seek in Creation’s great recourses the revealing element of the great mystery, the mental element, in its conscious formation, the link between God and man and the powerful lever of reversion.

With such unique assessments made by his protagonist on those episodes related to the beginnings of life on earth, de

Sándara completed the first part of his book. And, in the second part, as if intending to open up the doors of the great explanation to human minds, he had his hero cross the threshold and escorted him revealing a truth that had been long and strenuously sought.

The more he advanced along his route, the more did the hero penetrate into the knowledge of such a remarkable creation. He came to understand that, by acquiring this new form within the physical and psychological human structure, the spirit had to accomplish fundamental steps of evolution on Earth.

His spirit, being the recipient of the original science, prior to its descent to this world had completed the development needed to manage intelligently the cosmic elements that correspond to its sphere of action. Having thus completed half of its instructive process, this chapter closed only to reopen within the cycles of earthly existence where it would become complete in obedience to supreme designs.

The Creator had equipped man with a conscience so that he could accomplish the great works of self-betterment demanded by his human condition but, in spite of this, it was not long before the weaknesses of the flesh, the temptations and other complications, which later oppressed the human race, emerged.

What was imperative, according to the main character, was the fulfillment of a process of reversion that would allow man to recover his original purity, essential source of the spirit's resources. In order to accomplish this he would have to use, as working tools, cognitions that by virtue of such aspiration would help him carry out the great task demanded by his will. He could not rely on any protective gods, only on the elements of his own intelligence. There was also no possible miracle other than his resurrection or conscious awakening

to a superior world. Effort, perseverance and deep yearnings for self-betterment would help him leap over the metaphysical walls, which divide the two worlds offered as options to his will.

He recalled the early beginnings of the spirit on Earth. Accustomed to fly freely, the bird felt enslaved, oppressed between the bars of the flesh. Exhausted by the pain, it finally fell into a deep sleep. A circumstance used by God to give His Creation the cosmic touch, making the woman emerge from His divine alchemy. What causes had intervened in the anatomical division of the human cell? There was no doubt, that it was the need for a nucleus to interlink the species. Both man and woman had been endowed with the power to think, to feel, to love, to create and procreate so that this objective would continue to be chronologically fulfilled. Yet, he also discovered something else: the fundamental role that the woman would play in the man's life because the feminine nature contains great mysteries that man will have to discover in order to accomplish his ascent to the domains of wisdom.

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With such perspectives, the spirit, enclosed in the human structure, had begun its evolution through the successive and endless centuries. It had been a slow evolution because the conscience, defenseless as it was, had sunk into a deep slumber and, like the sleeping beauty in the woods, was waiting for her master who, by learning her name, would call to awaken her, presenting her with the scepter of life. What did this mean? That man would have to attain the most coveted and incomparable to all possessions that would make the entry and the knowledge of the supra-sensitive world accessible.

It was necessary then, absolutely necessary for the human being to realize and understand that the divine abandonment that

he so frequently alluded to in his lamentations, believing to have been unjustly condemned to an eternal earthly captivity, was not the consequence of any punishment and, if it were, it would be exclusively due to factors of his own doing and risk.

With this, de Sándara closed the second chapter of his book. His hand continued to write, obeying the dictates of his thoughts, which interlinked with one another, outlining the final steps of the epic journey.

The hero had returned from his successful explorations and was now having a sweet dream, which transported him to a new scenario.

There, he saw himself walking on Earth, amazed by the things and the human beings surrounding him. They were quiet and immobile as if their individual existence had disappeared. He looked to one side and the other and all he could see were inert things and beings exempt of any movement and – oh, strange sensation! – he felt unexpectedly identified with them.

He walked. He walked a lot and, in all the places he visited, whether a city or a field, a palace or a hut, a mountain or a valley, he continued to see things and human beings standing still, as if petrified. He approached some of them, then some others, then others more and spoke to them, but they did not see him nor did they reply. It was because he had approached them in spirit and, in spirit, he also talked to them. This caused him bitter suffering, a suffering that induced him almost in despair to call out to them and prod them to wake up. Nevertheless, no one saw or heard him, yet, in spite of this, he knew that he existed.

Having walked a great deal, he finally came to a point where he stopped. There, he felt a chant emerging from within his own being. It was a sweet chant that kept growing louder until it reached a high

volume. He looked around and observed that what had been inanimate until then was starting to move. The sweetness of his chant had just awakened the human beings from their sleep! But he couldn't show himself to their eyes because, being in spirit as he was, they were not able to see him.

"Oh!" he exclaimed with joy, "My chant has instilled life and breath into them! May it reach everyone, and may everyone feel the life in my chant! May all advance with it and be substantiated with the perpetuity of all times! May my chant pour over the Earth the happiness and peace that human beings need!

Encouraged by what his eyes had seen, he continued his walk through the world and, in doing so his chant was being transformed into words of light and love. Soon, he noticed that the people were listening to him attentively and were chanting along, forming around him a sublime chorus. It was the chant of liberation, the chant of joy, of understanding and of human reciprocity.

Confirming that everything had acquired life and activity and that Nature had generously opened up its wonderful and fecund bosom so that God's thought would rule permanently upon the Earth, his voice began to fade until it was extinguished. And, withdrawn within himself, he continued on his march, carrying the image of that creation with him. At first, he had seen it as static and lifeless, but then it became animated by the greatest of all the agents that could converge in it: God's immense love.

As he awakened from his dream, he had the feeling of having heard his own chant, yet he knew that, although it had emerged from his being, this divinely wonderful chant was not his. It

could not be his. It had come from Him, Who had endowed him with a power that became Word.

310 After the exhilaration of the honeymoon had subsided, life in the Arribillaga household settled and reached the stage in which the expectations of each member becomes defined after tastes, ideas and ways of appreciating things in common have been determined. The tolerance and tact they would display to one another in their daily relationship would, from then on, put to test the sincerity of their love, which was now sealed by the bond of marriage. Not knowing precisely how the difficulties, which originate from frequent and familiar contacts, can arise, Claudio and Griselda entered into this period of great transcendence to one's life with an unlimited confidence in their happiness, which was sustained by the harmonious unity of their lofty ideals.

Two months after Claudio and Griselda's arrival in Buenos Aires, a painful occurrence undermined their new joy. The unexpected death of Don Roque who, at the time, seemed to be on the verge of recovery, had taken them by surprise. They both mourned the loss of this beloved being that they would miss for a very long time. In the most familiar corners of the house he had inhabited for so long, he would be present, constantly projecting upon his descendants like a faithful guardian of his heritage, the characteristics of his noble exemplary life.

Months had gone by.

One day, Griselda's bright horizon was surprisingly darkened after having realized that an objection she had made to Claudio

with utmost tact was received with a stern expression of discontent. As he steadily maintained throughout the day a badly concealed stiffness on his usually smiling face and showed a slight reservation in his speech, Griselda understood that from then on she should abstain from expressing such objections. Nevertheless, she was able to dispel his offended look, after which the relationship returned to normal and the pain of the first disharmony subsided.

“Why is it that when we are contradicted,” he said a few days later, “we experience this annoyance with the person who opposes or corrects our opinion?”

“Perhaps because we have not succeeded in exercising control over our impulses, with which we could better demonstrate the consistency of our opinion as opposed to those of others.”

“I believe that not even this could help us avoid the irritation produced in us.”

“We also need to think, Claudio, that it is not always possible for us to determine on the spot whether or not we are right. At times, the very circumstances in life show us, on the short or long term, that we are right, that is, assuming we truly are.”

“Nevertheless, whatever impels our opponent to contradict us is not always prompted by the desire to clarify a point since it is well known that in several occasions it is done as a provocation...”

“Better still if it were so. Having drawn this conclusion, we would have the opportunity to oppose our patience and tolerance to the aggravation of an inaccurate assessment.”

“I can’t agree with you. We can contribute with a part of our patience and tolerance especially if we have no other recourse. But to consider, like you do, that it is better...”

“Claudio... Until when will we keep on thinking that it is for others to change their ways? Aren't we bestowing on others a benefit that we deny to ourselves?”

Griselda's voice was so persuasive and gracious that Claudio reconsidered.

“If you oppose me with these reflections, I will have to surrender and cut this short. To contradict you would be to help you build virtues at my expense and this does not suit me. So, what can we do? It seems to me that you sometimes go to extremes! I understand that we are the ones who must change by elevating our state of consciousness. This would greatly benefit us as opposed to those who do not change their ways, thoughts and habits. All this, however, is nearly unfeasible when we are overwhelmed by reactions that stir our mood at times for well justified reasons.”

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Griselda remained pensive, feeling sad for Claudio's unusual vacillation in relation to concepts they had so intimately shared. It was long since they had discarded as inefficient the common claim that it was others who had to change. On the contrary, they had thought and accepted by common agreement that, by modifying one's own behavior, differences could be reconciled.

Griselda discreetly avoided any further insistence, attempting, on the contrary, to deviate the conversation towards other topics in order to conceal the mark left on both by this small incident in their life together. Claudio then picked up a newspaper and totally absorbed himself in reading it. Griselda grabbed a book that was within her reach, opened it at random and, as if she were reading, slowly turned the pages.

The words she had said to Claudio some time ago referring, by sheer intuition, to their next incursion into that difficult zone they

had to cross in order to fulfill their aspirations, became present at that moment, perhaps as a warning at the initial stage of her path.

They exchanged opinions frequently and, despite the satisfaction he demonstrated in those conversations, a certain weakening of the objectives he had conceived during his contact with de Sándara did not pass unnoticed to Griselda's perception hence the reason why their point of view or their mind did not always coincide.

It was quite evident that Claudio was greatly neglecting his past objectives, which did not inspire him with the same enthusiasm as before. What cause had intervened in this? Beyond doubt, it was the instability of his thoughts, which had not yet been directed on the desired course. However, what really contributed to create this situation was his excessive surrender to marital happiness, which, if on one hand led him to extend to Griselda his most delicate thoughtfulness and care, on the other, it deviated insensibly his attention towards the attractions of external life. Claudio now seemed to feel a pleasure he had not experienced before when in contact with the world surrounding him and this encouraged him to develop a social activity that grew more intense and demanding. In addition to this, his professional obligations and the management of his commercial interests left him with hardly any time to dedicate to activities other than the ordinary ones. Therefore, it was hard for him to resume the process of his inner evolution, which was still in its initial phase. And, since he was subdued by such oscillations, some reactions emerged disturbing his temperament and weakening his will.

How much effort is required of the soul that prepares to undertake the great task of its own redemption, to conquer the fiery resistance of the thoughts engrained in the mind that, by tenaciously refusing to being replaced, conspire against the objectives of he who pursues such noble and worthy conquest! This was Claudio's drama as is the drama of all those who want to free themselves from the slavery of their thoughts and from the untamed pressure of their instincts. It is a drama, which is triggered with greater intensity in men, since women's souls are more docile to the changes imposed by evolution.

Self-love in Claudio Arribillaga, as in every individual, could be compared to the sovereignty of certain nations that wave the flag of independence, while internally individuals and peoples suffer the humiliation of being subdued by the despotic thoughts of those who rule them under the empire of absolutism. The changes in the mental, sensitive and instinctive structures cannot be achieved through sudden transitions. The process of psychological and spiritual transubstantiation includes important and arduous steps of evolution and through its accomplishment one must experience the strangest alternatives, some sweet, some bitter, according to the causes that happen to define them. These were the reasons for the ups and downs in Claudio's behavior and the explanation for the somber moments occurring in his inner being.

The first visits Claudio made to his club after his marriage had the specific objective of establishing a new contact with his friends who, striving for a greater development of their moral and spiritual aptitudes, anchored their hopes on de Sándara with whom they maintained a frequent exchange by mail. On such occasions, Claudio was able to confirm the degree of affection and respect they had for de Sándara as well as their willingness to investigate his cognitions. Marcos, Justo and Norberto were those who excelled in their efforts and who adjusted their behavior in a most natural manner to the severe norms of the inner process of self-betterment, which they had initiated. They never missed a meeting. Some of them were held at the club, others at different homes such as Mr. Malherbe's and frequently at Professor Moudet's. Miguel Angel and Salvador were also amongst the most diligent in this group, which had been constituted with the specific objective of exchanging the results obtained from their individual studies related to transcendent issues.

This new motive of interest had decreased to such an extent in some of the participants of this intellectual gathering that they finally stopped attending. Moreover, there were a great number of participants in the group who sought trivial entertainment. Upon Luciano's insistent requests, Claudio attended several meetings at first, with reservations, yet it was not long before he was counted amongst the most enthusiastic. Furthermore, having lost sight of the main reason that had led him to visit the club again, he dedicated himself nearly exclusively to the intellectual gathering.

The renewed contact with those friends of his, rekindled in Claudio the feeling of camaraderie, which bonded him with

many of them since childhood yet, at the same time he seemed to have lost that prudence he exercised when his father was alive, and that was, of selecting the best amongst them.

Induced no doubt by a frivolous inclination, which lay in the depths of his being and despite his healthy psychic and moral constitution, Claudio began to gradually give in to their influence. As winter arrived, his absences from home became frequent, as he participated in binges with Luciano's wild group.

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Fortuitous meetings at the club or different encounters with business associates served as excuses to justify his nightly absences. Griselda, who could not manage to dismiss her concerns, saw his behavior gradually change with increasing signs of an incomprehensible deviation. His contradictory attitudes and vacillations were a living proof of his weakening will, which surrendered to the devastating influx of thoughts that were in full effervescence, subjecting him to the power of his instinct, still untamed and overbearing.

One night, sitting in an armchair in her room, Griselda was reading while waiting for Claudio to arrive for dinner. Having heard the echo of his footsteps in the hallway, she promptly ran to meet him. But forewarned of her husband's mental instability, she took hold of herself, undecided, and looked at him in order to assess the degree of aggravation she seemed to have detected on his face.

Instantly overcoming her vacillation, she approached him and tenderly asked if there was anything wrong. Avoiding her eyes focused on him, he became evasive.

"I will not dine at home," he answered stiffly as he paced his room in long strides.

"You won't?"

"Are you surprised?"

"Yes, in fact I am. But if there is a reason that prevents you from..."

"Yes! A very simple reason: tonight I intend to have dinner with my friends. I want to reciprocate certain attentions I've received and to show that I don't wish to isolate myself from them."

"Why would you have to isolate yourself from them?"

"That is the question I ask myself! Why? It is because when one delves into very elevated concerns, one ends up forgetting that he is on Earth and that forcibly one must live in it and this is in no way possible."

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"In some ways," Griselda observed accurately "we become somewhat radical by placing ourselves at the opposite end, even with things that are less important."

"It is exactly what I think! And it is in order to avoid this extremism," he said bypassing the subtlety, "that from now on I'll dedicate part of my time to my friends and another part to the accomplishment of what I have in mind."

"I see nothing wrong with that. Although, I don't know how you'll avoid the oppositions that will occur in your mind."

"Don't worry! I'll know how to avoid them."

He slowly changed his clothes and told her he would see her the next day.

Senseless fool! Was this the way to respect what had been one day his most cherished aspiration? The fox, which disdained

the grapes arguing they were green, knew they were inaccessible to him, but he disdained cognitions that were so close within his reach because they demanded moderation from him. How hard it is for a man to understand that he can be the craftsman of his own destiny! One could have expected Claudio to behave more in line with his aspirations, but evidently, his youth still governed his will, leading him toward the easy paths of a mundane life.

That night Griselda had dinner in her room. It was the first time Claudio had left her alone on account of such unjustifiable motives.

Patricio, who waited on her, came in and out of the room quietly, carrying dishes always in silence. The kind butler understood it all and suffered for Claudio as a father would. He tried to speak to Griselda several times in an effort to entertain her. But, realizing it would be hard for him to say anything cheerful, he decided to excel in being friendly resigning himself to this unassuming and simple recourse.

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Having exaggerated in his concessions to his friends, Claudio returned home just before dawn. He was thinking he could perhaps be the happiest man by just letting his life drift along the same routine the others followed without having to submit to the constant inner censor that takes pleasure in pointing out his misdemeanors.

Griselda seemed to be asleep when he came in their room. He approached her to confirm it and, at that moment, he noticed traces of tears on her face.

His heart sank.

He rehearsed an explanation that could comfort her, but when he understood that no reason whatsoever could justify his behavior, he kept the explanation to himself.

“I will try, dear Griselda, to spare you any further cause for sadness,” he finally said. “I promise! I must exert my best efforts to find by your side the full and profound happiness my soul aspires to and which is so hard for my heart to achieve. How many times have I tried to fight the thoughts that I believed had been discarded long ago from my mind! In the midst of this struggle, I can occasionally visualize the appearance of the resources I must use to defend myself against them and I even feel how their strange power protects me. Yet, these thoughts continue to take shelter in me, resentful and unyielding in their intent to upset my life.”

“I understand, Claudio, but I am also aware of the nobility of your feelings and I have faith in the strength that you will find to dominate them.”

“I only know that their persuasive arguments end up obscuring my reasoning, unleashing my self-love, instigating my intolerance and my impulsivity and invalidate the attempts to devote myself to the goodness and the elevation of my life. You are unaware, Griselda, of this hidden side of my alternatives and even know less of the internal movements of my sensitivity that seeks what we both had set as our goal.”

“Yet I know, Claudio, that you will be successful one day! I don’t doubt this, even for a moment. Then, nothing will stop you from attaining your goals because they would have been transformed into a beautiful reality. This reality is the product of a cultivation that only a gradual evolution of our conscience will permit us to achieve.”

Moved by those tender and comforting words, Claudio took her tenderly in his arms.

Far from interrupting the continuity of her diary, Griselda kept up her writings, which she frequently resorted to when she needed to soothe her soul or put order in her thoughts. She continually registered in these manuscripts that contained the small history of her life, her most intimate and delicate confidences describing the states of her soul, sometimes sad, other times calm or filled with hopes, but seldom happy as before.

Sitting in the pleasant seclusion of her study, she orderly consigned to paper what she was experiencing and understanding in the course of the events that moved her and reviewed her notes when she needed to strengthen her objectives or bring up to date the results of some of her experiences.

That was certainly what Griselda was seeking after that night when she had undergone such a deep commotion, as she focused her attention on these pages of her diary:

“September 28th.

Claudio is being confronted with painful internal struggles that strongly reverberate in me. His states of mind provoke in me perplexity, fear and all the sadness that can be experienced as I face the possible destruction of the most cherished hopes I have nurtured for my life. I observe him, study his behavior through all the occurrences in our brief married life, and I seem to understand now something of what is going on inside him. But still, I cannot help him nor do I know how to do it. Claudio is of reasonable yet impulsive temperament. Fortunately, this ungrateful trait of his temperament gives way immediately whenever something manages to move his feelings. He

has a heart of gold, but his mind frequently betrays him, clouding the clear understanding he ordinarily has about things. How many times have I asked him to moderate the excesses of his temperament! After the storm subsides and he pacifies the turbulence of the thoughts that make him stubborn, he feels heavy-hearted. This, undoubtedly, causes him pain. Yet, suddenly, his pleasant character becomes harsh and I cannot find a reason for it. This causes me to suffer a lot, yet, to think he will change with time brings me comfort. He always believes he is right. Whenever he sees me resentful, he becomes even more upset. Sometimes, this has caused him to go out for dinner or leave the house for no reason. I had never thought Claudio could be so hard to deal with. Now regarding myself: why have I been feeling so resentful towards him? I have had to ask this repeatedly in order to see clearly within myself. Initially, I totally approved my attitude. Then, I approved a little less each time. Now I am more used to distinguishing between what I do right and what I do wrong and try to maintain my serenity as much as possible without being resentful. I cannot always sustain this internally, but neither do I run the risk of expressing it. I have experienced that in these cases serenity is very important since the more moderate I am, the more cautious I become. This allows me to enjoy more the after-the-fact satisfaction provided by that small but efficient attitude while, at the same time, I notice that I manage to neutralize a number of ungrateful consequences.”

“Lately I have seen Claudio flaunt his excessive self-love and we already know how susceptible one becomes when this trait surfaces. Although he dissimulates it greatly, I could observe that, at times, the firmness of my convictions exasperates him. Could it be that perhaps it annoys him to see in me what he has yet to accomplish? Oh, God! How painful it is for me to see the manifestation of his

self-love. And yet, when he manages to withdraw within himself and begins to think, he becomes totally different. He turns into someone else. Then yes, he is the Claudio I love.”

“It has been quite a while since he last received mail from Mr. de Sándara. His letters bring him such encouragement! Poor Claudio! How many times has he decided to firmly adopt a new behavior and, in spite of my efforts to give him support, his enthusiasm diminishes and his inner states of impatience grow. Sometimes I see him downhearted. It is frightening to think how inconstant we are with our purposes. The slightest incident in our life becomes a good reason to postpone them and that sensibly hurts our will, which should always remain active. What secret key should we count on to enable us to tread along the path of happiness without stumbling and without allowing such secondary factors to detain our steps? Mariné could certainly help me to overcome these obstacles. How happy must Mariné be now as she is so close to her wedding day! She who has next to her the man who knows so much about our weaknesses and all that is still uncertain to us! She will be undoubtedly very happy when she gets married since she will be sheltered from these inconveniences. When I think of her, a tender joy comes over me. Could it be that I receive a small part of her happiness just by remembering her fondly?”

“In the circumstances I am now going through, I do not feel the joy that a soon mother-to-be should. On the contrary, I feel my sadness deepening. Could I have ever suspected that Claudio, whom I have loved and love so much, would one day spurn being at my side to share my happiness at this moment?”

“I find it hard to overcome these unexpected events of married life, but I cannot confide in anybody else other than the intimacy

of my own self. Could my parents be helpful if asked? No matter how informed and knowledgeable they may be of this type of problem they could not go beyond conciliatory advice, which acts like a sedative but does not heal. Furthermore, there is a limit I must not cross when revealing secrets. Something stronger than my need to alleviate my load and seek protection forces me to keep silent about everything that creates an abnormal situation in my home. How could I then communicate even to my mother incidents that are uniquely reserved to my intimacy? And yet, she does not seem to ignore what is happening. I observe her efforts in trying to help me by placing within my reach elements that could mitigate several situations. And she does it with discretion and fondness! How happy she is that we will make her a grandmother, and how much eager enthusiasm she puts into preparing things to receive our first-born! The house had to undergo several changes to accommodate a room next to ours! This was not difficult to do. All that was necessary was to move my dressing room to the small area adjacent to our bedroom. We are now deciding how to decorate it, which we greatly enjoy in anticipation. The goddess Lucina will be very welcome! Claudio also participates and shares my joy when, together, we talk about this happy event, yet, not to the extent I would like him to."

"I need to raise my spirit higher. I have to transport it to comforting heights so that from there it can illuminate me while I strive to discover, in each and every circumstance surrounding my life, reasons to guide my efforts to increase the efficiency of my aptitudes and help me progress in the splendid mission of my life."

“October 5th.

Why am I anxious so often? Something inside seems to propel me to find the cause. I would say that my sensitivity wants me to examine some facts, which I have not yet done. I look inside and feel, in the area of my thoughts, a question emerging: could I have at times unwillingly hampered or created difficulties to Claudio's good purposes? I may have been slightly demanding of him. Slightly? Am I sure about this? I used to think that, being in the process of real spiritual betterment, we would have to unequivocally stop making errors. Nowadays, having become more understanding, I have learned through my own experiences that, in the beginning, such errors are utterly excusable. Yet, in Claudio's case, I should have known better and always concealed them. Have I been at all times tolerant with him, kind in my judgments and sufficiently discreet about his errors? Surely not. I too am learning to cope with the effects that disappointments produce in me and it would be premature of me to expect that my deeds be always correct. Is this an excuse? Perhaps so, but only in part. Yet for me, this is also a good lesson on tolerance.”

“I have little knowledge about these things, but at this time I feel inclined to think that such behavior must surely provoke in men a mental reaction, awakening in his soul echoes of a similar intolerance. In no way, could I consider this to be the main factor among the alternatives that stir up my home life since I have not indulged in such an unforgivable error very often. Nevertheless, I would dare to affirm that if not contained in time, it could become a cause of a serious disorder in the individual who, harassed by being watched and criticized, would

try to flee, one way or another, from the domestic disputes that occur as a result. How much knowledge is required to avoid such misunderstandings or to neutralize their effects when they occur! It would, however, be sufficiently helpful to remember at the proper time that our inner life, just as everyone else's, is inviolable and no one possesses the right to meddle in it. It is of exclusive responsibility of its owner."

"How soothing and comforting it is for my spirit to be drawn closer by what I am now providing it. And how wholesome is the effect that invades my anima by its contact."

"October 10th.

When engaged, we enjoy being spoiled by the thousand attentions we receive from the man we love. Later, as married life takes its course, the scenario changes inadvertently, as such attentions decrease and are even cut short. How necessary it is for us to make every effort to discover, in time, to what degree we are ignorant of the causes that have triggered this change! This is no doubt due to the lack of reality with which we view our future married life. We do not assume even for a moment that, once we initiate it, everything will gradually head towards what is natural. What strange things happen to us! As I think back to those days before and after our wedding, everything seems as if enveloped in the hues of a dream... Could I be disappointed? If that were the case, I would be disappointed but free of resentment because, for me, everything has been a feast in which life celebrates, often with an excess of unconsciousness, obviously, its approaching initiation on the path of reality. Although it is a difficult path to tread, it is a wonderful one too. From what I could experience,

this unforgettable stretch of life can echo in a very different way in each heart. Mine is a fortunate one. With its help I was able to define in my understanding, due to the constant palpitation of my intimate yearnings, the image presented to me today by those moments as a symbolic prognostic of the happiness I will later enjoy. Then, by extracting from it the small parts achieved through my daily effort, I will finally be able to conquer it.”

326 “My thought seems to urge me to continue my meditation on the causes that modify marital happiness and aggravate the moment in which married life shifts from the profusion of feelings to a course of normality. A few known cases come to mind, perhaps as a warning against things that I must never imitate – Liana’s case, for instance. Liana is one of the friends I like most and, since she trusts me, she tells me about some of the things that happen to her. In spite of my limited experience in these matters, I think that she herself is the cause of her situation. A woman feels in her man the protection under which her femininity is sheltered. I suppose that the man, by virtue of his own nature, will correspond to this attitude of the feminine soul and, in turn, be pleased in this position of predominance conferred by his virility. Liana’s case is one where the docility and the gentleness, with which a woman accepts a man’s superiority in the beginning, is transformed at the first setback, leaving a man facing a woman who argues with him on equal footing over tastes and opinions, replacing that former sweetness and gentleness with the harshness produced by self-love. What repercussion could such an unexpected and inappropriate behavior have on this man? There is no doubt that I am barely

a beginner at observing the psychology of the stronger sex. However, I might not be mistaken when I think he must feel diminished because the dominance that even unwillingly he exercised over the woman when he felt master of her love and object of her respect, now decreases as he experiences that she only partially belongs to him. Perhaps this does not occur in all cases, but the fact is that my friend's husband suffered a strong reaction that led him to make her feel today, by imposition, this same authority that she, inadvertently, had one day condoned. How many surprises could be avoided if we were to always remember what we used to think during the engagement period! My advice to Liana is to try to regain the position that belongs to her in her home, a position that we should never lose. We would never lose it if we knew how to hold on to it by understanding the exact meaning of our mission. Poor Liana! She is a good person and I am sure she will succeed in understanding her husband because she loves him."

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The great shock created by Don Tulio's huge financial crash and the sudden flight of the deceiving fortune-chaser had deeply hurt Nora's pride. Far from becoming reasonable and adapting her life to the lack of the excessive luxury she had enjoyed until then, Nora rebelled against this adversity and complained with repeated irritation about every circumstance that opposed her whims.

Subjected to her volatile, capricious and thoughtless character, as when she was a child and perhaps rekindling her unfulfilled desires of times long gone, she conceived one day the idea of approaching Claudio again. The last time she had seen him was on the occasion of Don Roque's death. Since then she had never visited his home, yet she did not think it inappropriate to visit him at his office.

328 While falsely asserting that she felt comforted in his company, Nora concealed, under this docility, which seemed to originate from the harsh setbacks she had been through, an evil intent: that of establishing a more intimate relationship with him. Such repugnant objectives, hidden initially under the guise of a mere friendly approach, almost reached their goal, as the impostor nearly succeeded in making Claudio's judgment falter. That turned out to be a true test for him. The life he led at that time predisposed him to become an easy prey to such a daring harassment. Nora was surely not a woman with few resources. Now, more than ever, she mastered the dangerous ploys of seduction, which identify the type of women who usually like to show off and enjoy all the trivialities of a mundane life.

Nevertheless, a remnant of that prudence that had always protected him from his cousin's traps seemed now to warn him. This being no doubt the reason that had made him one day stop seeing her. Once again, she found herself rebuffed and unable to understand the unfortunate consequences she invariably attracted upon herself.

The excessive pampering while growing up, the influence of the liberalities in fashion, which led to scorning the sound and moral ways of life, a natural inclination to follow a devious course, in sum, all this had contributed to Nora turning into a woman amidst

a confused and extremely harmful environment regarding the ethical and moral concepts of life.

Meanwhile, Claudio's misguided behavior had become a serious concern to the friends he had nearly abandoned, some of whom had approached him several times urging him to mend his ways. The reason was that, in spite of the promises made to Griselda, he carried on a way of life that was far from being cautious, visiting places of entertainment that intoxicated his senses, causing him to become frivolous, reserved and often temperamental.

Norberto, who shared Claudio's most cherished ideals, was as hurt as the other friends were by his desertion. He was the one who decided one day to have a serious talk with his friend urging him to be more thoughtful and prudent. These two factors had been previously defended by Claudio with great passion, when he had decided to undertake the noble, methodical, comprehensive and conscious achievement of the objectives that interested both of them equally.

His friend's eloquent and sincere words invoked the memory of his now faded enthusiasm, which visibly disturbed him, as he suddenly recognized the carelessness he had fallen into. Transfigured by the erosion caused by his own weaknesses, Claudio's face began to show the expression of his clear intelligence as he listened to his friend. On his face, previously lively, spiritual and dreamy, one could see once again the reflection of his soul's feelings towards goodness while repeating to his loyal friend the formal promise to return to the right track.

Oppressed and tormented, Arribillaga decided from then on to follow persistently the line of behavior indicated by his

reasoning and, in spite of having at times relapsed by thwarting his good intentions, he managed notwithstanding to behave, thereafter, more moderately.

A short time later, Mr. Malherbe paid Claudio a visit alleging that the reason for it was that he had received a letter from Mr. de Sándara requesting specific information concerning the meetings they held regularly. He also informed him that he would soon be sending new cognitions to be studied. He knew that the mere reference to de Sándara would produce in Arribillaga a favorable psychological effect.

330 To Malherbe's questions regarding certain objectives that used to interest his friend, Claudio's answers were skillfully evasive. Finally, honoring the scruples of his conscience, he was not embarrassed to admit that he had been paying tribute to old Adam.

He admitted to have been blinded by the effervescence of his blood and said that his youth had still been honoring the Dionysian cult.

"I am truly sorry," said Malherbe, nodding disapprovingly. "This shows that you prefer to circle around the possession of truth rather than to delve into them with determination."

"The thing is that the treatment there is rather severe."

"Not severe but different no doubt from what you are accustomed to in this world where the instincts dominate and where the urge to contradict creates confusion, disorients and finally thwarts even the strongest and most noble aspirations of the spirit."

Malherbe let his words fall heavily upon Claudio, like someone who fires a gun, sure to hit a bull's eye.

Being Malherbe a man of a brilliant career in public life and a figure of great respect in his field of activity, Arribillaga could

not avoid recognizing in him the authority to address him with such words. Furthermore, Malherbe was someone he held in great esteem.

Tense and downhearted, he nonetheless replied:

“I don’t believe this applies to my case, Mr. Malherbe, because I always keep in mind the purpose of dedicating myself to this type of investigation in which one’s own life plays a preponderant role.”

“In that case, Arribillaga, avoid what occurs to those who, wishing to cross slyly the gates of the unknown metaphysical world, end up having them close shut against their nose. Do not alternate thoughtlessly the usage of one thing with the abandoning of another, like the individual who chooses a piece of clothing today that he will change for another one tomorrow because he got tired of it. Did you not know that the processes of one’s intelligence, which culminate in wisdom, must never be interrupted to avoid the risk of jeopardizing it all? We can no doubt pay attention to a new issue, if it presents itself, but this does not imply the need to react negatively against those upon which our attention had been focusing until now.”

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Claudio remained silent as if Malherbe’s words had deprived him of the possibility to object.

After exchanging a few words, he informed Claudio that Mr. de Sándara would soon visit them in Buenos Aires – news that disconcerted Claudio although he tried to dissimulate it.

As soon as Malherbe left, Claudio let himself fall heavily in an armchair as if he had been crushed. He crossed his legs, then his arms and, when he finally found a comfortable position, he

lifted his right hand to his face, holding his chin. He remained totally still in that position for a long time.

What effect did this piece of news have on his will to make it seem more powerful than anything else? The perspective of shortly meeting de Sándara had baffled him. It was obvious. Nonetheless, it was not long before that psychological impact made him react. And as if something had forced him to make a resolution, he decided judiciously to confront himself before the circumstances brought him to face de Sándara. Gradually, as he was recovering and evaluating his past behavior, he began to calm down and his face, at first gloomy with signs of concern, struggle and hesitation, finally underwent a favorable change, an unmistakable sign that he had totally gotten hold of himself.

332 What had occurred in him? How sad and desolate had he felt at first when he assessed the accumulation of his follies! Was this the result of his well-thought out projects, of his aspirations and his enthusiasm? Was this the result of his conscious resolutions? Nonsense! Of all the goals he had established, he had not achieved a single one! Wherever he turned, he could only see the total neglect of the systematic vigilance over his thoughts that he had imposed upon himself.

Measuring the scope of his errors, Claudio felt affliction, disgust, anguish, and could only qualify himself as a fool. How had he not discovered and not stopped in time this mental ploy by which the thoughts that had affinity with the instinct pursued their interests freely? Only now, as he saw them escaping like cowards, did he understand everything and reproached his submission to them. They fled to avoid being seen or being forced

to give account of their vile tricks. However, he would be able to discover everything as he advanced in the study of this bitter depressive experience. Fortunately, other thoughts were coming back to assist him: those which had previously stimulated him and had remained confined in the cells of his mind until then. Those thoughts were the ones with which he had shared the objectives of increasing his inner values, thoughts that he had used so little to face the problem of adhering to the cause he felt inclined to embrace. At this point Claudio Arribillaga thought of his spirit and had no doubt that it was it that was propelling him to recover the abandoned positions he had conquered at the beginning of his enrollment in Mr. de Sándara's ranks.

At the same time that he felt a new determination growing and strengthening within himself, memories of certain facts continuously flowed in his mind and although they saddened him, they favorably clarified his understanding. He was invaded by a deep sorrow when he thought of Griselda and his home, which had been built with so much love and hope and was now on the brink of unhappiness. Nevertheless, he still had time to prevent the inexorable drop, overflowing from the cup of tolerance to destroy it all. Claudio felt, within the innermost recesses of his soul now free of obstacles, an increasing need to rehabilitate.

He recalled the many times he had unsuccessfully imposed upon himself the need to mend his behavior. He searched strenuously for the causes that had promoted the violence of his passions. He identified them in order to remember the torments of his initial slip-ups, produced by his self-love. At this stage of his analysis, he recalled that these, far from being taken as a

warning and an indication to act by applying his cognitions, had depressed his anima and caused real damage to his will. From a flourishing state of mind – whose movement he should have intensified through an internal and ever-growing activity – he had fallen into an unforgivable inertia. How confident he now felt after evaluating the causes that had forced him into such a deplorable situation!

Appearing to have reached the pinnacle of his examination, Claudio sighed deeply and, changing his posture, dropped his head between his hands. He remained that way for a long time. Then, as if it could relieve him in some way, he kept running his hands repeatedly, back and forth, from his forehead to the back of his neck. Finally, he stood up, refreshed his face with water, combed his hair and, after tightening his tie, gazed for a few moments more in the mirror trying to etch an expression of optimism on his face. All this seemed to have helped him recover. He promptly picked up the phone, dialed a number and told his wife he would join her for dinner shortly.

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As time seems to accelerate prior to events of great activity, so were the days in Mexico preceding Mariné's wedding. Due to unexpected circumstances, the wedding had to be postponed and the new date coincided with the beginning of fall.

On this day, just like the others preceding the wedding, an intense activity was taking place, especially for Mariné, who

took upon herself to undertake the major part of the work that agitated the house. That morning, she began visiting shops and department stores, and as it always happens in such cases, she had urgent errands to run here and there. In addition to this, there were details concerning the finishing touches in the quarters that were being remodeled for them in the house. Every now and then, she would make a phone call to hasten a delivery or avoid a delay or would attend a social duty or give instructions to the servants. By late afternoon, Mariné was physically exhausted.

Wishing to relax, she invited Ebel to join her in the garden. They headed, as they always did, towards the most spacious and cozy site of the area, which was located behind the house. There they chose to rest on the bench next to the wall where rosebushes, exhausted by a long summer season, displayed their last flowers.

The weather could not have been better: the temperature was mild and the atmosphere was clear. Everything seemed to be very still. A great tranquility enveloped the pleasant park. Only the birds, seeking their last bits of food before ending their daily activities, interrupted the silence of the afternoon. From the branches of a huge oak tree – their habitat – the birds would swoop down to the ground, one after the other, in search of a grain, a seed or a worm that might have carelessly ventured to the surface. From down there, they would fly off quickly to their branches where, with great vitality, they swirled around, mingling their warbles, as they always did, with the same energy at nightfall as they showed in the beginning of their daily journeys.

Mariné and Ebel's faces displayed a great happiness while they mingled the effusiveness of their hearts in a pleasant dialogue.

"And if, after a while, I were not as ideal as you thought?" she said jokingly.

"Don't you think that there would be a way to remedy this?"

"Oh, yes! And I certainly would strive to find the easiest one."

"The easiest one..."

"Why do you always enjoy asking me what you already know?"

"Then, don't tell me. In any case, I know that there will be no need for it. Haven't I just said that you'll make an ideal wife?"

"So much confidence creates an obligation for me, Ebel, and I would never want to disappoint you."

"And nor will you, Mariné, I'm sure. I'm also sure that you'll be the woman I dreamed of during my youth and whose image I keep amongst the most cherished things in my heart. Is there any thought of mine that your sensitivity and love for me do not discover?"

"This is not difficult at all when one understands the great and pure love conceived. I have committed all my will and with it all my life to serve this great love. I serve it as I serve a cause: with abnegation, with pure feelings and with my whole soul. The love I bear for you is unique: nothing nor anyone can, nor will ever be able to change my feelings. Yet, I also know, because I read it in your own heart, that no one will remove me from the place where you've put me."

The unequivocal signs of the spirit already governing the life it animates were prominent in Mariné. Guided by Ebel during the apprenticeship of the transcendent cognition, which provides the conscious and limitless manifestation of the spirit, she enjoyed in full youth the riches of the most valuable legacy.

This is why the law of inheritance was expressed so clearly in her and endowed her being not only with characteristic traits of spiritual maturity, but also with the benefits of assets converted into virtues. These virtues, accumulated through the evolution achieved during the various periods of existence, form, as they add up, the very essence of the spirit that characterizes the periods of life in this world.

As Mariné expressed her love to Ebel, he noticed the tone that the human voice acquires when, in moving words, it expresses something more than a confession. And as if coming from long past eras, thoughts that revealed Eve's mystery reached his spirit, and he detected in his life and in Mariné's details that evoked such exquisite beings. How enlightened his understanding became as he conceived the pure and celestial image of the first queen of the world! Under the influence of this image, Mariné seemed transformed as if all the grace that embellished the physical and moral aspects of women had been reflected in her. Thus, he could not avoid remembering the episode in which the celestial hierarchies themselves were moved by the beauty and splendor of the mistress of Paradise.

Moved by the words uttered by Mariné and under the exaltation of the fleeting projection of such images, he said:

"In this Paradise where together we learn the lesson of the centuries, you will reign with me, Mariné: you, by understanding lucidly the three phases of the sublime Edenic experience and I, by complying consciously with the precepts linked throughout history to reclaim the human race. You, by showing me the enchantments of your sensitivity and I, by discovering the enigmas of sex reflected

in the evolution of your soul. Both, you and I, offering at the same time the excellence of a love that seeks to follow a course beyond the human orbit to make way into the regions where the purest feelings live. These feelings of incorruptible essence are protected by the virtuous hands of eternity. Oh! How could we not experience the delightful elation that the benefit of such an invaluable happiness fosters in our souls?"

"I am overwhelmed by a sweet emotion, Ebel. I feel as if an inner light, illuminating my spirit, allows me to see, without overtaking my reasoning, the secret concealed between the folds of a happy moment. In this communication of our feelings, we can look deep within our being and confirm that the intimacy is inviolable when it shelters the feelings that give the expressions of the soul an ideal content."

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"All this, my darling, is part of this wonderful life that is so much our own. Every small variation depicts and maintains the sweetness of living without ever making it become insipid. This is what we have come to learn in this world of invisible and immaterial wonders, which significantly influences our physical life."

After a pause, as if returning from the sublime atmosphere of ideality, they met again in the mutual understanding of their own aspirations that were subjected to the realities of the world they lived in.

A few stars were twinkling in a still clear sky and the lights of the house were beginning to glitter as they left the garden.

The long awaited wedding day had finally arrived and was already drawing to an end.

It was close to midnight when the happy couple drove to the place they had chosen for their honeymoon. Inhibited by the growing effects of her emotions, Mariné remained silent as the images of the events she had experienced, hour after hour, since that morning, paraded through her mind, without her making the slightest effort to recall them. At times, it was the image of the wedding ceremony that was solemnized by the feeling that had granted this act its real significance. At others, it was the memory of the party that had had a special meaning within the family circle and in which everything had worked out well and enhanced the celebrated event. Trying hard to take center stage were the images that reproduced the sweetest or the most touching moments. Among the latter, Christina's tender and moving embrace as they parted surged with evoking force. Amid the former, was Ebel's look of extreme happiness as he approved the wedding gown, which she had so carefully chosen.

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Having covered the distance between Mexico City and their elected location, the newlyweds finally found themselves in the hotel they had picked for their stay.

In the room next to the bridal suite where he had left Mariné alone, Ebel was awaiting the moment, when he would present himself to his bride. Conscious of the transcendent nature of this moment, he reached in his heart for the source of affection that nurtured this love so his spirit, thus prepared, could delve deeply into the mystery that this nuptial event concealed.

Meanwhile, sitting in front of the mirror, Mariné combed her hair that cascaded down to her neck in smooth curls. The mirror

reflected her delicate face, etched in regular and gracious traits. Her well-designed lips and eyes, which held a deep and intelligent look, made her look beautiful. An imperceptible uneasiness colored her cheeks, which were usually pale. She glanced at herself and, standing up, made a few movements in front of the mirror to get a better view of the effect of her beautiful nightgown. She then withdrew a tiny package from her bag.

Ebel noticed this movement as he entered the room.

"Am I in for a surprise?" he asked cheerfully, suspecting a gift.

"Maybe..." Mariné answered naturally as she showed him the object she held in the palm of her hand.

340 "This is my wedding present," she added. "I saved it for when we'd be alone."

When Ebel opened it, he found a small delicate case from which he took out a locket. As Mariné hinted that it carried a secret, he promptly opened it. Etched over a blue enamel background was a small heart enhanced in gold on which were engraved the words: "From Mariné to Ebel." There was a date just below it and, underneath that, following the curve of the object, was the inscription: "Forever".

"What is the meaning of this date, Mariné?" he questioned as he encircled her waist with one arm while the other hand held the gift, symbol of a feeling that would live eternally.

"It's the day I felt my love awaken for you, Ebel. Since then, I've loved you with veneration because you meant everything to me."

He embraced her as their lips met in a pure expression of love.

"My dear Mariné," he later said affectionately. "When I saw you today in your wedding gown, which is the symbol of modesty and candor, I couldn't help but compare you in my mind with the vestals who stirred up the purifying fires on the altars of the goddess they worshiped. Like them, you offer me the sacred fire that animates your life so that I may perpetuate in you the sublime purity that transcends from all of your being. This purity is like a celestial perfume that, without intoxicating my senses, delights my spirit allowing me to prolong indefinitely this instant that infuses in me the certitude of its reality."

A long silence followed his words. In the intimacy of her thought, Mariné saw herself accompanying him on the steps and incidences of life that for years he had taught her how to lead. Meanwhile, he confirmed within himself the certainty that from then on she would be the exclusive confidant of all his mental creations and discoveries, product of his science and experience that he would thereafter reveal to the world. He visualized her dedicating herself to his work with determination as if the blending of the days and nights favored the appearance of a permanent transparent clarity of space in which time gravitates inexorably over the spirits that do not feed on its eternal essence. Mariné, who was now tying the nuptial knot with him, was confirming the marriage that one day had united her spirit to his in the moment she decided to follow him wherever he went.

Mariné remained silent as she rested her head on Ebel's shoulder. Only a slight quiver of her body indicated the profound effect of this sublime instant.

Ecstasy was slowly filling up their souls. The lights of external contemplation being turned off, each one sought the other in the most intimate part of their hearts to experience the divine shudder produced in the spirit by the reciprocity of a love that had not known, nor would ever come to know, a rival to dispute it.

It was morning.

A furtive ray of light, slowly creeping into the room, brushed Mariné's face with the risk of interrupting her sleep. Thoughtfully, Ebel quickly drew the curtain and sat by her side. As he waited patiently for her to wake up, he reviewed the trajectory of their lives.

342 That expression in her eyes, that gesture of surprise on her face and the inexpressible emotion experienced by her soul as a child when she first saw him could never be erased from his memory. Nor could he forget the impression made on him by that look and that gesture. Could this be the instant when souls recognize each other after a long search? He had the feeling of having seen these eyes in long past eras, which his spirit seemed to preserve as a reminiscence whose evoking power coincided with what his own heart had announced.

So many recollections flocked to Ebel's memory! It was as if they wished to be present during those moments, when happiness filled his heart with joy!

He continued to evoke Mariné's childhood when he and Christina, competing for her affection, childishly enjoyed asking her to name which of the two she liked best. She would immediately show fleeting signs of gracious protests to escape answering the question and, after being provoked, she would

hide her face to avoid showing her exultant expression, running away from their teasing.

Childish things yes, but expressions of affection as well!

One day, the style of Mariné's clothes announced that the child had become a young lady. From that moment on, the nature of his love for her – the love of a father, a friend, and a brother – began to be transformed into a more vivid feeling, filled with juvenile ardor. This change was followed by a discreet period of remoteness. This remoteness coincided with Mariné's discreet reservations, whose character had turned sad and withdrawn to the point of becoming a concern to her aunt who started to provide her with parties and outings in order to bring forth the natural spontaneity of her youth, in case she were holding it back. The frequent traces left by tears in her eyes demonstrated the inefficiency of such an approach. The situation, therefore, demanded another solution and he was determined to search for it.

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Continuing to evoke images from the past, Ebel recalled the moment he had decided to question Mariné. The light coming from the garden, filtered through the drawn curtains in the study, filled the atmosphere with the soft brightness of a full moon. It was there that the outcome had unexpectedly sprouted after the first question. Mariné had lifted up her beautiful eyes towards him revealing a particular glow in her look, which had left him perplexed. Influenced by this divine enchantment, Ebel felt all the forces and hopes of his youth being reborn. They contemplated each other in silence as if everything had been explained in the depths of their hearts. Mariné reflected innocence laced with incomparable grace.

With sweet delight, grateful memories continued to flow to his mind. How touching and sublime had it been for him to see, with mathematical precision, the culmination of two parallel sentimental processes: hers and his! Their love, mutually reciprocated, brought to his mind the image of two rivers, which in search for one another had found a common bed. Joy had reached the highest levels of bliss within their souls. He was unable to say how long this inexpressible fragment of eternity had lasted, but he was sure of what Mariné's love would mean to his life.

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How these memories inspired Ebel! He knew that a man could achieve great things in his life, but he also knew that united to an intelligent woman, capable of understanding him, he could surpass the limits of what is humanly possible. As he thought about all this and of the beautiful qualities that embellished Mariné, he uttered these words in an inaudible voice: "Oh, my sweet love who follows me trustingly through space as an inseparable part of my life while we travel on the path of eternity! Your name, immortalized by my thoughts, will cross oceans and continents to last forever in human ears as a symbol of a life beautified to its utmost by the conscious exercise of virtues that, in you, will become remarkable."

Mariné moved slightly, seeking more comfort to continue her sleep, but at that very moment, a subtle sensation seemed to emerge indicating the presence of someone next to her and she opened her eyes. Seeing her husband sitting by her side, she embraced him as if taking hold of herself, after having transcended the boundaries that separate the terrestrial orb from the incorporeal world of supreme happiness.

Their eyes shone with brilliant enchantment. Their souls, in mutual contemplative flight, favored the sweetness of silence rather than any other external expression.

Happiness, which had been elusive in the Arribillagas' household for several months, was now beginning to announce its presence as life was recovering its regular rhythm.

The arrival of a lovely girl contributed as a powerful incentive, as if she had arrived from heaven just in time to strengthen the confidence that was beginning to grow in the family circle.

Tiny Adriana, drowsing in the unconsciousness of her first days, was lying in her beautifully decorated cradle that seemed to convey the utmost tenderness of motherly love. In that room, where she would begin her life, everything was enhanced by the happy combination of good taste and foresight brought about by all that money could buy to contribute to the child's well-being and to the best formation of her character. A well-lit atmosphere, comfort and the appropriate colors befitting a child's sensations, delicate wall decorations and many other things to entertain her innocence would surround the child as she grew up. Nevertheless, if she were capable of understanding, nothing would be more cherished by sweet Adriana than her mother's presence who constantly watched over her, enveloping her in the tenderness of her thoughts as a protection provided by her immense affection.

Early December reminded the Arribillagas of the beginning of the second year of their married life.

One morning, a letter from Mariné with wonderful news arrived for Griselda. It announced their arrival in Buenos Aires the following January. The confirmation of the imminent visit caused such joy that Griselda could not wait to tell Claudio. Rushing to the study, she enthusiastically gave him the news as if she wanted him to participate in the high hopes that she felt invading her soul on account of their friends' arrival.

"Did you like the news?" she inquired, resting her hands on the desk and smiling as she stared at him.

346 The approval on Claudio's face would have been enough to satisfy her, but wishing to express his reply with greater warmth, he took Griselda's lovely face in his hands and, in a rapture of intimate relief, kissed her tenderly.

There was no doubt that having yielded to the demands of a firm resolution made after perceiving the harmful consequences that befall one's behavior due to the lack of an internal control capable of governing life, Claudio had been making remarkable efforts as of late. However, in spite of this, things between them had not yet reached that open and intimate reciprocity that had always bonded them. The evident sign that he had not recovered completely was his lack of continuity in participating in the studies his friends were carrying on. Therefore, at that moment, Griselda had reasons to be elated since Claudio's expressive demonstration heightened her hopes of seeing the last remnants of the harshness that still prevailed in his character disappear very soon. Nonetheless, she was suddenly disappointed to hear him say with clear signs of overconfidence:

"I am sure this visit will provide me the opportunity to dissipate some doubts that continue to assail my spirit."

Griselda immediately noticed how the still domineering self-love had just induced him to dissimulate, under trivial pretexts, his previous errors. Yet, without replying to these words, nor changing her joyful and confident attitude, she tried to draw his attention to the content of the letter she was holding. With this purpose in mind, she read him paragraphs where Mariné mentioned how pleased she was to take this trip and how eager Christina was to see the baby. She tried not to highlight the parts regarding the happiness Mariné had found in her recent marriage. Griselda then told him in a joyful tone how happy she was to receive her friends in a home now brightened by the presence of a child.

Claudio remained silent, nearly absent, as if his own concerns were absorbing him more than anything else and were forcing him to hold on to them. Griselda, who was observing him attentively, noticed an unexpected change in him when, in a frank yet painful tone of voice, he said:

"I seem to feel, darling, that my conditions to face, without risk, the changes demanded by the renewal of concepts improve day to day. I believe that with determination and without reducing efforts or time, I will be able to enhance them."

Griselda's kind attitude in response to that statement showed Claudio, with touching eloquence, how much his words had comforted her and, now satisfied by such support, he could not avoid thinking about the disastrous consequences that any expression of doubt or disdain would have caused her.

In a fleeting moment but with irrepressible force, the memory of the projects that had been postponed by his inconstancy sprung up once again in his mind and, ashamed of himself, he now confessed painfully, as he never had before, his repentance to Griselda.

In this moment of intense emotion, a sob surged from her soul.

“Why are you crying?” he asked.

Griselda wiped the tears off her misty eyes, stared into his with a sweet smile and said:

“Maybe it is because my heart is making me foresee very happy days in our future.”

“Certainly, my dear! I will do everything in my power to make it so.”

Griselda perceived a new expression of determination in his voice and she saw in his eyes the glow of sincerity that floods the pupils when what is uttered corresponds to the pronouncements of a profound conviction.

Among words that sounded more like a lullaby, and caresses conveying affection and sincerity, they renewed their vows of eternal love under the auspices of a new understanding based on a mutual spiritual solidarity. How happy and revitalized they now felt after having successfully removed the last barriers that obstructed their course along the path of self-betterment!

Silently, like swallows flying in search of a new spring, Claudio and Griselda headed to their friends' hotel the day following their arrival, seeking that something, which was still lacking in their lives and was making them feel insecure.

After being invited to go up to their friends' suite, they were soon standing at its door. A few knocks instantly reunited, as if by magic, two periods of time: the one in which they had met last and the present one, as if what had been lived between the periods belonged to one of the many lives that constituted the human existence.

De Sándara and Mariné welcomed their friends with an open and cordial gesture and Christina greeted both warmly, especially Griselda whom she embraced effusively.

"We have so much to talk about!" Griselda said to Mariné as soon as the greetings were over. Then, addressing De Sándara, she added: "If you don't mind we will rob her from you the whole day tomorrow or the day after."

"How can I refuse?" he exclaimed. Besides, it will greatly please Mariné. But don't be surprised, Griselda, if we abduct you, hoping that your husband's kindness allows it..."

"We are unconditionally at your service," answered Arribillaga and, responding to the joke, he added: "but I would be very sorry if I weren't abducted as well."

"Would you seriously be interested in that?" inquired de Sándara in a meaningful tone.

Unexpectedly, Claudio was overcome by a strange sensation of bewilderment and, suddenly, as if these words had reached their intended target, he blushed. How could he claim to be interested

if when he had been lifted up to the incorporeal palace of mental life, he had hurled himself out of the window without waiting for the explanations regarding the advantages that were offered there?

Nevertheless, he recovered and answered:

“Perhaps much more than it might seem, Mr. de Sándara. If blows are useful to enliven the spirit, why wouldn’t mine be urging me to seek your company and obtain something that could be very beneficial to me right now?”

In view of Claudio’s answer and realizing, at the same time, that it would be appropriate to give the ladies sufficient freedom in their effusiveness, de Sándara invited him to go down to the bar, and there they sat comfortably.

350 Sitting next to de Sándara, Arribillaga had no doubt that his friend had already perceived his immediate past, but determined to honor the commands of his conscience, he described, in all frankness and without omitting anything, what he had gone through.

“As you can see,” he said with regret when he was finished, “I was unable to deter the stallion that was kicking inside me and as I mounted it, I went wherever it led me.”

After listening to him very attentively de Sándara, replied with words in which the severity of his tone was softened by affection:

“Did you think you could accomplish the feat of your conversion under those conditions? When one is not satisfied with the life he leads and catches a glimpse of another one, which is more honorable, more generous, more ample and which is the life he yearns for, then there is only one alternative left and that is to change it. And don’t forget that the time we let

go by without recording it faithfully in our conscience is a time that does not return and which is taken away from what we had intended to use for our benefit.”

“You will understand, Mr. de Sándara, that I cannot but reproach myself for the inconsistency and abandonment I fell into, which are unquestionably the causes of the many uncertain and confusing inner states I went through afterwards.”

“This shows the fragility of the human being whose personality, strong in appearance, but in reality weak, inconsistent, cracks and is shattered, defeated by its own failure. Only when the individuality emerges, molded in the hearth of the eternal struggles to overcome the incipient conscious states, will man transform himself into an indestructible being. This will be the first effective triumph over oneself. Before reaching the scepter, however, he must abandon the cane on which his weaknesses rest and march straight, like those who are strong and honorable, along the path of the highest of all sciences: that of the universal and human knowledge in its eternal essence.

“It is, nonetheless true that the undertaking demands such great efforts at times that we fall crushed by the weight of the impositions we set upon ourselves in order to accomplish them.”

“My friend Arribillaga, this occurs precisely because we impose, without measure, on our fortitude, sacrifices that, being exaggerated, make us resentful, producing the frequent violent reaction of our instinct.”

“Then, what are we to do?”

“It’s enough to act with moderation, whether in face of the demands of the inferior nature, whose excesses, we will restrain,

whether in presence of the raptures of enthusiasm that occur after the first conscious manifestations of the spirit. There are two tendencies in constant struggle within each individual: the inferior one, which is noticeably extremist and dogmatic, and the superior or liberal one, which seeks conciliation and balance. The fluctuations of the human thought are caused by this and, as long as the individual has not been able to master the strong pressures of his inferior nature, he will be prone to fall more than once into these crude states of disorientation, like the ones you have just experienced.”

“If we were only able to understand, as a point of leverage, the conceptual essence of the precept...”

352 “To do so, one will only be required to know how to assess the depth of the matter and convert it into the highest morals. Hence, a reality that is as beautiful as it is instructive will appear before our eyes: on one hand, the superior life flourishing and abundant with happy perspectives, on the other, the non-transcendent or ordinary life, exempt from any specific content, led haphazardly as people in general do, representing absolutely nothing to the being who incarnates it. Under these conditions what does one become? Nothing. An embryonic being vegetating throughout a whole insubstantial life, a life that will never be able to fulfill the intimate need to edify an integral being, individually free and capable.”

“And yet, it is hard to abandon it.”

“Yes, it truly is hard to abandon the presumptuous being that man values so much. But it is too late when one becomes convinced that the material remains on earth and what belongs to the spirit returns to it in its universal and eternal existence. I have seen many people fall while attempting to painfully climb the ascent to wisdom. They remind me of the tragedy of Aeolus’s son. It’s not possible to keep pushing

upwards the inert mass of earthly life, which is never satisfied, without jeopardizing its stability. The enrichment of one's conscience favors the evolution of the spirit and promotes, in turn, the gradual abandonment of one's ordinary life without having to discard the world we live in or avoid complying with its demands. On the contrary, we will always feel more at ease in it as long, of course, as we honor our spirits with thoughts and traits that elevate the hierarchy of that which man has debased by ignorance and unconsciousness throughout centuries and millennia. Nothing could be more gratifying to the human being nor grant him more pleasure than to comply with this hidden dictate of his conscience. Thus, only through cognition and virtue, will it be possible to establish in man the moral order, which was meant to be incorruptible. Then, it would be fair to expect the lifting of this sanction that seems to burden the souls like a non-cancelled debt."

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"I agree with everything you have just explained, Mr. de Sándara, but I insist on the fact that the task of self-improvement is arduous. One could almost say that it is superior to our forces. The predominant influence that matter has over our life partially justifies the inner conflicts that are produced between it and the spirit."

De Sándara smiled benevolently thinking of man's need to always invent a reason to justify the time he wastes. Nevertheless, what his friend had just expressed because of what had occurred in him was very real.

"There is no doubt that the task of self-improvement demands efforts," he replied. "It is not a question of simple speculative manipulation. But we must not do like the individual who, beginning to practice an art or a craft, intends to master at once something that demands time and patience. The emergence of values and qualities can only become a reality within the individual when he starts to

work for the resurrection of his soul within the hidden spheres of his conscience. It is in the performance of this function that man is converted into his own redeemer.”

In his closing remarks, de Sándara added a few words endowing them with more affability and courtesy:

“The access to the world of causal cognitions has undoubtedly a high cost, my friend. However, do not be concerned because we have all been granted a high credit whose validity is related to our accomplishments. It is up to us, therefore, either to benefit from it or to lose it.”

These reflections deeply motivated Claudio. The mere fact of enunciating those possibilities, which his spirit, avid for liberation, yearned for, made him once again feel, with noble and wholesome enthusiasm, the sprouting of the virtual graft that frivolous thoughts, procreated by neglect, had cut off, just like ants cutting off the tender shoots of a rosebud. Moved by that reactivation of energies, he expressed, with sincerity, his resolution to dedicate himself with integrity to the cultivation of such precepts. De Sándara, however, reminding him to be prudent, pointed out that such a promise had to be made to himself so that his own conscience, being the one in charge to fulfill it, would protect him against any disappointment.

Claudio and Griselda felt extremely happy when they returned from the visit.

Dona Laura had spent the afternoon with her granddaughter and was expecting them at home. Later on, Doctor Laguna arrived and, during a very pleasant dinner, they all caught up on the latest news, making plans for the next day, when Mariné and Christina would come in the morning and de Sándara would most probably join them for lunch as well.

Patricio also shared his masters' enthusiasm, demonstrating it by the interest and diligence with which he complied with the orders and by the promptness in caring for the preparations so that the guests would be well attended.

Around noon the next day, Mariné arrived at the Arribillagas accompanied by Mrs. de Landivar. Everything seemed to reflect the communicative joy of the owners of the house.

Soon, cheerful voices could be heard in the entrance hall. Dona Laura, and especially Christina, celebrated the moment they met as the beginning of a friendship that both had long wished to establish.

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Preceded by Griselda, they went up the small stairway that led to the rooms above, Mariné being quite eager to see her friend's baby daughter. They stepped in the room at the very moment the nanny was changing the baby's diapers. This allowed them to admire the baby's body while making those sweet remarks that always come up when one looks at a child who has arrived in this world in healthy condition and with a perfect body.

Once diapers and wraps were changed, Mariné took the girl in her arms in a loving gesture:

"How beautiful she is!" she exclaimed and gazed at her for a while saying: "I think she has your eyes, Griselda."

"And it didn't happen by chance!" Christina said.

"Look at that beauty!" Mariné repeated as she bent over Mrs. de Landivar who, sitting down, was about to put the baby on her lap.

"Doesn't she look a lot like Griselda?" asked Dona Laura, not satisfied with the mere resemblance of the eyes.

Christina looked closely at the baby, first from the front, then from the back and finally said with humorous finesse:

"Yes, she actually looks quite like her. But she takes a lot after her father, doesn't she? Especially now with that little devilish gesture."

Claudio laughed.

"I know I don't have a saint's halo," he said, "but I don't believe to have a lot in common with the devil."

356 "Neither one nor the other is necessary to a wise man." affirmed Christina graciously wagging her finger.

The lady's timely remarks, flowing spontaneously from her vivacious and cheerful character, contributed undoubtedly in making that gathering more pleasant.

Adriana was finally placed in her carriage and taken to the small terrace by the nanny, for some fresh air. That day the temperature was mild and quite suitable for her.

They then strolled through several areas of the spacious residence, which depicted an era that was quickly fading away due to the progress of the great transformations characterized by modern times. Having reached the great lobby once again, the two young women, followed by Claudio, entered the study that had been Don Roque's. On one of the walls hung a beautiful oil painting depicting his venerable figure, which seemed to come

to life through the memories of those who cherished him in their hearts. Mariné stood respectfully before the painting for a moment and then went on to admire the vast library whose luxurious bookstands held the most selective works of universal literature.

Arribillaga pointed to the stand where de Sándara's books were kept.

"I see that not even his most recent work is missing," said Mariné, after observing them. She then glanced towards another section of the library where, in severe austerity, ancient and modern philosophical thoughts lined up.

"Here we can find the greatest exponents of culture," she remarked after a pause.

"Indeed. But it should be said that this culture was not able to shape in man the conscience of a superior destiny for his life. Human beings still stumble along uncertain paths..."

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Claudio's observation triggered an exchange of opinions. Finally, anxious to open her heart to her friend, Griselda exclaimed with satisfaction:

"Mariné, I will never cease to rejoice about the change that has taken place in my life, better said, in our lives. Because both our lives have changed, isn't it so, Claudio? It is so invigorating to feel capable of breaking the monotony of a routine life and forge a new way of living!"

"Oh! This implies that you have successfully interpreted the law of cause and effect." Mariné declared with a smile.

"Experiences are good teachers." Claudio replied. "No matter how hard they may be, they always yield a favorable result when they are studied. Thanks to them, I positively know today that this law is only inexorable to those who are unable to transcend the influence of its earthly power. Once this is understood, how stupid it would be to

stagnate under its influx when we can devote ourselves to cultivate aptitudes that could lead us towards a better destiny. The only thing is that in order to achieve this, we must simultaneously undertake a conscious study of our own psychology, which isn't in itself an easy task."

Without disagreeing, Mariné answered:

"True, it is actually an investigation that presents a wide range of difficulties."

"They would be insurmountable without the guidance of an expert guide," Claudio quickly added. "I have no doubt about that, Mariné. After having fallen into a swamp from which I would have been unable to disentangle myself, I must acknowledge the efficacy of those cognitions, which were presented to me as orientation for my life, in addition to some other very direct and timely recommendations. Now, free from dangers, I enjoy the small transformation that has occurred in me. This nurtures my spirit making me frequently think of the happiness of those who have already succeeded in crossing the threshold of their mental possibilities and entered the domains of wisdom."

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"That simple thought predisposes us to be docile to those tests that imply substantial changes in our being," expressed Griselda.

"I agree," her friend asserted. "We will always find this to be a strong support when facing our inferior nature, which is so prone to rebel against every submission and to destroy the results we have accumulated with patient efforts in order to conduct our life towards superior levels."

"You have just touched on a point that brings back rather unpleasant memories," objected Claudio, giving Mariné a significant look.

"Did I? I'm sorry, Arribillaga," she answered vividly. "This being the case, don't forget the stimulus you mentioned a moment ago."

You will find in it an excellent recourse to erase the traces of those memories.”

The clock in the hallway struck twelve thirty when de Sándara arrived, followed a few minutes later by Dr. Laguna.

“I’m sorry I am a bit late,” said de Sándara apologetically, “I was detained by some friends whom I had not seen for a long time.”

“Oh! Guests like you are never late,” replied the hostess.

They all headed for the living room.

Claudio offered de Sándara a seat next to Mariné, to whom Dona Laura was mentioning how eager she had been to make her acquaintance.

“My daughter mentioned you constantly.”

“She too spoke a lot about you on the ship. In a way, I already knew you and have held you in great esteem for a long time,” Mariné answered.

As he listened to them, de Sándara intervened:

“Griselda was never short in praising you, madam, and I never doubted her accurate opinion.”

“Oh! I don’t believe that my merits warrant such praise,” replied Dona Laura. “Usually, affection and affinity generously fill many gaps. In any case, I thank you all and you can be sure that I reciprocate with my love.”

They had lunch and a few hours later, following a long and cheerful discussion around the table, which helped them to get to know one another better, the men left to attend to their respective commitments. Mrs. de Landivar was dropped off at her hotel for a brief rest after which she would visit them in the

afternoon. Dona Laura took her leave as well to rest, allowing Mariné and Griselda to talk freely.

As de Sándara was expected to return by the end of the day to pick up Mariné, Claudio invited Mr. Malherbe, Marcos and Norberto for a short meeting that had been scheduled before his return.

Having willingly resolved to straighten out his behavior, Claudio had gradually sought the company of his friends and companions who had similar ideals. That was the reason he was so talkative and satisfied that afternoon, as they waited for Mr. de Sándara.

When he arrived, Dr. Laguna joined in the group's cordial welcome and said, in that pleasant frank tone that distinguished him:

360 "You must know, Mr. de Sándara, that my daughter, my son-in-law and each of the friends that accompany us at this moment have contributed in making me feel the same friendliness with which they receive you and that is inspired, I am sure, by the most respectable reasons. I haven't absorbed as yet the extent of your merits, but since it concerns my children, it will be easy for you to understand that I cannot remain on the sidelines of that which is the cause of their interest as well as of their esteem and affection."

The conversation quickly started out with earnest and growing liveliness.

"We alluded a while ago," said Arribillaga at a suitable moment, "to our usual exploratory investigations of the mental world. In regard to this aspect, our friend Malherbe highlighted the simplicity and precision with which you unveil this reality to us."

"The unobjectionable realities demand it," replied de Sándara. "These don't need any artificial coating. Those who resort to such

artifices have needed them, no doubt, to report on a world, which they had no access to. Moreover, the accumulation of so much unreality produced a wide variety of conjectures that permanently excite human curiosity.”

“I think that at least once everybody has thought,” said Norberto, “about the possible existence of the mental world. I also believe that everyone has felt its unquestionable influence when hearing references about the soul, the spirit, the conscience, and the mental faculties which move and enliven human life with astonishing energy, even though their functions have not been defined with absolute certainty.”

“Speaking of functions, I don’t know if the authors who venture to expose their ideas about the metaphysical field fulfill any constructive function,” stated de Sándara. “What is undoubtedly true is that the reader is left at his own expense to discern on his arguments which are filled with inaccuracies. Such matters are written with great exuberant imagination. There is no truth in them and everything there unfolds in a biased manner. Naturally, I exclude from this judgment the scientific works that present hypotheses by demonstrating the progress achieved in investigations and that refrain from making definitive statements.”

Taking advantage of the opportunity, Griselda referred to the novels published by de Sándara, stating that the reader absorbs their contents with particular interest, whether due to their conception on how to manage life in its multiple phases and ages, or due to their instructive directives related to the correct behavior of men and women in their mutual relationships and considerations.

"These differ so much," she added, "from the marked tendency towards the exotic that leads some authors to licentiousness, which is in itself so disconcerting."

"Except for the great novelists," emphasized Marcos, "there is no doubt that they have emulated one another in the art of fantasizing, by embracing with nearly religious fervor the tragic element, which deposits in the soul the angst of fatality or by surrendering to a fervent romanticism that almost always clashes with the sincere palpitation of the heart."

"Well said," replied de Sándara, "because one's heart doesn't agree in deifying characters who are estranged to the reality that we know and respect."

362 "If I may," interrupted Mr. Malherbe. "I would like to add something to Mrs. Arribillaga's comment about the authors with realistic tendencies. Having read a number of them, I've observed that they incur in truly censurable extremes. They are obviously inspired by the frenzy of passion when they crudely describe the vices and the scourges of the debased human nature, unaware that they are inflicting an offense to morals and not giving a thought about the turmoil they create in the minds of young people."

"Can you see", asked de Sándara, "how scarce are the means and resources man relies on to rise above so much misery, which is voluptuously preferred to moral richness?"

"Indeed," said Norberto "but we must admit that during their youth both men and women need to know certain episodes of the passionate and psychological life in order to create their own defenses, instead of exposing their candor to those who take advantage of it along the way. "

"There is no doubt that, to a certain point, what you have just affirmed is necessary," replied de Sándara, "but the fact is that no one knows how

to deter that curiosity in time. Naturally, when they awaken, they find themselves trapped by the subtle threads of a frivolous trend that gets them used to accepting everything, as an imposition of modern times, even though this “everything” deeply harms the good customs and the feelings of those who follow that trend.”

Changing the subject with the intent to respond to an insinuation made during the meeting, de Sándara referred to certain peculiarities observed in his novels.

“I have always sought to infuse in my characters all my optimism in order to mitigate the sufferings or the sadness usually felt by the soul during the bitter moments of its existence. I haven’t made them cry over the miseries of this world or seek revenge for offences taken. As children of my thought, I owed them a better legacy. I, therefore, endowed them with a particular ability to understand and to neutralize the harmful effects of evil in their lives. Even though I am aware that the human dramas, many of which end up in tragedy, are part of the current existence, as I create the main characters in my novels, I aim to crush the resulting pain by giving them a superior content, pouring over the wound opened by sadness the balm of understanding that comes by way of the spirit.”

“A particular event in my childhood has been preserved in my memory,” he continued, “with all the emotional force of that age. I was very young when I lost my mother. For years, I was deeply hurt by her absence and more than once did my tears help to mitigate my anguish. My incipient reasoning could not understand why, no sooner had my eyes gotten accustomed to seeing her and my heart to loving her, she had departed, leaving behind nothing but the memory of her adored image and her venerable name. Very well. Whenever I needed

to refer to similar cases in my books, as they became necessary in the development of my plot, being aware that we must be cautious when reproducing sad events or episodes, I always sought to convey to the reader an edifying sensation that would make him feel consubstantiated with the virtues that infuse strength during such a bitter trance of human existence.”

Following an uninterrupted silence, de Sándara went on:

“How many times, as I contemplated my wife’s hair, had I not wondered whether my mother’s hair would be similar to hers? And how many times had I not also dried out in them a tear of gratitude to the divine Providence, which had allowed me to caress, as an adult, with my hands the hair that could never flow through the tender hands of a child!”

364 As de Sándara spoke, his eyes seemed to disappear from their orbits, etching in his distant and diffused look the image of his thought.

“From the time I was very young,” he carried on, “I thought that the physical form of the individual doesn’t contain everything. Something, from the heights to which my aspirations rose, kept telling me that the spirit survives matter because the force that animates it is eternal. Yet, what inviolable secret made its presence elusive to my eyes? That was what I was determined to discover.”

At this point, de Sándara paused while tapping distractedly the tip of his half-lit cigar on the ashtray.

Taking advantage of the pause, the doctor asked whether he had succeeded in unraveling this mystery, to which de Sándara, already forewarned against the distrust of science that sustains its calculations on concrete material bases and evidence, replied:

“As it relates to the perspectives of my point of view, yes. We know perfectly well that two unquestionable realities exist in our lives and are maintained intertwined in an admirable form until one of them, the material, ceases its physical function. The other one, the immaterial, constituted by the essence of our spirit, lives on. If everything in man were reduced to what is terrestrial, like the animals, he would be totally indifferent towards the loss of his fellowmen, even of those closest to him. An animal, even when domesticated, lacks conscience and sensitivity and, therefore, the loss of one or all the individuals of its species cannot afflict it. Thus, it becomes obvious that since man is an intelligent being, he aspires to discover everything that exists and surrounds his spirit. We’ve been endowed with two marvelous systems: the mental and the sensitive. We know that, thanks to them, we have been able to undertake the most risky endeavors of investigation, beginning with the one about the atom, which shows us its ultra-powerful energy sustaining the cosmic and telluric forces of the planet, up to the immense astral steppes and the celestial vault studded with numerous stars. And, if all this is accessible to human knowledge, why shouldn’t it also be regarding the active orbit of this incorporeal world whose vibrations are received by our sensitive being by way of our mind and our soul? After thorough and lucid efforts of analytical reflections, one day I concluded that the individual spirit is not a slave to our whim, nor is it tied to us like an intolerable Siamese brother. Even though it belongs to us, we only possess it proportionally to how much we allow it to participate in the issues of our life. I remember that it was during the years of my youth when I decided to confront the passive doubt that puts the senses to sleep and keeps the intelligence prostrated. This occurred when I converted this doubt into

an active one and, without useless detours, I confronted the conflict that science maintains with the spirit since immemorial times. This allowed me to definitely enter the incorporeal world, which is strictly inaccessible to the ordinary mind and sensitivity. There, the spirit manifests itself and acts free from the restrictions imposed upon it by human presumption, which is so prone to blindly deny what it believes to be inexistent. In this incommensurable metaphysical world, in this “kingdom of heaven”, how well one recognizes the wisdom, the compassion and the prudence of the Supreme Creator in favor of the most arrogant, conceited and reckless of His subjects – man. Meditating over the complex mechanism of the universal laws, so wonderfully harmonious and precise, I think that it leaves us with no other alternative than to recognize the sublime protection and tact of the August Will, which opposes the excesses of ambition, of greed and of the foolishness expressed in superlative degrees by the human being as he strives to impose his power, inch by inch, over what is created. Very well. In seeking my mother in the immensity of this world, not in her physical image or in the tenderness of her affection, but in her symbolic representation and in the excellence of her spiritual function, I found her surviving the flesh in her immortal posture in front of my spirit. She, my mother, disappeared as such to blend in the supreme conception of her superior mission with the soul of all mothers; with the soul of the one who later appears, incarnated in the mother of our children, to prolong the life of the human species until the end of centuries.”

“You, sir, move with great expertise through the metaphysical scenario,” stated Laguna. “I would say that everything in you is driven by the desire to make us understand this truth, which,

according to your statements, exists in each psychological episode or movement of your ideas.”

“It is a desire that puts me, now and forever, at your disposal, gentlemen, to add any clarification that you may require of me.”

Yet, no one expressed that need. The only manifestations heard were the opinions of a few in which the states of mind of the youngest mingled with the warm acceptance of the eldest. Among them, Claudio was the one who kept most silent preferring to keep to himself what de Sándara had allowed him to read between his words.

That night the Arribillagas dined alone, after a happy and prosperous journey for their spirits.

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Claudio and Griselda received a new dose of encouragement during the following days as a result of their first contacts with their friends in Buenos Aires.

Arribillaga had seen de Sándara twice and had openly expressed his inner problems to a significant extent, obtaining valuable assistance which reaffirmed his purposes to conquer the obstinate resistance of those negative thoughts, most deeply engrained in his mind and, which were the ones that most often gravitated over his mood. All of this had contributed to guide his steps, in a definitive manner, towards the ideal goal he had elected as the objective of his life.

“Be very careful,” de Sándara had warned him at the end of the second meeting, “not to incur in the gravest error of manufacturing a god destined to serve you unconditionally.”

“How could a man in full possession of his reason fall into such an aberration?”

“Very simply, by conditioning himself to the idea of a God, who would suit his personal conveniences and by rating His Love, His Justice and His Compassion to the extent that one’s limitation is able to conceive them. Naturally, such considerations fall outside the realm of reality. Hence, the reason why those who adopt this judgment later undergo cruel disappointments.

368 Being under the sensations produced by the frequent assistance of his friend and moved each time by the need to increase his knowledge, Claudio began to develop the habit of reflecting. “There are two forces,” he said to himself, “that fight for the control of our being: the physical or material that governs our senses and our instinct with undisputed preponderance over our inferior nature and the spiritual, metaphysical or non-material that consists of two systems: the mental and the sensitive. The former is constituted by our prodigious thinking and creative mechanism and the latter by the sensitivity, the feelings and the decisive attributes of the heart. Between these two forces, the will is the oscillating pendulum which, like a lever, opens and closes the doors to our happiness.”

Gradually taking shape in Claudio’s mind, these concepts captivated his soul, which was often nurtured by the premature idea of becoming a magnate of wisdom. Yet, why did he desire the possession of knowledge? Had he seriously thought about this? Following this inquiry, the battle between these two forces, which for a long time he had felt contending within his being, appeared before his eyes. One was healthy, generous and endowed with a

virtuous feeling; the other, disguised with noble aspirations but flaunting the characteristic flag of greed and ambition, appeared as well. He had frequently noted, after overcoming the deceptions of the instinct and the fascination of his senses over his will, that he had celebrated his victory over such trances with inexpressible joy. Yet how much more effort he would still have to apply in order to detect, in each disguised attack, his implacable enemy, the inferior nature, in its obstinate intent to rule over his life.

“Why is it that some people need centuries to decipher the mysteries that lay deep within their souls,” Claudio wondered as he progressed in his reflections, “while others are able to unveil their secrets effortlessly as if they were simple mathematical problems being instantly solved by expertise with numbers. How immense is the abyss of ignorance that deceives man when in its darkness, by the reflection of light, the mirage of its peaks appears! Nevertheless, what deep lethargy engulfs the minds of men who require such a huge amount of explanations before deciding to extricate themselves from the mundane daze? It is unbelievable how difficult it is for men to be convinced of their spiritual inability. It is difficult for them because, undoubtedly, it was never part of their projects to realize that an inner awakening would be an honorable alternative to fill up their time. Unquestionably, as long as men remain ignorant of such truths, everything will be reduced to drinking from the cup of life in big gobbles whenever intoxicated by pleasure, and in very small and measured sips whenever life becomes bitter and unpleasant to their pampered palate.”

At that point of his reflections a few words spoken by his friend came, unexpectedly, to him. His words were befitting to

the thoughts, which at that very moment crossed his mind: "The individual will revoke the sentence which tied his life down to an uncertain and hazardous destiny by just reopening the process of his evolution, which will allow him to reach the magnanimous reasoning of the heights that is also that of History. He will unite his forces and determination to those of the souls who seek the truth, the unstained truth that gathers all the secrets of Wisdom at its core, and he will feel how he relates to them in the most sublime kinship."

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As he reached his conclusion, he was amazed to see the relationship between his preceptor's words and what was occurring inside him and, as he remembered his stare for a moment, he felt a special emotion as if he sensed once again that something was scrutinizing the most secret places of his conscience. Carried by the gentle palpitations of the hopes that animated and encouraged him, Claudio compared the mental and moral caliber of his preceptor to that of the friends with whom he had deplorably wasted his time. It seemed to him as if they lived in past eras revolving around the myths that spiritual blindness establishes as the unique incentives of life.

"Something strange recurrently happens to me when I am with de Sándara," he told Griselda a few days later in a confidential tone. "I am amazed at the lucidity I perceive in myself while listening to his explanations and trying to assimilate his words. Believe me, darling, at times I get the impression of being inside another Claudio, equipped with an extraordinary thinking organ that allows me to conceive valuable ideas and feel and look at life from a perspective that is completely new to me. In this state of mind, which I must strive to maintain permanently, I come to understand easily the existence of realities that would have still remained unknown to me were I not

ready for an awakening and had not my conscience expressed the need for a different way of life. A life in which I could experience the delights of an incomparable existence, filled with good fortune!"

Such statements, originating from her husband's soul in such a pleasant and appealing spontaneity, deeply pleased Griselda who contributed with the warmth of her affection and the sharpness of her intelligence, to strengthen even more the enthusiastic effects of these verifications and to help him extend them consciously. She knew how much Claudio would still have to struggle, since she was aware of certain attitudes of vanity that blinded him at times urging him to impose his arrogance in lieu of the simple satisfaction of humility. Nonetheless, she had seen him triumph more than once, which was evidence enough that these were subsiding. She had seen him bend his pride and act without the pompous attitude of conceit that tarnishes the merits of an individual. In these circumstances, the personality disappears together with its entourage of whims giving way to the reasonable, noble and sincere being, incarcerated in the tiniest place of the small inner human world.

During their married life, both had found the key point for the harmony that needed to prevail between them. The serene and conscious study of their own experiences had allowed them to discover that harmony in marriage is based on mutual respect and in the honor that one is able to bestow upon his name and the sacred institution of the family, adjusting to superior ethics, which must be exercised in a natural and spontaneous manner. It was particularly important for both to communicate, as a result of one's own impulse of intimacy and not by obligation. Everything had to harmoniously lead to the efficient behavior within the family environment, which is part of the experimental field of

the non-material world with which they were starting to get acquainted. Yet, neither one nor the other would interfere in the inner process that they were carrying out in search of the happiness they yearned for. Inner life is inviolable. Its virtue is the discretion that protects it against any contingencies. Its enchantment lies in its secret, only known and cherished by the owner of this intimacy.

The presence of Mariné, whose company delighted Griselda daily during this period, would undoubtedly provide considerable benefits to her and to the future stability of her home. Mariné's assistance would greatly help her overcome the psychological obstacles that could arise and disturb her feminine soul, which aspired to fulfill her generic mission with greater perfection. Griselda held in indescribable esteem the matrimonial life she visualized as a spiritual structure exempt of vacillations and in which understanding is the foundation and the mutual support of the love expressed. As she lacked, however, the necessary assurance to behave with the desired propriety – which constituted the accomplishment of her most cherished dream – her sensitivity, replacing what was not within reach of her reason, allowed her to grasp many details she could improve upon, which she willingly welcomed in order to favor the harmonious and happy development of life at home.

Because of this, she felt fortunate. While Claudio was experiencing the most wholesome reactions by enjoying the extraordinary magnificence granted to any human conscience that overcomes the fields of common knowledge, she, in her woman's heart, was beginning to strengthen the assiduity and dedication with which she was ready to triumph over those events, which the continuous flow of life presents after each sunrise.

During de Sándara's stay in Buenos Aires, Claudio had another opportunity to test his determination in the practice of a behavior exempt of extraneous interferences to his aspirations.

Until then, he had been able to fend off the tireless insistence of his friends who, unwilling to see their number reduced, had from time to time intensified their phone calls and office visits, inviting him to join them in their disoriented lives. His refusals, expressed without hesitation or vacillation, seemed to have finally kept them at bay. This was what Claudio had assumed, feeling relieved when after several days he had not received any other invitations.

And yet, when he least expected it, he was surprised by Luciano's visit to his office one afternoon.

"I'm dying to know how you are!" he exclaimed emphatically as he entered. "I couldn't find you anywhere! I called you and came here several times but to no avail! Where have you been hiding?"

"Not in another world, man! I'm just busy with friends from abroad."

"Could it perhaps be this Mr. de Sándara?" Luciano asked with a touch of irony.

"You said it," Claudio answered seriously.

Faced with the austere attitude of his friend, Luciano wiped the smile off his face.

"I'm sure you came to ask me to join you in some kind of a binge..." said Arribillaga, going back to his usual cordial manner.

"Obviously! And what a good one..."

"Even so, don't count on me. I think you had already imagined that..."

"Why?"

"You know why."

"But this is madness!"

"You have the right to judge it as you please. From my part, I hope you'll understand me and avoid insisting from now on. You know, Luciano, that I'm determined to abstain from engaging myself in ways and suggestions that don't befit my current responsibilities. Why would I alienate my life by making commitments that absorb a time I can put to better use?"

"Fine! But who would have believed that... I thought that when you were boasting about being the lord and master of your ideas, you were sure of what you were affirming."

"I was wrong then. Now, I'm striving to mend my errors, and I won't waiver."

Clinging to his reasons or possessed by them, Luciano, convinced of being right, replied:

"Forgive me, but it seems to me that such a determination is unreasonable for a man like you."

As if Claudio's decision had not convinced him at all, Luciano tried again moments later with renewed emphasis describing in vivid detail the upcoming perspective of a "memorable night on the

town.” The invitation was highly appealing inasmuch as he adorned it with every imaginable detail he could muster in an effort to awaken the appetite of his friend, who remained nevertheless unperturbed and deaf to the insidious whispers of the senses, which stirred his instincts.

“Listen, Luciano,” he said at the edge of his patience. “You must understand once and for all that this stuff is over for me. You must convince yourself that I’m absolutely determined to preserve my freedom, as I understand it to be. Therefore, I won’t go! This is my answer. I beg you to respect my ideas as I respect yours.”

“Are you serious? Really serious, Claudio?”

“Yes!”

“I could never share your way of thinking!”

“I am sorry, Luciano. I too didn’t think then as I do now. But I finally understood my mistakes. Perhaps one day you’ll also become aware of this. It’s worth waiting for...”

“The truth is,” Luciano insisted, “that it’s very difficult for me to be convinced of such a thing. Is this your last word? Well, then there is nothing else to say! I’m sure that you’ll join us even if it were only for the last time.”

Seeing that his friend was taking his answer as a joke and was becoming obstinate, Claudio stood up, more determined than ever in his attitude, stretched out his hand and with these words, said goodbye:

“If that is what you came here for, I’m sorry to say that you have wasted your time. Please, don’t insist any further.”

Claudio was relieved to see Luciano leave. It seemed as if he had seen behind his friend the suggestive figure of Mephistopheles whom he had just chased away decidedly and energetically, tired of playing Faust’s sad role.

Ebel and Mariné's stay in Buenos Aires ended with a dinner given at the Arribillagas', which Christina, Mr. Malherbe and also Griselda's parents attended.

The dinner had its lively moments and when finally they passed to the living room, the prevailing joviality did not abate. This would have continued if a dialogue between de Sándara and Dr. Laguna had not polarized everyone's attention. All of a sudden, the group's mental attitude changed and they were all willing to participate in a more serious discussion.

"What were, then, the essential motives that moved your thought towards the transcendent investigation?" asked the doctor at that moment.

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"Such motives, to be sure, do not allow me to depart from the norms that govern scientific behavior," replied de Sándara.

He paused for a moment, helped himself to a cigar from the box that Patricio was handing to him and went on:

"I proceed along other paths. I follow other methods, my own methods. They are formed and elaborated in the very field of experience while I adapt and readapt my senses and judgments to rigorous demands that do not tolerate any negligence or distractions. As you may realize, when I decided to undertake this type of investigation, penetrating in the metaphysical world where I found so many truths and satisfactions, I had foreseen the difficulties that I would encounter along the way.

"Forgive my interruption, Mr. de Sándara, but I would like to ask a question. What do you mean when you refer to the metaphysical world?"

"Not to the one that has attracted, and still does, the attention of ancient and modern philosophers who are deeply inclined to conceive

it as emerging from the absolute and, therefore, unreachable to man's experiences due to the very limitations of his corporeal nature. In my opinion, this world is consubstantial with our life thus allowing the thoughts and ideas that live in us to maintain a perfect mental correlation with the process of universal life. Men of science, skeptics by excellence, show contempt for everything that relates to the manifestations of the spirit and to our inner world, which is exclusively mental and sensitive. I once visited a laboratory where a group of distinguished researchers worked, and I had to ponder on the eagerness of the human being who, in seeking to dominate the universe, scrutinizes the forces of the atom, isolates bacteria and combines the powerful elements of destruction. At the same time, he lowers the guard of his inner defenses and yields to the power exercised over him by instincts and passions as his conceit scorns and humiliates his spirit. "Very well," I used to say to myself at the time. "Let each one act according to his best knowledge and understanding" as they say, while we move onward our path. Let the men of science keep on seeking the mystery of life in the material cell while we maintain the certainty of having found it in the mental cell. Let them continue in their delirium of crushing God's thought between their hands and subject the cosmos to their will, while we proclaim His august presence in every particle of Creation and adore Him in the unique manner that is gratifying to His divine eyes, that is – by working towards our own good and that of our fellowman, rebuilding life with what we find to be most praiseworthy in ourselves, complementing it with what is the most valuable we can achieve in order to dignify the destiny of the species we belong to."

"The vast collection of cognitions you possess," observed Dona Laura, "is surely the result of long years of work."

"Of long and tiresome years, indeed. During all that time, I was able to gather for my personal use what you have just named 'a collection of cognitions' which is truly the most valuable possession that can be found in this world we are referring to. On account of it, I was able to establish in me the sublime sensations that one can experience by reproducing the contemplated images seen there in the metaphysical sphere, in this infinite immensity that becomes more inaccessible when the individual's possibilities to penetrate it are far more remote. This allowed me to live happily and feel at ease there as in this world we live in."

378 "If I may..." objected Dr. Laguna, seeking clarification. "I think that any discovery must be given to mankind for their benefit. While many of your statements express this generous attitude, couldn't we suppose that what you just said implies using your cognitions exclusively for your own benefit?"

"You see how appearances can usually mislead," de Sándara answered with an insight into the point made. "I certainly don't discard the possibility that you wanted to prompt a broad movement of explanation of my thought concerning a conception that could seem adventurous to you."

The doctor smiled without refuting the hypothesis.

"The scientific cognitions," de Sándara went on, "benefit those who use them. I am sure we totally agree on that point. The cognitions I refer to also benefit them since they don't belong exclusively to anybody who, exempt of prejudice and

intention to modify them, seeks them accepting their generous action. The sole exclusivity resides in what each one is able to achieve through his own venture when using them as his guide. As you'll understand, nothing will be more gratifying to my spirit than to bring a soul closer to that world and give it support until it becomes convinced by itself that nothing compares to that in bringing happiness, in the broadest sense of the word. Everything related to the wonderful conformation of man interests me vividly, but my studies do not include his biological constitution governed, as we know, by laws ruling the cellular life without the assistance of one's will. I will not cease to repeat, Dr. Laguna, that my cognitions cannot be subjected to the cold and analytical examination of scientists. One cannot study and investigate with eyes turned outwardly, something that offers within oneself, in one's own life, the most varied and rich experimental field. The cognitions, whose virtues I exalt, possess the quality of penetrating the individual's psychological and mental life, where man becomes master of his destiny while learning to use his intelligence, his will and his energies, channeling them towards the point of the sublime linkage of his life with the thought that animates Creation. I can only guide the understanding of he who is willing to undertake this task up to the limits allowed. However, I cannot indicate the point of linkage because its location differs from one human being to another. While in a minority its location is, we could say, close at hand, in others rest long and painful journeys of struggle must be covered before attaining it. Furthermore, each one has a particular way of moving about. In short, it relates to a variety of situations that are extremely complex. Nevertheless, there is no obstacle opposing the

aspirations to reach this goal as long as the interested person is willing to educate his inner movements, having this objective in mind. He must, then, get these movements accustomed to an accelerated rhythm, which will tend to break the resistance of this habit that moves everything, at all times, in a slow and lazy manner within the scope of time.”

“I am sorry to say, Mr. de Sándara, that I partially disagree with you regarding the technical exercise of the scientific profession. I seem to detect a certain prejudice towards men of science and I know you will understand that I would like to see such an important point clarified for the benefit of our mutual convictions.”

380 “It was not my intention, dear doctor, to underestimate the undisputed merit of scientists nor do I hold such prejudice. However, we should agree that the explanations of the great mysteries contained in the human being are still inaccessible to science. Even philosophers and psychologists have not been successful in addressing the mysteries of the psyche. Science and philosophy have never indicated a path that guides men to the truths without vacillations, without the interminable roundabouts of their theories and hypotheses, erected as signposts to uncertain paths. Nevertheless, the day will come when science as well as philosophy will squarely address the subject in order to rectify behaviors and mistakes concerning the evaluation of the human being and his destiny.”

“According to your concepts, I presume that this will occur when scientists, philosophers, psychologists and others, interested in the subject, decide to study their own psychologies, based on their convictions.”

"That is the key! The study of their own psychologies: the spirit, the conscience, the life of the thoughts and the thousands of inner reactions that do not always surface but do shape, amongst other things, the world of each person."

"I believe, Mr. de Sándara, that if doubt is inseparable from science, then so are the convictions following the evidence."

"Exactly, Dr. Laguna, and you'll be able to achieve this based on evidence as soon as you decide to apply the science within yourself."

"This leads me to assume," stated Griselda's father, summarizing, "that in order to elevate the qualifications of our psychic and mental power to a high degree, it is imperative to follow a process of inner training. Inner because the aim is to increase what is inside ourselves and not outside. As you can see, Mr. de Sándara," he added cheerfully, "I'm beginning to become a little more familiar with your formulas."

"I'll then take this opportunity to add that it's also necessary to create the conditions demanded by a superior vocation in order to be able to increase, through constant effort, the capability of one's intelligence to penetrate and discern."

"This is quite understandable."

Apparently satisfied, the doctor refrained at this point from any further comment, yet, soon, needled by another question he reconsidered:

"Don't you think others have already treaded along the same path?"

"I prefer not to be categorical in my reply. I'll just limit myself to point out a possible difference. Those to whom you refer have covered only a small extension of this path, which certainly doesn't represent much when compared to its total length. This circumstance makes

them flaunt, upon their return, the fragment of truth they have encountered –encountered only by chance– and they do not use for the exclusive benefit of their fellowmen, but to acquire fame. What use has been made of this fragment of truth? What purpose has it served? Only to seed around the world theories galore, many of which deviate into passionate snobberies that are as useless as insubstantial. One cannot affirm to have trod this path when its essential part isn't known, that is, which zones of knowledge are being crossed, what are the requirements needed to move along it, and what occurs when one gets close to its steep pinnacles. Let us agree then, that he who has covered extensive areas of this journey knows much more and is also more conscious of his knowledge than he who has stopped a few steps ahead of his starting point. We can assuredly state that this path or route of universal life is also that of one's own life when man decides to fulfill the lofty goal of existence. This path is populated with all types of presences, some animated, others inanimate, but all of them visible to the scrutinizing focus of the intelligent and wise observer. Only the clumsiness of the senses keeps us from seeing them since this path is the same that is followed by everyone. The difference resides in that, while some discover many things along the way, others, no matter how much they walk, see absolutely nothing. The opportunities missed out by some, due to negligence, indifference or inadvertence, are nonetheless the same that, others, more capable and diligent, benefit from. To illustrate this fact, we could use the case of those who live in a routine, those who repeat, to the end of their days, the same movements, the same things and carry the same thoughts. And this is also the case of those who undertake studies, pursue

successfully different and risky enterprises and develop multiple activities, yet who never extend their vision beyond the scope of the circle in which they move.”

“That would place them in the same situation as the patient who, anxious to cure his disease, ignores the existence of a drug that has helped to heal others.”

Having said that, Dr. Laguna remained silent. Perhaps he remembered now what his son-in-law had once mentioned about de Sándara being opposed to flights of the imagination, so prone to delight in the field of fantasy; a comment he could now confirm with certainty, since he had not observed in his words the slightest hint of any chimerical articulation.

At this point, Dona Laura added:

“You must have struggled a great deal, Mr. de Sándara. Surely, you must have had many enemies...”

“There can be no struggle without enemies, and I indeed have had them...”

As if Dona Laura’s words had invoked memories of long past eras by removing the ashes covering that smoldering eternal fire, which pulses in the hearts of those who have suffered a great deal, de Sándara continued:

“Life is a struggle, a constant struggle. Moreover, mine has been one of singular dimensions. Nevertheless, my spirit was never depressed by the mischievous tactics used by those who, lying in ambush like highway robbers, attacked me, believing they could loot me and even kill me. They did not know, of course, that the assets of the spirit are an inalienable and indestructible heritage.”

"You must feel a great satisfaction in having triumphed over these struggles..." Dona Laura said.

"I have always regarded my triumphs as invaluable stimuli in sustaining my convictions and penetrating even deeper in the gap opened within the immense field of ideas and knowledge."

De Sándara was surely not amongst those who were easily lured by the dizzying vapors with which Armida put Rinaldo to sleep in Tasso's poem, since success had never made him feel conceited. Having never allowed the celebration of a triumph detain the rhythm of his activities, he had devoted himself entirely to transforming the displeasures of journeys, which seemed endless, into essence of teachings, which he deposited in the pages of his books as a result of his psychological disputes. In this way, they would serve as reference and encouragement to those who need them for the defense of their lives.

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A glass of champagne raised in honor of the guests, who would be leaving the next day, gave way to new expressions of warm feelings all around.

Claudio's toast wished happiness for his guests', ending his short speech with these words:

"I know there is a hierarchy in affections as well as in friendships and I have placed you, Mr. de Sándara together with your family members, in the highest level of my esteem and admiration. Your friendship, which honors me, has taught me to distinguish unmistakably what must be for me a reason of permanent adhesion and respect."

Dr. Laguna said a few words followed by Mr. Malherbe. Both in expressive and cordial words offered their friends their best wishes for a happy voyage and a quick return.

"These sincere expressions of feelings I have just heard," said de Sándara, "have deeply moved my spirit. I cannot find a better way to return so much amiability than to give you all the certainty that this is fully reciprocated in my heart and that I will keep in my memory, these great moments we have spent together like something delicate and valuable. May the days ahead," he added raising his glass, "and to the many more we may reach in this life, represent a constant affirmation of the friendship and warmth that you all have given us with affection."

"When will we see you again around here?" promptly inquired Dr. Laguna with a friendly gesture.

"If all goes well," replied de Sándara "when we return it will be to settle down permanently. I've been cherishing the idea of returning to my home country, for some time now."

"Will we have to wait long for that day?" Dona Laura asked.

"First we'll have to enjoy the company of your children, who promised to visit us soon after our return to Mexico."

From that moment onwards, a warm feeling of joy contributed to make all those present retain a happy memory of that night.

Moments later, when Ebel, Mariné and Christina walked into their hotel suite, they found a beautiful bouquet of long-stem roses on the table and next to it, some colorful gift-wrapped boxes with a card that read: "Claudio and Griselda – Affectionately".

"They are so sweet!" Mariné exclaimed, deeply touched as she gazed at the gift with surprise.

At Ebel's request, she promptly unwrapped the package that had been sent to her husband, unveiling a delicate calf's skin poncho, which they admired and appreciated repeatedly.

While Christina and Mariné were busy with their respective gifts, de Sándara, moved by his friends' gesture, kept silent feeling the joy of having contributed to their happiness. What an indescribable peace enveloped his conscience at that moment!

Throughout his life in this world, the human being barely takes notice of his conscience or does not notice it at all. But, one day, when pressured perhaps by adversity he decides to let it govern his life with its dictates, he must endure the bitter disappointment resulting from his behavior. Immobilized and dormant due to its lengthy inactivity, his conscience had already stopped exercising any power or authority over him. He has not illustrated it with the clear precepts of goodness nor has he enriched it with the valuable elements that his observation and sound judgments have accumulated as a result of study and experience, nor has he nurtured it with cognitions of a pure and lofty nature that would exalt its function in the governance of life. Having reached that critical point, the human being cannot say, as he usually does, that he is at peace with his conscience because he has done no harm to anyone. This candid manifestation of human selfishness ignores or forgets that harm is also done to a fellowman when one deprives him of the good that could be done to him. How different his peace would be, undoubtedly, when after first complying with himself by acquiring the knowledge of goodness, he generously extends this good to his fellowman thus, beginning his practice of such a humanitarian duty! Oh, the beautiful feeling of the human soul that should never distance itself from the hearts!

A nearby clock struck two bars.

Overtaken by time, Christina hurried to take her leave.

Ebel and Mariné were left alone.

The silence falling upon the room gave a rest to its occupants who were transported in their dreams to regions where the heart feels the influence of the non-material life, and where the spirit soars in its magnificent flight throughout the spaces of the kingdom in which the most sublime enlightenments occur.

No sooner had the image of the plane carrying his friends faded away, Claudio was already serenely meditating upon what he had lived during those days. At the same time that he felt within him the fertilizing power of the cognitions, which his mind was progressively absorbing, he sensed in his soul the disquieting anguish of his scarce spiritual activity undertaken up to that point. Thoughts, used perhaps by his conscience to attract his attention, led him to think of how life evaporates when the years pass by void of relevant facts that make man enjoy the palatable taste of exploits, which the will, guided and stimulated by profound yearnings of spiritual elevation, is capable of achieving.

He thought about the monotonous succession of those days, without variations or attractive perspectives, which indicate to us the regular rhythm with which time moves the heavy wheels of its inexorable law, while the lives of those unable to avoid the continuous cycle of their uncertain destiny are crushed, as grains, in the powerful funnel of the mill.

"I must do something. I must intensify my efforts," he said to himself with determination. "I must think seriously about my future behavior in order to free myself from the inner censure that disturbs me. And I will not stop until I reach the heights from which all horizons are dominated, and from which the human being can come to know the reason for the anxieties and yearnings related to the essence of his existence."

Throughout his silent monologue, the concern on Claudio's face began to dissipate and reveal an expression of self-assurance and confidence that emerged as a favorable result of his examination. There was no doubt that having reached the exact point of mental absorption of the latest cognitions he had received, his life had gained an invigorating stimulus whose power sparks the energies of the soul and shakes vigorously even the most intimate fibers of the individual.

Now, feeling content for being better oriented, Claudio Arribillaga got up from his chair, rearranged some papers that stood piled on his desk, and left to find Griselda.

He saw her as he crossed the hall. He went to her, eager to talk for a moment.

"I was looking for you, darling," he said, taking her arm. "You are as necessary to me to express my joys as solitude and silence are, at times, to clarify my ideas."

"Oh, your words are music to my ears." Griselda answered, reciprocating her husband's affection.

To what she promptly added:

"I am so happy to see how changed you are!"

"And how do you notice this change?"

"It shows on your face! Whenever you are not content, like one hour ago, I notice an unmistakable sign, which although imperceptible, remains etched on your face throughout your moments of discontent."

"How well you know me!"

"As much as you know me, to be sure," replied Griselda who incidentally asked him with growing interest, "I gather you wanted to tell me something, isn't that so?"

"Yes, and I'll start by telling you what is making me feel content. I am now under the effects of extremely happy sensations. It is as if the mechanism of a powerful system of psychic and mental articulation, exalting my enthusiasm, was set in motion within me. Do you understand, Griselda? Something similar to having the cells of my soul move about in fervent activity in my being, fulfilling the task of preparing me for a more subtle endeavor."

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With de Sándara's last statements still echoing in his ears, he went on to explain how one's own internal resources could be used effectively so as to create defenses for the mind and, consequently, increase the potential of one's intelligence. He also told her that, having admitted to de Sándara that he felt that he was not worthy of becoming the recipient of the confidence his friend had placed in him, De Sándara, nevertheless, urged him to expand his cognitions and join the group of men who, from the most varied and distant places of the earth, cooperate daily with the effort of saving humankind from its worst misfortune: ignorance.

"These people are scientists," Claudio went on, "some dedicated to fight the diseases that harm our health and others devoted to technical improvements in all areas for the progress of nations. There are also the philosophers whose theories create controversies over the problems

of the spirit thus awakening the interest to investigate this branch of knowledge. There are the artists who perpetuate the excellence of the soul in their work. Some of them reproduce on canvass, bronze, or marble exemplary lives, which are in this way kept in eternal memory, or create and idealize in their masterful conceptions the archetypal traits of human beings, whereas others express their ideas and emotions in the prodigious language of musical notes. Among these are the poets and the writers who convey to the world the messages of their intelligence, ranging from the most varied and complex philosophic, scientific and artistic subjects up to the description of a cordial and plain gesture that provides the soul with moments of pleasure. Also included in this group are the businessmen, the artists and the workers, the navigators and the farmers as well as all those who bring to their work something beyond the urge to just make a living and the ambition of personal well-being, contributing honorably by supporting the tranquility and the progress of society."

"Then, this is not something totally out of reach..."

"Certainly not!" assured Claudio, tenderly bringing her closer to him. "And it is even less with a companion like you. You are the same today as you were the day the eyes of my soul saw you and my heart consecrated you its queen."

"Claudio..."whispered Griselda gazing tenderly at him. "How glad I would be if you were always pleased with me."

"I wish I could say the same," he answered with a sigh. "But a force unfamiliar to our feelings moves us sometimes as if we were puppets. Obviously, such experiences do not produce any well-being. Darling, in life a man must confront extremely harsh struggles against his nature; struggles that the woman, constituted differently,

is not called to face. On the other hand, the feminine soul's capacity to suffer is also different from ours. This places the woman in an advantageous position when facing life's hardships, which man, for this same reason, endures with difficulty.

"True," Griselda said affectionately, approving such promising changes in thinking now displayed in his assessment of things. "Furthermore, our suffering comes to an end as soon as we find consolation in love which, when enlightening our heart, will never wither as long as we kindle it constantly with the best and purest that our feeling can provide."

"You are an intelligent girl," he replied, rewarding her with the same tenderness he had shown during the happiest days of their marriage. "Everything about you is clear and pure; everything in you exhales sincerity and sweetness."

Such dialogues recurred frequently along those days while they dedicated themselves to the study and practice of cognitions that each one, moved by his inner conviction of their efficacy, strived to incorporate into their spiritual heritage. With increasing enthusiasm, both had discovered that what had formerly been regarded as a promise made outside of themselves was gradually being expressed in a clear and progressive manner in their souls, producing the delight of being a part of a wonderful reality. It then seemed to them as if a dazzling succession of heavenly fragments hung there, suspended over the horizon of their lives and expanded, as they blended into other fragments. Both were able to keep these fragments, resulting from dedication and effort, as trophies, laboriously conquered in the science of the eternal light that illuminates Creation.

As a very wise and prudent observer, Patricio celebrated inwardly the changes that had taken place in his master, but knowing of his

impulsivity and vehemence that were uncontainable when some inner states of passion overtook him, he was careful not to attribute too much confidence to such exuberant manifestations of his temperament. One day, when his intervention was propitious and timely, Patricio said to him:

"It's not unusual to see you cheerful, sir. However I must say that during the past few days you have been radiant."

"How could you have missed it when I feel as if I was just reborn in a world that allows me to savor in anticipation the delights of an existence filled with happiness!

"This enthusiasm is well understood, sir, but..."

"But, what?" asked Claudio turning to the butler who was next to him and who only seemed interested in opening the shutters to let more light into the room.

392 "My apologies, sir. I only meant to say that enthusiasm is very good, very wholesome but only as long as it doesn't make us forget that we are still somewhat subjected to this world we live in."

Accustomed to such remarks by Patricio, Claudio spontaneously burst out laughing.

"I understand," he said, "that you want to restrain me. But why, if I've never felt as comfortable and full of joy as I do now? Everything offered to me in this world will be very useful in achieving all I want in order to expand into the other one."

"I'm not the one who would cast doubt upon this!" replied the butler nodding emphatically while inwardly his attention seemed to concentrate on other thoughts. "You, sir, are very young and do a lot in your own benefit and that of your fellowmen by showing with convincing examples all that can be achieved when the soul is educated in the clear principles of goodness."

“And you cannot?”

“I have tried so hard! This has been my greatest aspiration, but no matter how much I desired it, I could only circle around the external perimeter of that superior world, which is distant from my poor and limited understanding. And yet, I cannot complain since by peeping, yes, I say peeping, through the curtain that obstructs our sight, – a metaphysical curtain, of course, – I was able to get a glimpse of some of the great truths that exist in it and which must be the support of the spirits that are nourished by them.”

After a pause, Patricio added:

“Since you brought it up, sir, allow me to vent a comment. Who could have thought that I would get to personally meet the author of these books I have kept with such great regard! And how different he is from what I had imagined him to be. I had visualized him with more wrinkles on his face than hair on his head! It was a great joy to meet him.”

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Claudio, who truly liked Patricio, looked at him with fondness and said cheerfully:

“Look, I’m going to add another joy to this one,” and placing both hands on the butler’s shoulders, he said: “As of this very moment, I name you my esquire! And I hope that we will not have to fight against many windmills nor respond to offenses. Do you understand me?”

“Forgive me, sir,” replied Patricio, playing along with the joke. “I suspect that the esquire will be of no value at all to you. On the contrary, he will be an obstacle because this path, on which you tread, must be covered within oneself. It’s only there that the individual can find the resources required to assist him in undertaking the other path, which includes the whole of mankind, I believe, and that expands to the vast areas of Creation. You will

surely understand me, sir, that these are two paths that by blending together form a single one.”

“Well, well! I never thought that you were such an expert on this matter.”

“Not at all! I merely find myself taking the first steps on the slope and this was after having walked a lot and faced several complex moral and psychological incidents. Obviously, from where I stand, that is, from a low height but a height nevertheless, one has a clearer and wider vision of things than from the ground. As I was saying, from my position, I had to face thorny situations and several times, I had to derive forces even from my own weaknesses in order not to lag behind and become vulnerable to the despair caused by the devious reactions of depression. Oh, the same will not happen to you, I am sure! You can rely on someone who assists and counsels you. Obviously, it is crucially necessary not to neglect the good purposes that are so prone to fade away. He who aims to succeed must visualize himself mounting on these purposes like on the back of the noble stallions to which we entrust our reins when undertaking long journeys. We have to nurture them frequently and zealously care for them so that they can resist, without suffering, the exhaustion of the long journey that lies ahead.”

“This means then, that the objectives that support my will must become my war horses, isn’t it so?” replied Claudio. And, in an impulse of wittiness, he added emphatically: “Oh! I can already visualize their luxuriant manes flying against the wind like those of the fiery stallions launched impetuously by Achilles on the dry sands surrounding the walls of Iles!”

While Patricio smiled benevolently at his master’s cheerfulness, Claudio, suddenly aware that his words were not totally exempt of

fickleness, blamed himself for having taken that imaginary flight upon whose wings man soars in a vertigo that is as intense as his illusion to touch the stars. This is the imprudence of Icarus, who repents later after admitting his foolishness.

Later on, that fleeting episode brought to Claudio's mind the memory of his weaknesses, which seemed to strengthen his disposition to resist yielding to any of its attractions. On the contrary, he would consider each one of these circumstances as opportunities to measure his prudence and the determination of his will.

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Claudio frequently made kind remarks about Patricio. He told his wife about the periods in his life when the butler had been a great help during the critical moments of his childhood and adolescence, all of which had fostered his high esteem towards the noble servant. Furthermore, he had become an excellent help in his married life by acquainting his wife with all the customs and ways of the house, which she modified to a certain extent in order to implement, with her husband's agreement, changes that reflected their own tastes and style.

"I like Patricio for his kindness, his discretion and above all, for the affection he has for you," Griselda said that same day to Claudio as he was referring to the butler's common sense and to the timeliness with which he warned him against the traps laid by his thoughts. "I noticed that he worries about you like a

father and I know that on occasions he was able to substitute your mother and fill in for her. He once told me that, during her last days, seeing her concerned about your future, he had reassured her that he would watch over you and, within the limits of his resources, would try to assist you, so that the same yearnings and inquietudes that had always nourished her heart would flourish in your soul. Since then, and more so, than any of your teachers, he has attempted to bring within your reach whatever you lacked, so that you would be protected against life's surprises and, moreover, determined to be more efficient, he sought in books what best could allow you to forge within yourself a behavior that until then you had unsuccessfully attempted to achieve. The responsibility he had taken upon himself had granted him strength to learn and rehearse the most secure norms of morality."

The knowledge of that fact, to which Griselda referred with emotion and kindness, caused a profound impact on Claudio's soul, bringing tears to his eyes.

"Without discrediting the merits of my father, who always held a great affection and devotion for me, I must recognize in Patricio the great friend I had as a child and during my youth," he said deeply moved. "I used to play and laugh with him and I remember his patience when confronting my anger, my whims and my childish impertinence."

They were interrupted by the butler's arrival in the room where the dialogue was taking place.

He was bringing a tray with the champagne his master had ordered.

"You didn't understand," Claudio said kindly as he looked at him. "I had asked for three glasses and you only brought two. Go and fetch another one."

Failing to understand the reason for that, Patricio hurried out to comply with the order and promptly the bubbly wine was being poured into the glasses.

"We want to drink to your health, Patricio!" exclaimed Claudio handing him a glass. "If people are rated by their social status, on the spiritual level souls are rated and live in the holy peace of their ideas when they are endowed with purity of feeling, an understanding exempt of selfishness and above all, with tolerance, respect and kindness that demand a reciprocity of feelings and aspirations."

Unable to hold back the tears rushing to his eyes, Patricio walked towards Claudio who, filled with emotion, gave him an affectionate hug.

After that moment, in which words disappeared giving way to feelings, Griselda held out her hand to Patricio who respectfully took it, saying:

"Thank you, madam! Thank you very much!"

"And now," said Claudio raising his glass, "let us wish happiness to those we love. To you, Patricio, may you be with us for many more years. And finally, that we may, through our effort, conquer day after day, one more step the towards the 'promised land', the incorporeal motherland of those who, by their example, show us the path that leads to it."

The Arribillagas spent the remaining summer months in Balcarce enjoying the company of the Lagunas and of other close friends. That year, however, the vacation period was shorter as it had started late, forcing everyone to cut it even further due to the weather which had deteriorated bringing rainy days and premature cold temperatures.

Upon his return, Claudio hurried to call a meeting at his house with those friends, who like him, were already back from their vacation. Having fulfilled the natural need for rest and leisure that had made them travel away from the capital, they had returned with an enthusiastic disposition to resume the course of their investigations.

The meeting was held in his living room, which was already a familiar place for their discussions and the participants were listening to Malherbe:

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"During his recent visit," he told them "Mr. de Sándara left us with extremely interesting key points, whose study will allow us to undertake satisfactorily the removal of old and engrained concepts that still exist in our minds, of fixed ideas that make us act like robots, and of numerous prejudices that hinder us from having a more intimate and direct contact with the cognitions that presently attract our interest."

"I think that it is not only timely but also fundamental," said Arribillaga "that we reaffirm our determination to leave behind whatever hinders or obstructs our task if we are to better equip our reasoning and proceed firmly ahead."

"This is very important," stated Marcos pointedly, "because our future success will greatly depend on the determination we now place in our decision to advance."

"Not only will it depend on this," added Malherbe, " but also on maintaining its inalterability throughout the entire time required for

the elimination of this burden.”

Salvador, who was also present, intervened with the following words:

“We are striving to achieve the exploration of a world of which we only have references. Our situation, therefore, is somewhat similar to those who undertake the exploration of the poles, the great mountains, the jungle, etc... I have always read with great interest books that describe such risky ventures. Now, I’m thinking of the minutia with which such endeavors are treated in the preparatory phase since a good part of their success depends on it.”

“Naturally, the circumstances are similar,” added Malherbe, “although there is a distinct difference between them, which is that in our case the preparation must be done individually, meaning that it must be undertaken within oneself since the endeavor is specific and that each one must depend upon himself under all circumstances.”

“I understand that asking others for assistance is not forbidden” Claudio stated.

“Absolutely,” Malherbe approved, “but the solution of inner conflicts, as well as of intimate problems generated by the situations that will be created are left exclusively in one’s own hands.”

“I presume that the fact of being the sole participant in this experience,” Salvador said, still referring to his analogy, “does not exclude an exchange of ideas, of our viewpoints, in sum, of our special resources concerning the best way to penetrate the unknown.”

“Certainly,” Malherbe agreed. “This preparation or individual training does in no way contradict the objective exchange of opinions and criteria we have been exercising, on the contrary, our task allows each one of us to build up our own means towards progressing, with utmost assurance, in the exploration of what we have determined to achieve within ourselves. This means that we are all here helping each other undertake the adventure with a minimum of risk.”

Following this, Malherbe began reading several texts sent to him by de Sándara, which contained new clarifications concerning aspects of the human evolution and of the life of the spirit. Notes were taken, norms to follow were discussed and finally, it was agreed that those meetings should be held at regular intervals, sometimes there and other times at Marco’s or Malherbe’s place where their friends who had not yet returned from their vacation would shortly join them and expand the number of participants.

A little over a month later, those projects developed into a tenacious and enthusiastic work. Participating in these tasks were Miguel Angel, conscientious and dynamic, motivating everyone to keep up their efforts; Norberto, very formal, hardworking and efficient in addition to Salvador and Augustin, both extremely capable although less active or constant than the others. Marcos, Justo and Claudio ran neck and neck in this spiritual “marathon”. However, Claudio lost ground on certain occasions, feeling more upset than his companions on account of the conflicts that were developing in him due to his uncontrolled vigor. It was also true that

he later managed to find the way to give stability to his forces and to extract a sliver of truth, one of many that he would have to conquer for the enrichment of his knowledge and experience. There was no doubt that his efforts were greatly driven by the vehement desire to earn his preceptor's approval when he saw him again. On the other hand, he depended on the encouragement inspired by Griselda either through her wise words or through her discreet approval of some victories he obtained over his temperamental faults, or even more, by pointing out the difficulties created by the mental inertia, which every now and then overpowered his good intentions.

Amongst the elders were Mr. Gorostiaga, Marco's father, whose great vocation made him a frequent participant, and Moudet who, in his eagerness to get more clarification on everything, forced the others to obtain greater results in their investigations. Due to Malherbe's authority in that branch of knowledge and to his deep psychological insight, he was ahead of the others and distinguished himself for his profound understanding of the human concept of life, his simplicity and his high sense of morality, which made him a gracious and very influential person. Generally, he tended to mitigate any reference directed as a compliment or tribute to his successes of whatever nature or to make others withhold them. His greatest desire was to favor those who accompanied him in this noble task by increasing their enthusiasm or by reinvigorating their own convictions.

Despite such a well-designed program and the advantage of having so many dedicated participants, things did not always go well for Claudio concerning his progress within the inalterable

plan he had devised. Without allowing this to discredit the merits of his aptitudes, which were many, a few months later he suffered a few psychological collapses regarded by him as disappointing and in contradiction to his purposes. He would try to be more cautious in the future. Why did this have to happen again and again?

It so happened that one morning, without thinking about it or wishing it, he woke up in a bad mood, and giving Griselda the excuse of problems in his job for his somber state of mind, he headed to his study, overtaken by a surge of rebellion. There, he sank heavily into an armchair, showing signs of great discouragement.

Had Arribillaga examined then the origin of the sudden restlessness that had attacked his anima? No. He did not even remember that the previous day he had discarded it by simply exercising wise reflections. Now, sitting there captive of this restlessness, seeing or hearing nothing around him, it seemed to him that something similar to a caterpillar with dragon eyes was winding its way into his being. It was devouring the tender shoots that he had watched loom in his soul as a promise that nurtured the symbolic tree of life with a new vitality. The same tree, which he had so many times imagined to be luxuriant and gigantic, displaying its robust crown sustained during centuries by its thick and firm trunk and in whose shadow he would rest after his long pilgrimage to refresh his tired spirit and savor its delicious fruit. Afterwards, he would stand up and resume from that point onward his firm and secure walk along the Great Path.

Jumping from his armchair as if the position had become suddenly intolerable, Arribillaga began to pace back and forth, sat down, stood up, similar to the one who, having committed a crime or was feeling anxious over a deep concern, does not know how to

get rid of the moral weight that oppresses him. As if all the thoughts that nurtured his yearnings for knowledge had suddenly abandoned him, he stopped, tossed away a few papers he had just retrieved from a drawer and blurted out with disgust: "Why so much sacrifice? Why study and commit myself to be better? Is it only to satisfy a vanity that demands us to waste all the energies of our youth? That is a huge price I am not prepared at all to pay!"

Claudio Arribillaga had been warned about the dedication, the effort and the patience that the conquest of great wisdom demands. He was made aware of the tireless attacks the instinct would have on him and that it would never accept the new way of life that he was preparing to adopt. Toppled from its throne, which represents the passions, the impure desires and licentiousness, the instinct would soon react against its new sovereign, the spirit, which would orient Claudio's future steps towards better paths. Having been instructed on the best way to fight such inner crises, he would have to overcome them by just using his knowledge, yet, still psychologically weak, he was defeated before summoning to his defense the technique that would have made his veiled opponent withdraw and liberate him at the same time, from the enveloping effect of these mental and volitional movements that had taken hold of his being.

"I can't stand any longer," Claudio said to himself with increased agitation as he continued to vent his outburst, "the fact of finding myself as if galvanized by two forces that drain my soul, as both exert on me an equal attraction, threatening to annihilate me. I wanted, with the best of intentions, to let go of the life I had known so that I could live in the world of ideas, of thoughts and of sublime sensations. But how far I was from realizing that, being on the very threshold of the

great objective I had conceived as the ideal goal, I would run the risk of mistaking the material for the spiritual, in the midst of an agonizing and desperate torment. And, accepting this hybrid union as being very natural, I definitely did not count on this, although I suspected it! Oh, yes, I did suspect... With each and every day, I am more convinced that my progress inches ahead at a turtle's pace! I, who had visualized myself, equipped with huge golden wings, dominating space... On the contrary, now I feel as if my head, embedded in a hard psychological cover, is doomed to stare down at the floor with stupid eyes. And, what for? Why do I want to know so much if what I have is more than enough to obtain everything I desire? I've discarded so many pleasures, so many attractions... If I were to go on like this, I would be seen as a strange specimen of an extinct race. No! It cannot be! Since I haven't been able to live in the promised world until now, I will therefore go on living in this one, which after all is not that bad."

Those were the arguments presented by the reckless Claudio Arribillaga, probably to justify to his conscience a possible false step. Only a moment of serenity and prudence would have been enough for him to dismantle the wicked game of his thoughts, which, eager to retaliate from a corner of his mind supported, ardently and cunningly, the discontent brought about by his impatience.

Sensing that perhaps something unusual was happening to his boss, Patricio entered the room.

"What's going on, sir? Are you ill?"

Faced with the butler's question, this whirlwind of ideas and turmoil announcing the Mephistophelean triumph, ceased as if by magic.

Exhausted by the terrible inner struggle, Claudio fell heavily into the armchair pronouncing disconnected words meant to deter

the aggressive impulse that induced him to express outwardly his resolution to renounce his yearnings. His hair was messy, the collar of his shirt unbuttoned, and the knot of his tie, after enduring a violent squeeze, was strangely transformed into a Chinese puppet.

It did not take long for Patricio to understand that his master had fallen into one of those depressive states that arise when the instinct, still dominating man's inferior nature, rebels against those who try to liberate themselves from its tyrannical influence. He knew, by his own experience, that this was a state comparable to what is felt during moments of great disenchantment.

"I am sure something very serious must have upset you," Patricio insinuated without relenting in his intent to start up a conversation in which he could use his experience to calm down such agitated mind and bring it back to reason.

"I have simply decided to abandon any project that isn't easy for me to achieve."

"To tell you the truth, I don't understand..."

"Then I'll state it in clearer terms: I have no time to undertake anything else except what relates to my own interests."

"Ah! I understand. Now, I understand," whispered Patricio staring down at the floor and scratching his head in an attempt to find some helpful resource.

He thought to himself, "Oh God! The reasons man gives to justify his mistakes."

A little more subdued, Claudio said:

"I don't have the temperament to be subjugated by disciplines that deprive me of the freedom to do what I please."

"But, who deprives you of that freedom?"

"Who? Well, my conscience, man, my conscience."

Soon after, as if the thoughts that caused so much violence regrouped for a moment in a last attempt to impose their will, he exclaimed vividly:

"Yes, Patricio, my conscience, whose persuasive and interfering power in my life is becoming each day more intolerable! Sometimes I visualize it as one of these gossiping women who spend their time prying into everything we do. Initially, I had hardly noticed it existed yet, now it demands that I account for all my deeds. Oh, yes... As if I were a paid employee who is forced to adjust his behavior to comply with an obligation. This is unbearable, Patricio! I can no longer put up with this..."

406 Patricio would have burst out laughing were he not detained by the respect for his master and by circumspection, which prevented him from igniting, by an improper attitude, this mental combustion, which was already showing signs of exhaustion after having ostentatiously used up the last arguments accumulated by the reaction. It was an exhaustion filled with astuteness since the rebellious embers, still reddened by rage and seemingly dying out, were nonetheless burning under the ashes with the intent to produce a new fire at the slightest negligence.

Very cautiously, Patricio answered:

"Then, sir, send it all to hell and enroll in the court of the devil's unfortunate vassals, which will no doubt give him tremendous pleasure."

This time it was Claudio's turn to smile, but still seized by an acrimonious mood, he added:

"The truth is, Patricio, that we want to be great actors on the stage of our life and we end up proving that we are but mere Punchinellos unable to undertake a more important role."

“Oh, no! I totally disagree. The proof is that you were not previously aware of what was going on in your own domains nor had you experienced the noble satisfaction that you now enjoy when you manage to escape from the depressive states that overburden your mood without a valid motive. However, looking at it from a more appropriate perspective, doesn't it seem to you that these same alterations could also be indicating positive results?”

“You'll agree with me, Patricio, that it's somewhat difficult to conclude that the fact of being on the verge of succumbing to a mental storm could be construed as a sign of progress.”

“Yet, I do visualize, sir, that such circumstances are just like filters, or better said, like sieves in which we are strongly shaken to allow the small or great good that exists within us to pass through, while evil remains there waiting to be melted down in the hearth of future experiments. I suppose that the good part, resulting from this shakeup, must be the gold we pay to enter this singular world, whose sublime spectacle will greatly fulfill our hopes.”

“How well I know, Patricio, that each one of these shakeups must induce man to review his deeds so that he can orient himself as to the most practical way of enriching his own chest of assets. How frequently we forget that only at the cost of abandoning our weaknesses, will we open the doors to this world in which the mysteries of Creation are revealed. As I understand, in it are faithfully reproduced all the phases of the process of universal life that advances in obedience to a supreme force that keeps it in perpetual movement. This clearly demonstrates that this world is not within an easy

reach, nor is its entry instantaneous since our vile look could not even perceive the tiniest part of its infinity. In order to avoid being dazzled by the myriads of lights that no doubt illuminate the extent of this inexpressible world, one must necessarily feel – and there lies the difficulty – a true vocation for the most prominent of all sciences and arts: Wisdom. According to the biblical statement, Melquisedec possessed it to a high degree, and that is why he appears amongst the most illustrious and distinguished high priests of the Old Testament.”

“Don’t you find this perspective attractive?”

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“Extremely attractive! But I seem to lack this vocation. The incentive, the stimulus that I find at times in this singular apprenticeship abandon me at other times due to forces, which my own, barely developed, fear to confront.”

“Look, from what I’ve been able to grasp about this subject, he who doesn’t possess this vocation will have to create within himself the idea of acquiring it without relenting in this effort. That same attitude also applies to the individual’s virtues, qualities and even to his disposition. If these virtues don’t exist, then they must be created within oneself in order to be equal to and even excel those who are best endowed.”

“The difficulty lies in not knowing how to do it...” Claudio sighed.

“But, on the other hand, it isn’t difficult to learn how to do it, especially, for a sharp intelligence like yours. What could then be said about me, when I have to wait for hours and sometimes for days to understand something and I don’t always succeed?”

“You’re right, Patricio. But one must have a clairvoyant mind and an athlete’s will to tackle the mystery of our complex psychological mechanism. Furthermore, I don’t consider those

who possess a great number of virtues, or those who distinguish themselves by their aptitudes, to be further ahead of me in the results obtained.”

“It so happens that the mere fact of possessing them doesn’t mean that these are always used intelligently and consciously towards an objective similar to the one you pursue. One could have the virtue of patience, for example, but it doesn’t imply that this patience has reached the required degree of development in order to achieve one’s purpose. I suppose that virtues, just like vocations, originate within the deep perspectives of the soul. They seem to wait there, since time immemorial, accessible to man’s possibilities like an invitation for him to ascend to the world of wonders and a promise to facilitate this ascension.”

“This may well be what supports us and helps us overcome this unfortunate psychological distress every time we succumb to it.”

“To make matters worse sometimes we must include the participation of a simpleton like me as a motivator.”

An open and cheerful laughter was the best answer the butler could hope for.

“Well, the worst is over!” Claudio exclaimed, recovering and springing up from his chair, ready to leave the room. “I feel as if optimism and self-confidence, which I believed I had lost, are being reborn in me. You see, Patricio, at times I visualize myself pushing a cart uphill, and I would say that the devil himself, with the sole intent to harm me and to make my march slower and harder, is determined to fill the cart with rocks every now and then. And, when I am not vigilant... Bang! What happens? The cart is overturned by its heavy load and there I go, rolling

downhill pursued by the rocks whose sharp edges dig deep into my weary back.”

“Oh, yes! I too have had the same feeling at times, but naturally I imagined it in a different way.”

Totally unaware of what had just come to pass in her spouse’s small world, Griselda was later enjoying one of those moments in which both happily admired the progress of their little princess who was already entertaining them with cute noises and smiles.

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During a meeting a few weeks later Salvador expressed his opposition to a norm he now regarded as unjustified even though he had previously accepted it without reservation. At this moment, he was experiencing one of those small inner dramas that often unexpectedly overtake individuals of a certain intellectual background when facing something that exceeds the scope of their knowledge. This compels them to air opinions that in some way diminish their established personality. In short, all this boils down to the simple emergence of a psychological reaction triggered by a bruised vanity.

It was obvious that a common goal had gathered the group there: that of conducting an in-depth study of the problems of the spirit. Nevertheless, the differences in character and especially the psychological modalities, still maturing, coupled with the abundance of prejudices, whether innate or self-bred, exerted a great influence over the course of the investigations,

often complicating them. Due to this fact, it was at times difficult to reconcile viewpoints since the objective was to adjust the opinions to the scope and dictates of a culture they were barely beginning to examine and practice.

Malherbe was often the one who, on account of the authority acquired by his direct personal bond with de Sándara and his consequential knowledge related to the cognitions he had been given, succeeded in establishing the harmonious coordination within the group that all wished to preserve.

That time the meeting was held at Marco's house. Being on the verge of finishing a well thought-out analysis on the value of starting out from a solid basis in the investigations of such a transcendent nature as those they were conducting, one of the participants raised a point, perhaps with some vehemence. He pointed out the importance of being able to understand them without running the risk of relying on no other guide than the confusing line drawn by man's thought in his tireless attempt to shed a little more light over his uncertain destiny.

Salvador, who had so far been in full agreement with the norm established by everyone in order to facilitate the course of the task, and whose comments were usually measured, surprised everyone by declaring:

"I'd be remiss to my moral obligation if I were to conceal that I'm not totally convinced of the non-similarity between the system being studied and the others to which we owe our knowledge in the philosophical, psychological and moral areas. I consider that by excluding these as totally unnecessary, and by persisting in such an attitude, we will deter the results that might more

easily be obtained by the group. At this point, our efforts to derive elements of judgment from this science have been well oriented and I, myself, had willingly accepted to exclude other lines of thought in our meetings, but I don't see why this should continue indefinitely. Confrontations as well as comparisons with the proposals of other distinguished intelligences are necessary. In my opinion, we should stop engulfing ourselves in this unique conception and embrace wider areas of knowledge, thus broadening our erudition."

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"To address confrontations or comparisons amongst ourselves isn't the issue here," replied Malherbe courteously, "although I understand that each of us is entitled to do so on his own. It isn't, therefore, forbidden. Furthermore, it was never our intent, during these meetings, to reconcile the differences that often exist between theories, methods and systems. Our idea, and I think we all agree on this," he continued emphasizing each word, "has been to follow the plan of this new conception about man's life, striving to penetrate and clarify the conflict between his two natures: the superior, manifested in his mind, in his conscience, in his spirit, and the inferior, which although excels in its ideas that forge the material progress in the world, cannot escape the quasi-permanent influence of the instinct represented by the passions and by this animal complex that is characterized by the deeply engrained human tendency towards what is strictly material or physical and almost totally deprived of the spiritual."

At this point, Marcos asked to speak:

"If these cognitions, that particularly attract our attention and which perhaps some of us still regard as one more theory, were limited to simply indicate problems as Aristotle and other philosophers after

him have been doing up to our present days, I declare that I wouldn't have dedicated my time to study them since I couldn't confirm that my aspirations for knowledge had been satisfied by those sources and even to a lesser extent, that I have felt the favorable influence of their knowledge in my life. Nevertheless, I do consider that we are faced with a different situation in that, this science, having the specific objective of positioning man within the reality of his lofty prerogatives, offers us a perfectly drawn out and short path as well as an assistance that ensures its coverage by indicating, like milestones along the way, the laws that rule and regulate the human thought in its progress towards the goal of perfection."

Mr. Malherbe, intervening once again, directed his comments to Salvador:

"The error you have just committed by regarding substantially different ideas as parallel ones resides in that you have considered them as simple intellectual illustrations, limiting yourself to acquiring erudition, which although respectable, will not lead us any further into the field of knowledge, or better said, will not lead us to accomplish our objective. We must remember, my friends, the recommendation made by the science under study that points out the need to conduct an in-depth investigation by way of rational evidence. If we don't do so, how can we attest that one's reasoning has been sufficiently illustrated? In order to determine, for example, the quality and value of a diamond, would it be enough to hold it? Wouldn't it be necessary besides establishing its legitimacy, to evaluate its weight, the perfection of its cut in which case one would be required to possess the capability of an expert? Let us take another example: faced with

an appetizing dish, not yet tasted, could we deliberate about anything else but its appearance? If we don't eat it, if we don't taste it, how then can we assess its quality and appreciate the degree of pleasure it can offer our palate?"

"I agree, Mr. Malherbe," said Salvador, "although I believe that by tasting the dish we would even then be lacking the absolute assurance that the palate had not been mistaken."

"In this case, I can say that this would never happen to the individual that has trained and educated his palate in assessing flavors to the degree of savoring its delicacy. You see then, dear friend, how it is indispensable in all circumstances, to have the participation of the noblest and most important element, which is common sense, and to which we must always resort in order to evaluate things and grant them their respective values."

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Moved by vanity, which had been foolishly offended by these words, Salvador replied, not in the least concerned about showing his disagreement.

"I didn't mean to upset anyone with my words, but the truth is that I'd prefer to be called an accomplished sophist before fully admitting a conception that, no matter how elevated it might be, still finds itself in the embryonic stages of investigation."

Malherbe, who knew by experience how the obstinate mind usually has a way of producing twisted ideas so as to give prominence to a specific one— a fact related to man's extremist attitudes — asked Salvador with calculated irony:

"Have we ever denied that the examination must be free to make an accurate evaluation of each line of thought, wherever it may come from, in order to elaborate one's own judgment?"

Determined to make the point with a satisfactory proposition, he added the following concepts:

“It has been repeatedly mentioned here that we find ourselves facing two cultures: the first one, brought from long ago by a tradition to which we have meekly subjected ourselves and whose dictates and precepts no longer fulfill the imperative and legitimate demands of our conscience for the preeminence of truth over any interpretation, conjecture or argument that may distort it; the other that must be forged by man through his self-improvement effectively carried out by means of a rigorous conscious attitude. The results of this will have to be condoned by the living testimony of the present generations, invited to participate in this initiative for the emancipation of the human spirit, and liberated, through a rational and exhaustive investigation of all prejudice and belief that oppose one’s reasoning. By doing so, these will be led to attest to the meager results obtained by the sciences involved in discovering the great mysteries of man’s life and that of the universe, and see what they were able to gather in terms of their effective contribution to the spiritual progress of the world and to the elevation of the individual’s dignity. Furthermore, this will lead them to discern on the reality that consubstantiates these historical facts which, enveloped in a mystical, prophetic or miraculous façade, have been not only sources of inspiration but also the origin of the most daring beliefs. I’m convinced that the new culture, I’ve just referred to, is clearly structured by the postulates of the science we are studying. I’m very pleased to say this and to testify, even though in words only, to the satisfactions I have always obtained from this study and this exercise.”

"I'm sorry for spending time on this slight dissention, Mr. Malherbe," said Salvador, "and I do apologize for it. But I did not want to omit that by insisting on clarifying the ideas and concepts that I had suggested be included in our studies. There is an implicit personal need to modify, or better yet, to strengthen this way, the adhesion of my somewhat weak convictions regarding a few points, in particular those related to the super-sensitive world, which is so profusely referenced in the new conception."

"I wouldn't be mistaken to think that you find yourself perhaps in one of those circumstances where one's judgment is urged to seek whatever breach it can, in search of a reason that stands above the propositions that preoccupy one's understanding."

416 "In which case, I'd be forced to admit that I'm behaving without being conscious of it," replied Salvador unable to restrain his annoyance at Malherbe's words.

Realizing, however, that Malherbe had not demonstrated the slightest intention of offending him, he calmed down immediately.

"The truth is that I didn't mean it that way," exclaimed Malherbe amiably. "It was simply a reference to a very understandable or justifiable common fact. But let us return to the subject in question. Referring to what you told us a moment ago when you pointed out that the causes of your difficulties lay in what this conception expresses about the super-sensitive world, I am pleased to tell you that we have so many explanations available, that the illustrative material is so vast and abundant and that its reality is so prone to be verified that, at this moment, I have no better answer than to repeat what Mr. de Sándara himself said in another such circumstance. He said that, to

doubt its reality would be equivalent to including oneself in this doubt since a large part of our nature, just as in all human beings, belongs to that world, even though we ignore it.”

“Nevertheless, doubt protects us from falling into blind faith, which rejects any reasoning whatsoever.”

“Exactly. But let us also admit that we could fall into the fanaticism of doubt when in the course of reasoning, we persist in the excessive value given to what others have said, without perceiving that such values lack the power to resist the discovery of a truth that has suddenly been revealed to us. We shouldn’t be surprised by this occurrence. I myself have made this mistake before verifying the contrast between the results obtained from philosophical cognitions and the evident reality offered by them throughout the long years of my university studies and other even longer ones in direct contact with life. All of us here can confirm two facts that are regarded as incompatible by us: the simple illustration offered to man by the immense philosophical richness and the precise cognition that, in order to reconstruct one’s life, can be derived from this very science we are beginning to interpret and practice.”

All the participants followed with attention this little philosophic battle. Some were probably experiencing the feeling of watching the replay of one of those trances where they had played similar roles, since there is a great relation between the psychological upheavals that usually occur prior to reaching maturity, which definitively balance and organize one’s life. That could well have been the reason that made Claudio come forward to assist his friend, who had stumbled over a misunderstanding, which had made him feel somewhat uncomfortable.

"It's strange," he said, "how this circumstance is linked to what I have experienced at times, better said many times, wherein I felt tortured by doubt, vacillation, confusion and rebellion as well as by other similar psychological states of mind. I've observed that when these occur, it's because something within ourselves, still undefined, urges us to overcome certain inner states that we must slowly abandon. The proof of this is that after overcoming the obstacle, we always experience a greater portion of light emerging from the elaborations of our intelligence. It isn't, therefore, unusual to be subjected to what we have just heard, since it could help us face the risks of any disturbing movement in our mood. I say this with the conviction of one who doesn't consider himself invulnerable to such risks."

Several more participants in the group felt encouraged to narrate their inner changes, which had affected some more than others, throughout their attempts to ascend to higher positions in the conquest of knowledge.

Salvador thanked Malherbe for having tolerated him – as he put it– with so much patience and friendliness. However, his words now lacked the frank and cordial tone that would express that the inner barriers, which were oppressing him at that moment, had subsided.

That same night, as he shook his hand to leave, Claudio understood, due to the stiffness on his face and the avoiding look in his eyes, that his friend was still obstinate in his ideas. Nevertheless, he tapped his shoulder in a cordial and affectionate gesture as if nothing unusual had occurred.

As he drove his car along the short distance to his home, Claudio went through a sequence of reflections, some of which turned out to be quite strange. Amongst other things, he imagined Salvador perched on the column of prejudice, like Simeon Estilita and his people. Wouldn't he also rather spend his life converted into a statue of flesh and blood than, as God directs, walk and struggle along the paths of this world? As he ended his reflections, he felt greatly comforted having realized that he was free, fortunately for him, of those thoughts that were at that moment upsetting his friend's mind and which had often upset his own.

Two days later, having just finished dinner at home, he received a phone call from Salvador.

Claudio rushed to take the call, anxious to know the reasons that led his friend to talk to him. "At best," he thought, "it would be to justify his behavior or to tell me about something that would tilt my opinion in his favor."

He was wrong, however, because he soon recognized in his voice a promising reaction. Indeed, it was so.

"Congratulations then, with all the joy of a friend who was somewhat concerned about you!" exclaimed Arribillaga cheerfully after having listened to him.

He had heard Salvador reproaching himself on several counts. Having recovered his cheerfulness and good sense, he referred to the conclusions he had reached once his obstinacy was gone, which he described in a few sentences, recognizing how the best intentions of his fellowmen can sometimes be distorted by an upset mind and make one act harshly, thus provoking in the psychological epidermis that tremendous eruption named susceptibility. Clearly

satisfied, he confirmed to Claudio that he had now acquired a better notion of his real psychological stature, having also evaluated, in more precise terms, the difference between erudition and knowledge.

“I am now far more comfortable, Salvador.” Claudio replied. “You see, while erudition is based on superficial studies and intellectual speculation, knowledge is formed by conscientious study, by investigation, by experience and by direct inner assimilation of the cognition. We might say that erudition is the staff that leads us to preach, but with no effective personal accomplishment and that knowledge is the scepter representing the superiority of power conquered with nobility. If we were to use only the former, then the transcendent cognition would never reach the essence, which distinguishes it from the others. Hence, we must come to understand that it is uniquely by means of its study, of its practice and of the perfect assimilation of its contents, that one can obtain the consciousness of its lofty values. Having done so, we will therefore decide, without incurring into errors, whether it’s more convenient to continue dedicating ourselves to increasing this knowledge or to pursue the comparisons that you had suggested.”

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At this point of the conversation, Griselda approached Claudio, and leaning affectionately on the arm he offered her, listened to the rest of the call, reassured that the news was good.

She was elegantly dressed and looked lovely with her scintillating jewels and her beautiful light colored silk dress, partially covered by the fur coat that rested over her shoulders.

They had planned to go to a party that night but since it was still early, they decided to enjoy a few moments together next to the blazing fire, crackling next to them in the great hall.

As Claudio helped her take off the fur coat and placed it on the sofa, Griselda addressed him cheerfully with the clear intention of expressing the ideas that emerged as a result of what she had just heard.

“How very subtle are the movements which exist in the complex mechanism of human psychology!” was her comment. “So many reactions occur without the consent of our will. They would even determine the fate of our life if we weren’t aware of this in time.”

Claudio smiled, as he listened to her, showing satisfaction on his face whose cause he expressed as both sat down next to each other:

“Unintentionally, you’ve just given me the tip of a lead that may take us to finding something interesting.”

“That would be great...”

“Tell me, Griselda, isn’t everything based in discovering this force that activates the movements that occur in our psychology, in knowing the origin of this force or the source that nourishes it and connecting it to our will rather than allowing it to act blindly within us?”

“Why do you think this force acts blindly? Couldn’t it be the opposite? It seems to possess a great intelligence. Don’t the movements it generates, although imperceptible at times, demonstrate to us that it carries within in it an instructive objective, which we should know how to make the most of?”

“I think that your reflection is right on target.”

After glancing at his watch, Claudio continued:

“It is certainly not an appropriate time for our minds to embark upon such a profound issue,” he said smiling, “but nor could we deny that we are irresistibly attracted by it. Isn’t it so? Going back to what we were saying, I repeat, my dear that I agree we are not dealing with a blind force.”

"Then, I'm happy..." Griselda replied, pleased with the coincidence, adding: "I presume that the only blind one is the individual, who doesn't see such an extraordinary reality."

"I suspect, Griselda, that this subtle movement you mentioned initially holds a strange similarity with the tides. The articulation of this movement, called flux and reflux, is subjected, as we know, to a cosmic force that sustains the ocean's reactions, which are calm at times and rough at others. Surely, something similar must happen within us. Obviously, in our case, we are the ones who run the risk of capsizing, as do ships when engulfed by its whirlpools. However, this does not happen to the monstrously immense ocean that is restricted to an orbit it never exceeds."

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"Have you noticed how interesting our inner life scenario becomes the moment we are capable of dissipating the blindness that conceals so many assets? This is understandable because when the observation that we must dedicate to it isn't exercised or is carried out defectively or only partially, a great number of invaluable elements escape us. How much more would man do if he were to know that he possesses possibilities that can enrich his meager intellectual and spiritual life! "

"Perhaps he would use this precious faculty more often. He would then be able to prove to himself, as we are proving it day after day in ourselves, that the faculty of observation, guided by our conscience, is converted into the owner and master of our inner world and, at the same time, into a linking bridge with the transcendent world."

“What subtle feeling invades us when, from that perspective, we see the transformations that take place! Nonetheless, there are as well, of course, reasons that afflict the heart if we are to consider the causes of desolation experienced by the human creature who is exposed to the most varied and tempestuous psychological shakeups.”

“This and many other extremely important things can be clarified, my dear lady, but...” and by finishing the sentence with a kiss, Claudio hinted that they were late.

“Do I have time to check on Adriana?” she asked.

“Yes, but quickly.”

And taking her by the arm, he added gladly:

“I’ll go with you.”

Fifteen minutes later, Patricio was locking the door through which his masters had just left. His face glowed with all the serenity emanating from his soul as he acknowledged that happiness had decidedly found its place in the heart of that home.

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De Sándara knew how to manage time with full knowledge of its value. In Mexico, the daily chores in his house ran parallel to his mental movements, which he conducted in various directions in order to capture the authentic and positive images that he would later develop within his creative work. His office was a true laboratory of ideas and his desk a maternity ward where he daily gave birth in his mind to thoughts, which

once having reached clear signs of conceptual maturity were put down on paper. He spent many hours at this during the day and even during the night, when other chores reduced the time he had available. His wide circle of acquaintances allowed him to often receive in his office a large number of people who visited as friends or by adhesion to the world of his ideas. He would speak to some one day, observing others on the next or mentally following the steps, needs or yearnings of many others. De Sándara penetrated effortlessly into the mysteries that inhabit the dark corners of human psychology and the most remote areas of its sensitive region where, adjacent to it, the most beautiful qualities of the soul strive to be expressed. By doing so, he increased his knowledge, which he would later transfer to his writings, or place directly within reach of those who needed it.

From time to time, he would interrupt his daily work to take a break and relax with his family. When time allowed it and the temperature was pleasant enough to stretch out in the open air, he would take refuge in his preferred corner located at the far end of the gardens surrounding the house. There, the titanic figure of a very old oak tree towered high, with its lower limbs waving in the breeze fanning with its long leafy fingers the plants and the small trees which artistically surrounded it. From where he was, he enjoyed contemplating the green carpet covering the garden area, which was decorated, here and there, by the joyful multicolored hues of the delicate flowers of the season.

Ebel and Mariné usually had their breakfast in that family paradise when the sun warmed it early in the morning. Within its cheerful natural walls, everything necessary to relax the body

and entertain the spirit was there: comfortable chairs to sit on and a stone table with small benches for an occasional snack or drink. Sometimes, Christina would join them but only when good company attracted her more than staying in bed a while longer. At least, that was what she claimed. Yet, one could clearly see that it was a simple excuse often used to conceal a discreet attitude.

One morning at the end of summer, de Sándara was sitting in the shade of the colossal cedar, absorbed in his newspaper, waiting for Mariné.

Just as he had finished reading, he saw her approaching, cheerful and radiant as that August day.

“Had you woken me up, Ebel, I would have been here enjoying your company much earlier,” she complained affectionately as she arrived, kissing him on the cheek.

“The truth is that I couldn’t bring myself to doing that. You were sound asleep.”

“But you know what each moment spent with you means to me.”

De Sándara smiled and said:

“Well then... I’ll try to be less compassionate from now on.”

“Oh!”

“‘O’ is a letter that often protests against what the other letters of the alphabet do.”

They burst out laughing.

Birds hopped here and there, chirping joyfully while they graciously slipped through the foliage.

The serene eloquence of the happiness he was feeling showed on Ebel’s face. He took a deep breath as if wishing to expand his joy even further. He felt truly happy. During the months following

his wedding, he had continuously confirmed, within the intimacy of his spirit, the accuracy of his opinion about Mariné, which she had inspired in him. She had taken up her new responsibilities with such assurance and with such precise notions of the attributes that corresponded to her, that the change occurring in the household made everyone's life much happier.

By general consent, it had been decided that, after the wedding, Mariné would take Christina's place in the administration of the house – a chore that was becoming too heavy for Christina. She took over the management without ever letting Christina feel she was being replaced. The subtle and humanitarian tact with which she had put away her young girl's concerns and taken up the function of a married woman earned Ebel's approval. That morning, he said in a joking tone:

426 "Do you know, Mariné," he announced seriously, "that I want to divorce you?"

"Is that so?" she replied cheerfully. "And why is that? Would it be to feel the happiness of marrying me again?"

"This was precisely my thought, Mariné, because the truth is you make me very happy."

"I'm overjoyed!" she replied graciously overstating her satisfaction. "You couldn't have said anything more gratifying."

Mariné then began serving breakfast prepared by the servant and, wishing to pursue the subject, she confessed:

"All along, Ebel, I think I have done nothing but remain faithful to my feelings. This allowed me to be the master of my own self at every moment."

Mariné could never have betrayed the sincerity that vibrated in her noble feelings. She would have debased herself in the eyes of her

conscience were she to yield, even for a moment, her authority to the fragile and insecure direction of childish, frivolous and petty thoughts capable of pushing life towards the abysses of misfortune. Prior to marriage, many women flaunt their kindness, their affection, their gentleness and other esteemed gifts of the feminine character, yet, once married, they take on attitudes that seem to show that such a notable change had disturbed their reasoning. Enslaved by vanity, pride and other equally pernicious weaknesses that foster human instability, they fall without restraint into the arms of whims when favored by a trouble-free life. Once the objective has been reached, they forget the status that prevailed prior to their marriage and, proud and intransigent, they abandon their previous virtue of tenderness and kindness and soon become masters of all situations. What ill-fated change discards the magic spell and converts the kind fairy into an unbearable cruel witch? All this occurs as a result of inappropriate forms of conduct adopted by society, indicating the lack of an education based on a superior conception of goodness. If forewarned of the evils of moral and spiritual carelessness, how efficiently would a woman's soul, like a young bird rehearsing its first flight, be able to neutralize many of the sufferings brought about by the violence of the character and those that her own life will impose upon her later!

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Cheerful and enthusiastic, Mariné accepted Ebel's invitation to drive to the neighboring hilly countryside and in a joyful and expansive mood they set out a little later toward the selected spot for a pleasant morning outing.

A few hours later, de Sándara stopped his powerful steel horse in the mountains. They climbed to a peak close to the road in order

to enjoy the vast panoramic view at their feet. Even though the area was very familiar, the eventual and strange inspiration, that primitive traces embedded in valleys and mountains produces in one's soul, soon led them to address matters related to traditions.

"You know, Mariné, that in various parts of these mountains that seem to be agricultural colonies lived some isolated tribes, which were descendents of the indigenous civilizations that had once inhabited this land. In a way, their life developed in a different world from ours, subjected to myths and customs partly inherited from their ancestors. I say partly because although they claimed to be essentially traditionalists, their ceremonies were subjected to variations and innovations adopted by the chief of every tribe with the intent of dominating the soul of its people who regarded him as a god. If you want, I'll tell you the story of a young girl who belonged to one of those tribes."

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"You well know how much I am attracted to anything that puts us in contact with facts and legends that reveal the customs, the way of life and the beliefs of the people who used to live in these areas. Each time I look at this beautiful view, my soul feels the influence of the mystery that floats around everything that gets lost in the depth of time. Please start, Ebel. I'll listen with great pleasure being surrounded by the very scenery in which the story you are about to tell took place. It will seem as if I relive it."

"I'll therefore begin talking about the main character, a beautiful girl named Ximara, daughter of the Chief of a powerful tribe. Ximara was deeply in love with Huipec, a young Indian, whom her father didn't seem to appreciate. As a result, the Chief ordered his daughter to appear before him and after inquiring if she truly loved Huipec, he

asked her how she could prove it. Sweet and reserved, the Ximara, who couldn't even raise her eyes towards her father, expressed her resolve to remain faithful to her love until the last beat of her heart. The next day, accused of having broken a tribal law, Huipéc was sentenced to death by the great council of the tribe, and by specific order of the Chief, Ximara was ordered to attend the punishment. The cruel and barbarious sentence was to be carried out that very night. Well before the set time, drumbeats were announcing the event, summoning the members of the tribe who, gathered in great number, circled around the huge pyre of torture erected in a semi-circle. Ximara, also present, was hardly able to hold back her tears and despair. At the set moment, the bright light of the fire illuminated Huipéc's athletic figure, who, held by many warriors, headed towards the pyre. He walked arrogantly, perhaps to challenge, by his valor, the cruelty of the unjust punishment. For a few moments, the brightness of the flames illuminated his virile figure, being then violently pushed towards the opposite side of the fire in the semi-circle and hurled to the ground. The huge blazing flames rose high and avid and the diabolic flickering of the fire concealed from the tribe what was occurring behind it. Suddenly, the stroke of an ax was heard and the executioner raised a head drenched in blood, which he threw into the flames followed by the victim's body. A heartbreaking scream burst out from Ximara's lips, one of those sounds that only the human soul is capable of uttering at the height of pain and fear. Since that day..."

"It makes my hair stand on end, Ebel..." Mariné interrupted.

"See what will follow..." he said with a big smile as if wishing to soften that impression. "Each and every day following this event, the beautiful girl knelt and shed abundant tears at the execution site. All the while, several males approached her and offered her their love,

but Ximara constantly replied that she would rather die than incur into such unfaithfulness. Once, as night approached and she was invoking her beloved as usual on the spot she had last seen him, Ximara believed to have heard his voice. She raised her pretty face and – Oh! What a surprise! Huipec was standing there, a few feet away, amidst the weeds. The girl wanted to run up to him but the apparition stopped her. “Don’t come any closer, lovely Ximara,” she heard him say. “If you do, you’ll cause me to disappear forever from your sight. Do what I say and you will see me everyday at this very spot. Now, go and tell your mother that you’ve seen me.” Obediently, Ximara left, and turned around to get another glimpse of him, but Huipec had vanished. When the young Indian girl narrated this strange event, her mother feared that she had gone mad. Day after day, always at sunset, Ximara returned to see Huipec at the execution spot. But, as she began to fear that this could be a hallucination, she asked her mother to accompany her. Extremely concerned about her daughter, she agreed and, one late afternoon at dusk, they went to the spot together. After waiting for some time, both mother and daughter suddenly saw, standing before them, the young man who, so faithfully reproduced, seemed to be as alive as they were. Unable to restrain herself, Ximara’s mother rushed to inform the Chief and who ever she met on her way, that she had just seen Huipec in body and soul. From then on, many curious natives gathered on that spot around Ximara. The apparition, however, was never to be seen again. One day, the beautiful girl was summoned by the Chief who, assuring her she would never see Huipec again, ordered her three times to accept the man he

was suggesting as her husband. All three times Ximara begged for mercy, pleading with her father, with all the meekness that pain had placed on her lips, to be given the same sentence that befell her beloved. The Chief's voice suddenly turned compassionate, and he declared: "You have passed the great test, beautiful Ximara. You have glorified your race. You are therefore worthy to wear this necklace that I place upon your chest so that my tribe will respect you as the Daughter of the Sun." Suddenly, Huipéc made his appearance before the astonished young woman who could not believe her eyes. After being greeted by Great Chief, Huipéc hurried to join his beloved. And here, my dear Mariné is the end of the story which has never been doubted by those who have heard it".

"But one can surely say that it's a legend, otherwise the supernatural elements couldn't have been included in it."

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"Yet, none of this happened. It was all, in fact, the result of a simple and carefully planned ruse. Huipéc's head, seen by all to have fallen into the pyre, was not his but that of another man who, sentenced to death, was made to replace him at the moment of the execution. It was a well devised trick performed under the cover of night, of the pyre's fire and of several objects strewn around."

"And what about the apparitions?"

"We can presume that they had been ordered by the Chief who would have instructed the young man to refrain from disclosing the secret under penalty of undergoing real torture in case he betrayed him."

"If that happened the way you said, we must consider this form of proving one's faithfulness to be strange, although proper

of savages. Besides, finding faithfulness in such rudimentary natures seems to indicate that it's a feeling engrained in man since the dawn of his existence."

"Faithfulness, my dear, emerges in the human being as an invaluable support to his feeling. It is therefore, innate. However, I'd like to clarify that faithfulness reaches its maximum expression, its true expression, when it's converted into a cognition that man must discover within his conscience so as not to be deceived by volatile thoughts."

Mariné listened with such great interest, that de Sándara was moved to continue:

432 "When faithfulness is merely a feeling of loyalty – do you understand? – it can easily be affected by unexpected events such as: the lack of reciprocity of an affection, the cooling of passion, separations occurring in the home often due to foolish causes, in short, disappointments of various types. But when faithfulness emerges as a cognition from the deepest part of our being, it becomes difficult and even impossible for it to deny its own constructive force. Faithfulness becomes an indivisible force when its objective, whether it is a being, an idea or a thought, constitutes something that is consubstantial with us."

"The difference between the two would then be the passivity of the one as opposed to the activity of the other, which carries the element that makes it invariable."

De Sándara agreed.

Still taken by the legend she had just heard, Mariné said:

"One feels truly relieved knowing that such practices, as the ones you described, have been overcome by civilization. Nowadays, we don't have chiefs who hold in their hands the power of life and death over their fellowmen."

“It is true that, due to the elements given by parents and educators to their young during their immature years, personal behavior is in our day and age dependent on one’s will. However, it’s also true that in countries that are proud of their high degree of civilization, we can still find forms of cruelty and submission that subject men and nations to the most dreadful physical and moral misery.”

“You’re right, Ebel. How many times have I asked myself whether one day nations could free themselves from the slavery imposed upon them by the despotism of their rulers.”

“This will happen, my dear Mariné, when men who think – wherever they may be – teach others to think and unite around the same thought of freedom. Man must learn to defend his freedom not only with thoughts and words but also with all the lawful means within his reach, so as to foster his evolution and that of the nations until the definitive conquest of such a supreme good.”

“How beautiful the word freedom sounds to our ears!”

“It couldn’t be otherwise! It refers undoubtedly to the most sacred and most precious of our assets. Whoever threatens it will, in fact, be threatening the most cherished human feelings: the love and the respect that we owe to ourselves and to our fellowmen. Any attempt to neutralize it is to rebel against God, who has instituted it as essential to man’s life.”

“Moments ago I thought that only by belonging to the bloodline of savage tribes could one tolerate such cruelties as the ones Ximara endured, but now I see the degree of fortitude that is required in our modern times to face the turmoil and the

wars that despotism and the annulment of freedom impose upon nations. Throughout the ages, how often these crucial events have surprised the human heart as destiny unleashes the blind forces that drag the souls, marked by its fateful index, into the whirlwind of their fury.”

“There’s no doubt, my dear, that your sensitivity would be hurt if you were subjected to similar afflictions.”

“Nevertheless, don’t you think that I’d be able to find comfort in the inviolable mystery represented by the compassionate power that emerges from respecting God’s will? You, yourself, have etched this in me, Ebel, and wherever I go I’ll carry it as a talisman that will protect me from all evil.”

434 “I’m extremely pleased by the spontaneity with which the lights of your sensitivity glow every time your spirit is moved by some thought or fact that relates to your convictions gathered in an unshakable cluster that sustains your life and the happiness of your soul.”

Touched by Ebel’s words that were sweet and very meaningful to her, the young woman revealed:

“I’ve always observed that everything I learned with you brought me closer to your heart, with irresistible force, as if my whole soul penetrated it and became one with yours due to the reciprocity in our feelings. Since the moment I yearned for you to become my husband, you have become so decisively, and my utmost zeal was to take care of what belonged to you: my life that you have enriched with such great care and tenderness.”

As she stopped, they looked at each other with that intelligent and intimate bequest that reflects parallel states of consciousness, similar to those that are shared during moments of overwhelming happiness or deep distress. There may have been in their look something enlightening that had inspired the Homeric epic exalting the imagination of Horace and Virgil when, in their poems, they described the peculiarities of the human spirit, mistaking it for all things that live and exist in the incommensurable orbit of Creation.

Interrupting that moment of enchantment, Mariné went on to reveal, without hesitation, the satisfactions of her voluntary confession:

“I knew that in order to free my life from the horror of emptiness I had to give it content. I had frequently wondered whether such content was similar in all cases and each time I came closer to confirm that it was so. How clearly I came to perceive the schematic scale of the contents that can fulfill the lives of individuals in general. They’re certainly not the same. They can, however, be similar to the point of becoming identical if the yearnings coincide, if the ways of conceiving and feeling life also coincide and if the same degree of affinity exists in the superior aspirations of the spirit. What is evident is the ease with which such objectives are deviated and extinguished. When one doesn’t know how to preserve the power of wanting, it becomes tainted and corrupted, contaminated by opposing desires, which end up prevailing, thus forcing the individual to return to his former ways and vacillations. This is how one loses the yearning that sustained life during the period in which the will presided, when it was placed at the service of a noble and deeply felt need.”

“Exactly. Few are those who accept to adapt their life to the

demands of a superior ideal. The objective pursued doesn't always resist the test of time.

On the top of the hill, Ebel and Mariné interrupted their dialogue as they began to descend slowly towards a grove. Once there, they sat to rest on a carpet of small, fresh, sweet-scented shoots that covered the ground.

"Without your help," Mariné admitted, "I wouldn't have been able to find this hidden, enchanting narrow passageway that links the limits of our non-transcendent life to the Promised Land, which is its esthetic content and the divine space of our existence that was previously outside the scope of my thought in spite of its undeniable reality."

"Can one know the content of this divine place you've discovered?"

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"It consists of all that is necessary to make me a happy woman. I'll never forget my encounter with this reality. It was like a wonderful awakening. Since then, everything has changed. My nature was transformed as it adjusted to the rhythm and pulsing of a new life. A life that I had sensed existed and yearned to live and which you taught me to find, leading me to its border and pointing the path I had to cover within my own self in order to find the very essence of my being. Once there, I understood everything I had to do in order to maintain firmly and unyieldingly the objectives I'd conceived as being the supreme ideals of my life."

"And what are these supreme ideals?" de Sándara inquired again, delighted by her words.

"I know only too well how much it pleases you to confirm if I'm faithful to my recollection. From my part, I'll gladly express it to you since it is one of the most necessary exercises for our sensitivity. Your question, therefore, brings out the need I feel to renew the images that

are dear to me. Perhaps the same instances that characterize the variations and changes that take place in nature are reproduced within ourselves. At times, trees seem to be dead as if totally deprived of life, yet the sap moves within them in a permanent motion generated by the energies that support their vitality allowing them to grow when small, and to blossom when tall. This shows us their potential force. As I evoke my past adolescence, a time when the images created by the illusion of the young years appeared in my sleep and vigil, the events that stand out the most in the course of my life now come to my mind in an uninterrupted succession. As it always happens during this period of our existence, my imagination began to fly in search of the most capricious tastes and, being permanently dissatisfied with everything, the reckless lack of reflection made me become demanding. Fortunately, this didn't last long. You appeared as a star in the night of my life and, in the darkness, where my vacillating soul was searching aimlessly for a point of advantage for its inquietude, you guided me towards the light of day. I gradually began to understand how you etched in me with refined artistry, the indelible outlines of your exceptional and skillful chisel. I then understood how at the same time that I was distancing myself from what I was, having broken the spell of the chimerical enchantment and freed myself from the lethal delight of the uncertain years, I penetrated further and further into this reality, which today fills my heart with happiness. Under your watchful eye and the help of your ever timely advice, I've learned to moderate my thoughts and to value the dimension of my aspirations so as to never exceed myself. In this apprenticeship, I began to be conscious of the meaning of adjusting my behavior to the demands of a process

in which I'd gradually improve myself. I had to anchor in me the image of this great yearning or supreme ideal of my life, which I had initially sensed and later on yearned for with all my heart and soul. During this effort I had to face great conflicts within myself and shed many tears as a result of my lack of comprehension. A particularly painful circumstance occurred during those still insecure trances, which I was going through. Truly, those were days of inconsolable turmoil because just when my soul was seeking a sentiment of deeper tenderness the only thing I perceived was the serene affection of your heart. In certain moments, Ebel darling, I felt as if my life were made of crystal. Drained by pain, I expected more than once the fatal instant that would end it. Finally, on a certain afternoon, you discovered my secret in the most impenetrable place. My soul wavered, moved by candor, conscious perhaps that its response could compromise its destiny. You told me later that you had witnessed on that day one of the most innocent, gracious and, at the same time, impressive episodes in a woman's intimate life. I've been happy since that very day. I knew then that you had never been indifferent towards me and whenever you spoke to me your voice carried the gentleness and the sweetness of love. After overcoming this difficult step in my life, the yearnings that needled my soul continuously accentuated their profile and, from the hidden corner that sheltered them, the primary rainbow of comprehension began to paint my most cherished mental images with well-defined colors."

De Sándara listened to Marine's words with the attention and respect due to that moment in which the girl's soul expressed with flowing ease thoughts which were related to the ones he kept in the secrecy of his heart. Finally, having seen her reach, through her memory, the objective of her mental flight, he said:

“I see that you master with great assurance the dimensional space of your life and the multiple venues of your past.”

“Don’t you think you’re exaggerating? You know, Ebel, that it’s not difficult to evoke the memories that fill my life because it’s their force that allows us to link what was lived to what we’re now living.”

“Indeed. If we were to forget the part of life that inspired us at the beginning of our conscious march in the world in which so many thoughts and yearnings participated, this part would inevitably die. It’s necessary to link it to what we are now living so that it becomes substantiated with all the days of our life. This way, we won’t experience that emptiness that fosters anxiety and desperation in those who, without even remembering, have lost in the sands of the past, all they have lived up to that point.”

“If you asked me now what I intend to dedicate my life to, I’d surely answer that it is to fulfill the mission that you have taught me so properly and discreetly. First and foremost, my dear, I’ll be your ideal companion, because I am what your hands have forged. I have before me this wonderful world of knowledge that you unveiled to my feeling so that my spirit, evolving, may absorb the most delicious of all nectars from it. I couldn’t find greater motivation for my life or a more precious destiny to fill the days of my existence with joy!”

“You are faithful to the cherished pronouncements of your spirit and this pleases me. It’s precisely the opposite of those who, aiming to give content to their lives, end up throwing their projects out the window, being disturbed perhaps by ambitions they were unable to curb.”

After a short pause and attempting to bring Mariné back to the reality of the moment, de Sándara added:

"Were I to evaluate your progress in this subject, which is one of the most difficult, my rating would be: *outstanding*".

Pleased with that gratifying morning exchange, they decided to head back home.

They got into the car and drove at regular speed along the road, which, beneath the sun's rays, seemed like an enameled necklace zigzagging from the Sierra Madre to the peak of the Anahuac plateau.

Expecting them for lunch, Christina made it a point to reprimand them, faking a bad mood on account of the time she had been left alone. But the joy of seeing them so happy quickly brought to her lips a smile she attempted in vain to hold back and which accentuated when Mariné responded with a very affectionate kiss.

440 Taking his aunt by the arm, de Sándara walked into the house, while Mariné, who had preceded them, was returning cheerfully waving a letter.

"Is it for me?" Ebel asked, suspecting something very special in that day's mail.

"No doubt!" replied Mariné smiling and adding playfully: "But I won't give it up unless you say something beautiful to me."

"Something beautiful? But I can't think of anything more beautiful than you!"

"Are you serious or joking?"

"Madam... Don't I always speak seriously?"

Christina intervened and requested that they stop behaving like children.

A little later, they were all celebrating the good news. The letter was from Claudio, announcing his forthcoming trip to Mexico by mid-September accompanied by Griselda.

The Arribillaga couple spent peaceful and happy days in Mexico and, although these were few in number, they were plentiful in benefits.

Everything up to that moment had been fulfilled exactly as they had promised themselves when planning the trip. They experienced great satisfaction as the days went by. Only the thought of being away from Adriana, who had stayed in Buenos Aires, disturbed Griselda's happiness from time to time. Nevertheless, she knew how to quiet down that legitimate claim of her heart by taking refuge in the safety and confidence that the baby was being carefully looked after by her grandmother.

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The hosts displayed a warm affection for their guests during their stay in Mexico. The vast mansion on Reforma Avenue offered beautiful bright accommodations in a cheerful and cordial environment. Furthermore, the occasion was more than appropriate: having finished writing a book, de Sándara could now dedicate more time to them and this favored their fervent yearning to nurture their spirits.

Until then, not a day had passed without their having registered in their memory a joyful event. In addition to the pleasures of their daily outings, they felt particularly enchanted by the moments spent in the intimacy of the home. Above all, they enjoyed the conversations held in the study where the family usually gathered and the affectionate mutual proximity during the hours de Sándara remained alone.

Large and furnished in good taste, the study was as comfortable as it was inviting. They had managed to adapt it for them to work there in the summer as well as in the winter. What made that possible was its large glass panel that divided one side of the room as if it were a moving wall. During the warm months, this wall could connect the office to the large veranda making the area pleasant and ventilated. The veranda faced the front of the property overlooking the garden where the flower pods, nearly always in bloom, gave a touch of freshness and joy. Marking the limits of the property was an extended fence covered by rosebushes mingled with geraniums that orchestrated, every spring, their invariable symphony of colors.

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They all met in the dining room for breakfast and planned the day. De Sándara suggested to Claudio they visit the outskirts of the town so that he could show him first hand its typical environment.

"This way the ladies will be free to go shopping in the downtown stores as I heard they wish to do. Will you join them, Christina?"

"Me? I hadn't thought of it. But you may be right. I could be tempted to buy a few things for myself."

"All right, then. We'll drive you downtown."

"I accept. But you won't drop us off at the same place, alright?" Christina added. "The young ladies must move about at will. I'll go wherever I like and at my slow pace."

"Actually, little is to be noticed of that pace," observed Griselda gazing affectionately at the lady.

"It's settled then," agreed de Sándara and, teasing her, he added: "But I warn you that if you are late, I won't wait for you."

"Then, my darling nephew, I solemnly promise to be ready in a jiffy. Good habits should serve me for something!"

A short time later, de Sándara and Claudio were strolling down on the outskirts of the city with its shacks, shops and open markets. Poor people were in great number in this area where the precarious way of life had not yet benefited from the progress obtained by the social and economic development that highly favored other parts of the city.

A violent commotion outside of a store attracted their attention as they saw two policemen arrest a suspicious-looking individual.

"That's a *macuteno*," explained de Sándara. "It's what they call scoundrels here. They roam around the entire city in search of victims."

Driving around from one point to another, they visited some of the most typical places in the city while de Sándara explained the local tastes, the characteristics and the customs of the people.

They decided to extend their outing in order to visit the downtown area. They parked the car and headed towards one of the most populated spots, quickly mingling with the agitated crowd that jammed the streets like ants rushing nervously to and fro.

Along the way, maybe in an attempt to pay tribute to the charm of the Mexican ladies or hoping perhaps to catch a beautiful suggestive smile, Claudio began exalting with excessive enthusiasm the beauty of the country's women whose grace and composure evoked in him the elegance of the Andalusians. Far from opposing such enthusiasm, Mr. de Sándara listened to him with benevolent attention.

Having reached a luxurious shopping center they stopped on the sidewalk to better observe the crowd. Suddenly, de Sándara spotted a friend who, having also seen him, approached and introduced his companions: two beautiful Mexican girls who behaved in a forward and provocative manner. As if to celebrate this encounter de Sándara invited them for a drink, which was immediately accepted. This did not displease Claudio. He only foresaw an opportunity to contemplate more closely the two lively talkative beauties.

As the unexpected event came to an end and, after the goodbyes that were not exempt of insinuations for a next encounter, the two friends decided to end their tour and headed back to their parking place.

444 As they walked, de Sándara, who had been following very closely the psychological movements taking place within Claudio, pressed his friend's arm in a quick motion, with a peculiar laughter that had caused certain uneasiness in Claudio in other occasions before. Disturbed and confused, Claudio laughed as well, yet he seemed like someone who, not knowing the language that is spoken, laughs at whatever he hears even though he is unable to grasp a word. He took hold of himself and decided to find out the meaning of it, but failing in his attempt, he then let himself be guided by his intuition, which led him to discover what he was searching for. He experienced great relief and a very favorable sensation generated by the sudden flight of certain indiscreet thoughts that were partying in his mind.

After that moment of confusion, Claudio began to review this latest encounter but from a different perspective. While

everything seemed to be very natural to him, he was astonished to note that Mr. de Sándara had spent his time in such superficial discussions and above all in the company of women who could create a problem for him. With his mind immersed in such reflections, he expressed these thoughts to his friend as soon as they got into the car. Aiming to use this event to offer Claudio the assessment he needed on the matter, de Sándara changed his destination and, driving towards the closest rest area, stopped in a wide avenue shielded from the sun by rows of dense trees. Remaining in the car, he decided to fill up with a bit of conversation the time they still had left.

“We can affirm with certainty,” he began saying, “that if we were to observe a thousand wives from the most diverse social levels at the moment an unexpected event or circumstance places them in the position of seeing their respective husbands in company of another woman, we’ll see, in each one of them, the same reaction of jealousy, anger or resentment as well as, obviously, other variations that each case presents. Furthermore, we’ll see that, no matter what their educational level may be, most of these ladies suffer from a certain mental myopia that prevents them from addressing correctly such incidences of married life. In short, we would be confirming their inability to neutralize by means of sensible reflections, the tragic effects of this type of episodes. Undesirable thoughts take hold of them and that is when the worst often happens: they seek the advice of others. Since such advice is usually inadequate, they risk converting their married life into hell.”

Pulling out a cigarette from the pack Claudio handed to him, de Sándara continued:

“It’s logical that if we want to know what lies in the depth of a cave we must go inside it and satisfy our curiosity. However, this intention may be hampered by a tenacious enemy – darkness – that defeats our purpose. Ignorance, which in the human being is mental darkness, also prevents us from seeing the depths of things. Hence, the imagination, believing to be enlightened, weaves the most whimsical versions of facts and usually takes them for granted without even making a minor reflective analysis. And this, my friend Arribillaga, is how several human dramas occur in the deceptive shadow of misunderstanding... That’s precisely the origin of the marital conflicts that become aggravated by mutual intolerance.”

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“My understanding, Mr. de Sándara, is that the attitude you mentioned, that could be considered intransigent in the woman, stems from the fact that, when besieged by sex, she not only reveals, in numerous cases, to be more conscious of her matrimonial responsibility than the man but also demonstrates how her own dignity protects her when her feelings prevail. Looking at both positions – that of the man and of the woman – it is noteworthy to think that while the man, motivated by his powerful natural predispositions is frequently incapable of avoiding the errors he commits, he nevertheless can correct them and even neutralize them entirely if he so decides.”

“There is no doubt but, still referring to the couple, this must necessarily follow an internal process of understanding that leads each one, and especially the woman, to grasp the

reason for this carnal and affectionate bond in order to acquire self-control and strengthen, instead of weakening, the superior meaning of the marital link.”

“This is quite understandable. Otherwise, love, the one we call love from the heart, which is extremely sensitive, can be harmed by any incident in the relationships of mutual reciprocity. And the proof lies in that its existence, in many cases, is not less ephemeral than passionate love, which only aspires for the circumstantial possession even when it is interspersed by promises and oaths.”

“Do you know why? I think I already told you something to that effect... It is because love can only last when it is transformed into affection. Affection is the great power that persuades, that mitigates resentments and forgives. That is the love that relieves the blows of adversity and eliminates the pernicious effects of all disagreements. Very well. When this love has been condensed into affection, and even more, is crowned by knowledge, it becomes immutable and incorruptible.”

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“It is truly stimulating to come to understand that such precious elements are integrated in the human soul.”

“Very well put, but we should also add that, once linked between them, these precious elements form the inalterable base of our sensitive being.”

They kept silent. Claudio tried to retain in his mind his friend's words in which he had not yet detected the clear answer to his question. De Sándara did not show any other apparent interest than to light a cigarette. Moments later, ready to expedite the matter, he said:

“I forged the temperance of the soul of the one who is now my wife in the hearth of experiences and assisted her during

her incipency with all my love. I praised each of her triumphs offering her additional opportunities to get to know me better. This fact has instilled into her a confidence in me that undoubtedly few women in the world have in their husbands. She knows that no one else could take the space she occupies in my heart. She understands this to such an extent that she never disturbed me with any kind of jealousy. It may happen that she would see me circumstantially in company of one or more women, as it occurred a while ago, but she'll feel neither curious nor concerned about it. Such an attitude could be construed as indifference but it's not. Mariné is so because she knows, because she proved it many times that she is in fact my beloved and that amongst all women she is the first to me. She's the first even amongst those who are above all others. The concept I inspired in her is like a tattoo on her soul that nothing or anyone could ever erase. But I must admit that Mariné was capable of understanding me and has also reciprocated by being sincere and genuine, as well as giving me intelligent obedience, which is the antithesis of blind obedience that makes women stupid."

"I think, Mr. De Sándara, that it's difficult to adjust to such behaviors, but I presume that this places the human being so close to the dreamed happiness that the mere fact of knowing that this can be achieved strongly motivates me to seek, as soon as possible, positions of such high level of equilibrium and understanding."

As a reply, Claudio received a smile of doubtful meaning. At first, he believed to have perceived in it total consent, but it did not take long for him to realize that it had deeply reverberated in his inner self, inducing him to remember that his conscience

must always be present during his enthusiastic outbursts. Imperceptibly, he observed de Sándara whose placid and quiet attitude clearly contrasted with the pointed blows emitted by his reasoning. From proven experience, he knew that his friend always aimed at the core of the issues and would never press the trigger in vain when applying his stable pulse. He was absolutely sure that de Sándara knew in depth the alternatives of the psychological process that he was undertaking and also recalled that his words and attitudes, even when they stirred in him a resentment like the one at this moment, had no other objective than to help him in such alternatives by warning him against the repetition of the moral crises like to the ones he had frequently experienced.”

“What I just described,” continued de Sándara “is surely not impossible. It’s the basic condition for the individual to know how to control his passionate nature, his impulses and his instinctive reactions. When he thinks of doing something today and changes his mind tomorrow, when a project is undertaken and is soon abandoned, he’ll only diminish his own capability. You can draw the consequences from this situation, my friend Arribillaga. Where will man end up along this path?”

“He would end up in utter self-denial.”

“Why do you say that?” inquired de Sándara, accentuating the subtle question.

“Because he’d have denied himself the right of being and doing what he planned during his hours of lucidity.”

As soon as this was said, Claudio suddenly felt as if a thought of stinging sensation was rubbing his skin. Nevertheless, he recovered, and grasping unexpectedly the last stronghold of his

presumption, he ventured an argument in the hope of attracting his friend's attention:

"As a mere reference, Mr. de Sándara, I'd like to mention a fact that frequently happens to me. After enjoying for a few moments the company of a woman, I feel an extraordinary attraction towards my wife whose virtues become more accentuated and valuable to me. I am quite confident that this circumstance will immunize me against the possible dangers of any passionate nature that might occur."

"Don't you think that you trust excessively the mirage of the senses? I can't believe that you are one who would succumb into the arms of weaknesses, but in any case I feel it to be my duty to warn you that such confidence could harm your principles and make you go through more than one bitter experience. It's indispensable, my friend, to be on guard at all times against the gullibility which these matters are frequently dealt with. Furthermore, you should be aware that our acts are not always interpreted in their exact dimensions. However, you should not be discouraged. I am sure that you will be able to acquire a very clear concept of the superior life. I'll tell you this: do persevere and you will give me the joy of seeing you incorporated for good in this world which is reserved to the souls who try hard. This world, whether we like it or not, is the ideal objective coveted by man since he sensed his existence."

"Rest assured, Mr. de Sándara, that your good wishes will serve me as an encouragement," said Claudio as he began to calculate inwardly how remote this appealing perspective still was.

In the meantime, after a hectic day of shopping all around town, Mariné and Griselda were lazily resting in the armchairs on the veranda.

Guided by the sound of their voices, de Sándara and Claudio joined them.

“Oh, what a surprise!” exclaimed de Sándara. “I didn’t think you’d already be back.”

“And let me tell you that we did a lot,” replied Mariné coming closer, “we visited many stores and still had time to take this short rest. You, too, must have certainly walked a lot.”

“Quite a lot.”

“Then you surely need a refreshing drink. I’ll call the servant.”

“Don’t be concerned about us, Mariné. We’re fine,” de Sándara said as he turned to his friend with a meaningful look.

He then inquired about his aunt.

“She arrived almost at the same time we did.” replied Griselda.

“Then I’ll go and get her.”

Having said that, he left thinking of the pleasure he would undoubtedly give his aunt with this small attention.

Griselda mentioned how much she admired the careful attention given by de Sándara to Christina. Mariné, in the benevolent manner with which she frequently spoke of Cristina, referred to the value that the older woman attributed to such displays of thoughtfulness that were, in part, claimed by age. While she was talking, she observed that Claudio kept silent, absent, as if something were bothering him. Mindful of this and, in order not to distract his attention, she chose to keep quiet. Very delicately, pretending to have to give an order to the servant, Mariné left for a moment, leaving the couple alone. Griselda had also observed the fact and thought it appropriate to remain quiet.

Nothing more than a simple look was necessary to detect the strange torment enveloping Claudio's face. Accustomed to examine what was happening along the paths of his conscience, he alone knew, for sure, that whatever in these moments was disturbing his serenity and dampening the good dispositions of his soul, usually joyful, lively and communicative, had its cause in the subtle effects of susceptibility and vanity.

He suddenly felt an uncontrollable urge to withdraw from everyone's presence except his own and, deciding to retire to the solitude of his room, he gave Griselda a trivial excuse and left, promising to return shortly.

Once in his room, he began to pace up and down until he slumped on the side of his bed, sitting there for a while, with his head low and his hands crossed.

The ringing of his moral bell calling him to prayer was strong and persistent and so vibrant was also the sound of the bugle, convoking his thoughts to war, that he could not avoid, at that moment, the whirlwind that threatened to envelope him.

He felt a stirring within his whole being caused by the struggle of the two antagonistic forces of his nature, announcing the proximity of an outcome whose solution he alone would have to find. His inner scrutiny, concentrated on the stage of his small world, revealed an alignment of rancorous and threatening reactions of the instinct that was not prepared to surrender but to fight to the end in order to reinstate the tyrannical rule it had exercised over him. Leading the rebellion, he saw the fleeting figures of temptation, authoritarianism, licentiousness, worldly pleasures and sensual lust, all still aiming to seduce him with

the brilliance of their tinsel. Towering over them, stripped of its inoffensive appearance, he identified the fearful beast, the culprit of the agitated struggles that were so often unleashed inside him: his self-loving, this invisible enemy that curls up furiously and leaps at the slightest controversy, generating the most diverse blunders.

At this stage of his inner observation Claudio stopped. He had just realized the danger to which his foolish susceptibility, unforgivably unleashed, had once again exposed him. An indescribable sensation of triumph permeated his mood and was reflected on his face, until then contorted by a painful turmoil. There, facing the horrible figures generated by his passions, dominating everything from the highest positions, his vision, free from the shadows, contemplated the impressive phalanxes of the spirit that demanded the unconditional surrender of the relentless enemy.

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Being the only actor and witness of what had occurred in the intimacies of his conscience, Claudio reveled in the inexpressible sensation of this triumph that had re-established the peace and happiness he had lost for a moment.

All this lasted the time that the others had taken to return and it made Claudio think that no one had noticed his absence.

Half an hour later lunch was held in a cheerful atmosphere. One perhaps could say that it was a tacit tribute to the brilliant victory of a battle waged in silence, in the depths of a soul.

After a restful siesta, followed by a long walk in the mountains at sundown, Claudio felt greatly invigorated.

The delights of the excursion were added to the ones that originated that self-confidence he now felt, clearly expressing

in his conscience the potential that the exercise of the superior life had been accumulating in his being. He would not find himself again in the position of losing this confidence when the strengths of his will were to diminish.

The power of the essential cognitions given by Ebel de Sándara had helped him triumph and obtain positive results in the multiple contingencies that had occurred uniquely due to his inexperience in managing his impulses. On the wings of the lofty aesthetical satisfactions that all of this had inspired in him, a certainty emerged from the intimacy of his soul: that life was beginning to offer him, in greater volume, the enchantments reserved to the individual who is able to penetrate deeply into its secrets.

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De Sándara visited the city in company of his friend several times. Even though it seemed that these outings had no other purpose than to expose him to different sights and enrich his observations on the people's way of life and customs, Claudio, nonetheless, was always left with an additional element to consolidate the new spiritual positions he was gaining.

One night, de Sándara invited him to visit the club where he was a member and where the cream of the Mexican intellectual society gathered.

On that occasion, he said to Claudio:

"I'm sure that the presence of our respective wives would have made our pastime more pleasurable, but in fact, not only

do they enjoy but also need to be left alone for their confidential chats.”

Claudio noticed that his friend’s words presented a somewhat weak argument to justify the fact. Nevertheless, he willingly accepted the invitation.

“You have invoked a reason that allows us not to feel sorry for leaving them at home,” he replied courteously. “I am at your service, Mr. de Sándara.”

“We’ll therefore devote this “escapade” to the observation of man in the wholesome exercise of his mental muscles.”

Having said that with the enthusiastic spirit with which he readied himself even for the smallest things that pleased him, de Sándara stated that this was one of the evenings designated by the club to offer its members a philosophical debate in which one or more members, selected by a drawing of names of volunteers, would address the group. In fact, several had spoken from that podium. Scientists, polemicists, thinkers and even sophists had submitted their knowledge to the verdict of an equally erudite public who frequently harassed the speaker with questions or interrupted him with objections or interpellations, all of which generated quite a few controversies.

The information appealed to Claudio and heightened his interest to attend.

A short while later, they walked through the spacious rooms of the elegant convention hall. It was bustling with a great number of people, many of whom were introduced to Claudio. He greatly appreciated the opportunity of coming into personal contact with so many distinguished figures.

As the session was called to order, de Sándara took Arribillaga by the arm leading him quickly into the auditorium and saying in a joyful tone:

“The function is about to begin, “mon petit”.”

The meeting room was quite wide, although not very long, and could easily hold about two hundred people. From the extensive access door where the two friends stood for a moment, they could see a mounted platform at the far end of the room, covered like the rest of it by a light colored carpet. Facing the platform, orderly rows of comfortable chairs were laid out in a semicircle.

Claudio had already been informed on how these debates were organized.

456 Appointed as moderator, a member of the mentioned institution would call the meeting to order and invite the selected speaker to pick at random, from a specially prepared ballot box, two envelopes containing the questions submitted by the audience. The speaker could choose to answer one of them or both, if he so wished. At times, when the speaker’s answers were brief or when the questions were only partially addressed, another speaker would succeed him. That was the case that night. Having answered brilliantly and in depth one the questions, the speaker declared himself unable to tackle the second one.

He was, nevertheless, acclaimed by a prolonged applause. Being deeply impressed, Claudio applauded as well, displaying clear signs of approval.

As the speaker was leaving the platform, the moderator announced de Sándara as the following speaker.

In a sudden movement of surprise, Claudio turned towards his friend who had already left his seat and was quickly heading for the

rostrum. Having controlled his astonishment and now internally enjoying this novelty, which had caught him unaware, he noted the audience's positive reaction towards de Sándara whose ascension to the platform was accompanied by extended applause.

Claudio seemed to have perceived in the smile his friend flashed at him from a distance the satisfaction of having provided him with such a striking surprise.

Following the customary procedure, the moderator began reading aloud the questions he withdrew from the ballot box, including the names of those who had asked them.

The first one defined in the following terms the ideological inquietude of the author, a well-known writer of strong liberal tendencies: "Does God exist? Can you prove His existence?" A doctor phrased the second question: "What is your opinion concerning the missing link, which has originated so many theories on the genesis of man?"

De Sándara took the papers with the questions from the moderator's hands, placed them on the podium and, after a brief examination, began to fulfill his obligation.

"Gentlemen," he said, "in reference to the first inquiry, I must state from the outset that, if the Creation that surrounds us and of which we are part is not in itself sufficiently eloquent to convince man that God's existence is undeniable, far less could the word of a fellowman demonstrate it, no matter how hard he tried. Having made this clarification, let us now address the issue in depth. When declaring that God exists, it is absolutely necessary to accompany such affirmation with a proposition that disconnects it from any idea that could limit or prevent

one to conceive Him in his immensity, omnipotence and infinity. Starting from the premise that the Primary Cause is God and not having within our reach any other visible being to which the act of the Universal Creation can be attributed, it becomes logical for us to recognize God as the Supreme Maker. Nevertheless, the ability to consider His existence does not depend on this existence itself but to the degree with which each human being, individually, is able to recognize it, feel it and touch it.

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There are two things that, without a shred of doubt, are inseparable because they constitute one same and absolute truth: the Creation and its Creator. One presupposes, with absolute certainty, the presence of the other. And therefore, if Creation does exist, and it does, since we see it, touch it and live in it, it is impossible to cast doubt on the existence of He, who, having conceived it at first, has etched it later on as a supreme reality, dictating at the same time the laws that maintain its balance and protects its eternal preservation. Gentlemen, God's existence is proven by the very existence of everything that surrounds us, by our own existence, and above all, by the prerogative granted to us to raise this question and answer it to ourselves, by using the knowledge acquired from the study, the observation and the experience consciously achieved in our daily life.

I have just affirmed that, due to His infinite cosmic dimension, God cannot be limited. However, I must also add that, although this is quite easy to understand, seldom have men taken it into account. It is a proven fact, in spite of the paradox, that men have attempted to make God to their image and resemblance, probably without evaluating the dimensions or the consequences of such a sacrilege. We must not forget that beliefs have planted their roots in

the ignorance of primitive tribes. In total mental incipency and lack of understanding, each tribe worshipped the gods they could find. Throughout time and human development, always in an atmosphere of ignorance and naïve gullibility, religions did the same, as they drove their beliefs to the point of convincing themselves that God belonged only to them since this had been decided by their followers. Not only that, but also each sect went ahead shaping Him according to the conveniences and demands of their respective dogmas, presenting Him veiled, naturally, by the so-called “mysteries”.

Gentlemen, beliefs paralyze the noble function of thinking. Fortunate are the eyes of understanding that were not contaminated, and, which differently from those blinded by dogmatic faith, can nurture their life with the teachings God has spread out through Creation! The dogma could have been useful to men during the eras of barbarism, of moral, intellectual and spiritual backwardness, but not in our day and age when the most astonishing changes in almost all venues of human living are registered. Nowadays, the dogma is pure and simply an incongruity. To insist in maintaining it is to claim to shut the eyes of those who were able to overcome the spiritual obscurantism in which mankind is still immersed. Man loves the truth, yearns for it, but in order to avoid deception, he must seek it with his reasoning, and this reasoning must be unanimously respected. By attributing to blind faith virtues it does not possess, one cannot claim to exclude the functions of discerning and of judging from the human possibilities, and subject man, without his prior differentiation, to be bound by formulas that corrupt the truth.”

“Mr. de Sándara,” exclaimed a member of the audience, raising his voice above the disquieting whispering of the room, “we cannot revolt against the dogmas. As a Christian, I refuse to listen to you.

To oppose dogmas is to openly declare oneself against the revealed truth, which is the sacred support of religion. Furthermore, could we deny that the majority of dogmas constitute historical facts?"

"Allow me to say that, due to the very fact that dogmas are impositions of a religious character, they have been discarded by History. Furthermore, there are tremendous contradictions in those same biblical texts that many have attempted, in vain, to amend. Human reasoning discovers them as soon as it sets out to analyze those texts in depth. It is well known that for History to be trustworthy, it must be legitimized by unquestionable witnesses; by truth that agrees with our inner reality, which is the one that must nurture men's judgment. From that base, the acceptance or the non-acceptance of its passages must emerge. Historical facts can only be considered indisputable when they are supported by realities that exempt posterity from having any suspicion concerning the faithfulness of their origin. Such a thing has certainly not occurred with the events mentioned in biblical narratives, since they have not been endorsed by any responsible certification, as would be the testimony of historians of that period. So as to praise the figures of their protagonists, they have insisted on deifying them, when on the contrary they should have humanized them in order to have them serve as role models to the human race. There is no feat or virtue that can be accessible to us and that we can understand, in a "divine" being who intends to display before our astonished eyes his aptitude to perform miracles. However, they exist in any human being who, being the same as all the others, shows us with his knowledge and example at least part of the great prerogatives that his fellowmen can achieve along the path of evolution."

"As for the dogmas," continued de Sándara, aware of the growing expectation in the audience, "I affirm that God has established

none. And this is a truth; as it is also a truth that God has never excluded anyone from His great human family, which He created to inhabit this world. He has not called heretics those who dissented from the true form of thinking about Him, nor did He excommunicate anyone or let alone approve that any of his sons would do so, because this attitude bears the principle of non-love, of ill intent. If God has allowed nations to deny Him and permitted atheist and perjurer nations to attain advanced positions in science, have we not the evidence that He continues to regard those nations as children of His Creation?

Every man should aspire to clarify what his reasoning resists to admit as a truth; for example, the repeated affirmations made on the existence of a Hell that condemns sinners to eternal fire. Which truth is this affirmation based upon? Can the spirit burn even though it is not material and is therefore incombustible? Let us assume that it does. Let us assume that the spirit can burn, that it can smolder eternally. In this case, what useful consequence would the eternal condemnation of the spirit to the fire bring to human life? Until when, gentlemen, until when, will mankind continue to cling to a belief that lacks any educational sense? The errors made by men cannot be settled by an endless martyrdom, by a perpetual torture. Such cruelty cannot therefore be a part of God's immense greatness. It can be, however, part of those who preach and terrorize people with such absurdities. God could not have created the prodigious human being to exterminate him later without a single explanation. This would mean violating the express laws destined to regulate man's evolution and it would imply a denial that the human intelligence

can in no way admit. God created man so that, through all the contingencies and experiences he faces during his transition in the world, he would learn to conduct his life in the existence that was determined for him, and, which I presume, has no end. The faults in which he incurs can and must be amended by him, and are of his sole responsibility. In that lays the wonder of the law of evolution, which, consciously interpreted and lived out, converts man into the redeemer of his own self. Could there be anything more soothing and sublime for men than to feel capable of achieving by themselves such a task whose glory will also belong to them? Is this not better than to accumulate error upon error, trusting with blind faith and in some cases with great speculation, that someone with divine powers can absolve us of our faults? Let us analyze with serenity in which of the two cases man would feel more worthy of himself, of his fellowmen and of He who created him.

Much has been said about the revealed truth. In fact, it has just been mentioned in this room... What is that revealed truth, gentlemen, that man should not know and that is inaccessible to him? The truth revealed by God, the greatest, the transcendent one, is His own Creation. This is the great truth revealed! From this Creation, from this revealed truth by God, which is accessible – allow me to affirm it – to all human minds, emerge the threads that lead to all the other truths which will also be revealed in due time. The man who sets out to know what lies within a mountain, which in this case would represent a minute part of the great truth, will invariably need, in order to carry out his goal, to enter and reach into its depths with his understanding and his action, to follow its venues and discover its deposits. If someone were to

forbid him to do so, assuring him that he must only limit himself to admire the mountain, this will go on being a revealed truth, but a revealed truth in whose depths his intelligence did not penetrate. The human mind, I repeat, has free access to all truths, but to do so it must follow a rigorous mental and psychological training process, a process of inner culture, that makes it possible to ascend towards them.

For the man who fully exercises his freedom of conscience, there is no dogma whatsoever behind which the truth can remain hidden. This is quite logical. It is perfectly understandable that he who thinks and exercises this function in its total plenitude, will know how to discover the truth wherever it may be. Once he does that, on account of common sense, he will refuse to accept, for example, the fact of a planet penetrating a strand of hair as a way to teach man how to avoid baldness. All the faculties of the intelligence are generous when used continuously, but beliefs, gentlemen, do not in any way activate its development. Beliefs put the intelligence to sleep since they act as hypnotics. Life is thought and action. Life weakens, deteriorates and dies when the mind stops thinking and when, due to this immobility, the will slackens and the cells get bored because they have been deprived of the activity that reanimates and stimulates them. For this reason, the beliefs are a means of oppression, a tyranny imposed on the human spirit. They represent the slow death of the spirit, which, unable to evolve in compliance with its superior destiny, is consumed day after day, century after century...

Man is not what he is on account of what he eats but of what he thinks. If we were to forbid him to exercise this function, if we were

to place him in an iron mold to prevent him from thinking, what consciousness could he attain about his existence in this world? If, later on, we were to ask this same man what he had done of his being, of his spirit, he would probably reply: "I believed, I had faith." Faith in what? Is man, by any chance, forbidden to know the truth? God could not have made him for such absurdity, nor condemn him to become a common being, someone who does not think and whose spirit is subjected to the slavery of a belief. Proof of that is the magnificent psychological mechanism with which he is endowed and, which allows him to act independently. Every human being is constituted of a soul and a spirit. Furthermore, each one is of a different kind of psychology, in other words, an individual psychology. Why then has man insisted, throughout the centuries, to twist the course mankind had to follow by putting to sleep so many with beliefs and subterfuges? By any chance, were men ignorant of the fact that inducing the human being to think by edicts and making him feel whatever has been inculcated in him, implies violating the universal laws that regard as a crime anything that tends to favor the absorption of the individual by the masses? Was it unknown that this tends to fuse him into this nomad group that follows an erroneous path, since the true path man can only come to know on his own? To cast aside derogatively, or even worse, to reject, as it has frequently been done, those who use their reasoning legitimately to discern what is fair from the unfair, the truth from the non-truth, is to offend the will of God, who has instituted that faculty so that man would achieve the moral, mental and spiritual elevation that corresponds to his condition of human."

"Allow me to interrupt, Mr. de Sándara," the author of the question expressed at this point. "I would like to state that had

I the absolute certainty of the non-existence of God, I would not have requested an opinion upon the subject. Mine would have sufficed. What I could definitely never accept were simply the conceptions attempting to illustrate a Being of such a lofty hierarchy. Until now, theology has not been successful in inspiring me to form strong convictions. I could not even support any of them as I studied the dogmas upon which each religion is based on and in which the idea of the existence of God is too distant, in my opinion, from what corresponds to such an immense paternity. As I sought to elucidate the doubts generated by the natural influence of the laws, which govern our reasoning, on several occasions I felt disturbed. It is true that philosophy, with its reflective spirit, has expressed its conceptions on the matter in a broader way, yet I could not find there a clear demonstration to convince me of that reality with unfailing evidence. It is in fact difficult to form a clear and conclusive judgment of things. More so, when each affirmation we set out to analyze is suddenly transformed into the antithesis of what we had analyzed before. Faced, therefore, with what had never satisfied my reasoning and with what I had regarded, on several occasions, as absurd or deprived of any truth, I did not hesitate to declare myself mentally and spiritually liberated. Nevertheless, my position towards God is different because I intimately feel Him and I admire Him in His loftiness and greatness. I was particularly interested in knowing, my friend de Sándara, your conception of God. That was the reason for my question, a somewhat bold question perhaps. The reply, however, has been more than satisfactory. The affirmation that the truth, the great truth, is accessible to

man's knowledge and is, moreover, the path which he will have to cover in order to approach Him, honors God's greatness and, on the other hand, honors this subject of Creation made to "His image and resemblance". Perhaps I have not understood certain parts of your thought, but I assume that you, sir, will grant me the opportunity, at a later encounter, to have them clarified."

"Gentlemen, the author of the question has just declared himself satisfied," said de Sándara, after having courteously replied to him, "but I would like to request a few more minutes to complete my explanation, that is, if it is not burdensome to my listeners."

Receiving signs of approval from the moderator and the public, he went on:

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"The eloquent response given by the author of the question, gives me the chance to refer to a point which, due to obvious reasons, I would otherwise have by-passed. I will never insist enough on the advantages of not closing the channels of the understanding to a causal investigation, through which even the greatest atheist can come to grasp the fact that man, not having been the author of Creation, someone necessarily must have been, someone who has wisely reserved for himself the control of the whole universe. How often have we not seen the atheist put on the dark glasses of the skeptic, worn by Piraeus, and declare with absolute assurance that he knows nothing about the existence of God... and does so for the sole reason that the Great Unknown has not come into the presence of his reasoning, as he presumes it should have. That is so, gentlemen. The atheist is often the most fanatic of believers, a believer of the divinity that forms his personal "I". He denies the existence of God and yet deep down inside, the beetle of doubt gnaws into his entrails.

However, it so happens that, in spite of the skepticism of many, the Great Unknown, whose existence is so strenuously denied, is paradoxically and in essence, the very existence of all that exists. And it is the duty of the human creature to feel Him and understand Him, but by means of knowledge, since only in that way will one come to truly love Him, that is, to know the supreme reasons for this love, which is an inexhaustible source of eternity.

I have met many atheists in the world and also many believers whom I have had to consider as the most atheistic of them all. I identified the latter as being amongst those who even bragged about being sincere believers of the religion they practiced. In fact, these are usually the most dreaded because while proclaiming God with their lips, they abominate and disgracefully deny His Name through their veiled undignified acts. They are the ones who throughout the ages have instigated the arm of their brothers to fatally wound innocent people for the sole reason for their thoughts being different from those of their cults. They are those as well who, for the same reason, scoffed at geniuses, heroes, illustrious inventors and researchers who have made wonderful discoveries in science. How many great figures recorded by History were subjected to the most outrageous disputes and extreme cruel persecution led by those who distribute graces and induce beliefs? And yet, each benefactor of mankind possessed a divine blossoming spark, a superiority and a greatness that were lacking in the exasperated believers who accused them of being ungodly, diabolical and heretic. The irrefutable evidence of the believer's atheism is the crimes committed during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Were these not monstrous acts produced by the atheism of those who prepared tortures and pyres to destroy and burn the glorious flesh of

so many martyrs who paid an innocent tribute to human ingratitude supported by barbarism? Were not part of the believer atheist family, always in opposition, those who, by falsifying the concept of the doctrines they claimed to profess, denied God by their acts? This is why I say that those who just believe in God surrender their soul to those who will make it intolerant and intransigent towards their fellowmen. By contrast, he who feels Him and dedicates his life to approach Him through knowledge truly knows how to love his fellowman as he loves himself, even when their thoughts do not coincide.”

“You are openly attacking religion as if it had not fulfilled, throughout the centuries, in a broad and praiseworthy manner, its pious objectives with its redeeming and civilizing work!” exclaimed an elderly gentleman with unrestrained anger, as he stood up, determined to leave.

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A disorderly commotion spread out in the room where voices of dissent and approval were heard at the same time.

“Gentlemen, I am not finished yet. I ask you therefore to hear me out calmly until the end,” replied de Sándara, raising the tone of his voice that resounded vibrant and well balanced throughout the room. “I reaffirm that it is not my purpose to attack any religion, but to invite all of them to enter the folds of reality and shed all their artifice, suggestion and whatever they know as not being truthful in order to place themselves, humanely and spiritually, if at all possible, in the broad understanding of the lofty objective that awaits the individual and mankind. The truth is one and indivisible. It is what it was, what it is and what it will be. Non-truth lacks this virtue. It has never been nor is what it claims to be, nor will it ever be. My effort aims at uncovering falsehood, mystification and deceit, the trilogy that summarizes the thought of the great imposture. What then can this or that religion fear

if they possess the truth as they claim they do? What concern can they have regarding what I say? Could it be that my words are so strong that their “truth” does not resist their influence? In any case, gentlemen, let us agree that if God has given us the use of reasoning it is to discern and judge that which is fair and truthful from what is not, with full notion of our responsibility regarding the Creator. A new spiritual treatment for all men of the world is a must at this point in the historic age of mankind. And we must understand this change and adapt ourselves to it because the very truth revealed by God – Creation – shows us, through its constant changes, that everything in it is subjected to permanent transformation. A new nature will also have to flourish in human beings as a result of this transformation, a strong nature, enhanced by an inner renovation carried out in total consciousness. This, gentlemen, is the greatest undertaking that the minds and the hearts of men can and must expect. Human beings should not lead their lives clinging to the past as if resisting or dreading the future or what is to come. This would be opposing evolution, that is, the process of emancipation of the spirit. I understand, and with this, I conclude my speech, that religions must foster unity and not obstruct it with irreconcilable intransigencies. And this unity, gentlemen, can be achieved by a mutual proximity and by a clear concept of the respect due to a healthy relationship, uniting all religions and all human beings in an effort to attain the superior truths that man will come to know, experience and have available in order to carry out the great process of his evolution.

After these final words, an interval followed.

Walking towards the lobby, whose doors led to the auditorium, the participants began to scatter around the corridors while the majority headed to the bar.

The moderator and a large group held a friendly talk with de Sándara in a room bordering the auditorium and Claudio, unable to get closer to him at that moment, spoke with several acquaintances, which in no way prevented him from assessing the effect produced by his friend's words through the hubbub agitating the room. Amongst that distinguished audience were those who approved without reservations, those who openly declared their disagreement or insinuated subtle objections and others who prudently kept silent.

Finally, when the two friends managed to get together, Claudio was visibly happy and eager to express his emotional impressions freely.

470 Once the interval ended and the room was fully occupied again by the public, the moderator announced that the speaker would then address the second question.

Standing on the stage, his hands placed on the podium, de Sándara looked kindly at the audience. He then smiled and said:

"Gentlemen, I was asked to express my opinion on the "missing link", but this time I must ask you to excuse me if I am not too explicit on the issue because the truth is that I was never too concerned about the tail, but I have always been much more concerned about the head..."

Laughter and whispers echoed through the audience.

De Sándara began his speech:

"In short, here is my opinion: even if we were to suppose that there was full consent that the famous link did exist, and some scientists have believed to have found it, in spite of the volumes of evidence that could be gathered in the future on the issue,

I consider that this fact would not have solved the problem of science regarding the origin of man since that solution would be undermined by a huge mistake. What I mean by this is that science will one day be forced to redirect its research towards other paths. The mere idea that man could descend from a monkey is a denial of the creation of the human being by the Supreme Maker. There are four natural kingdoms that integrate the beings. I affirm this in spite of the conclusions reached by the authorities on the matter assigning only three classifications. It is a mistake to have included man in the scale of the irrationals due exclusively to biological reasons. Yes, there is indeed one element that is shared by this kingdom, or better said, that is common to all the kingdoms. That element is the atom, but this has nothing to do with the possibilities of development of each kingdom and it only intervenes as an element carrying the universal energy. We must consider that man is the unique being in Creation capable of experiencing changes as a result of his own determination. This explains why, as nature fulfills its work of selection amongst the inferior species through existential cycles of long duration, the progress of the human race is driven particularly by the law governing evolution. Very well; this law of evolution, which is frequently refrained from complying with its lofty objectives because of man's habitual ignorance of its precepts, can reach the point of governing his destiny with imponderable force. This prerogative, being specific to humankind, draws an even deeper dividing line between man and the animal kingdom. This occurs by virtue of this wonderful substratum called conscience that he alone possesses and which makes him capable of experiencing

psychological transformations as well as advancing without limitations onto the path of his self-improvement, since it is in the conscience that the evolution of the spirit is confirmed and gains its potency.

Man was, therefore, created with an individuality of his own and endowed with all the indispensable attributes to evolve by himself towards a higher objective. These attributes consist of a mind capable of remembering and creating and of a conscience, which registers his progress and affirms his transcendent evolutionary changes. It also consists of a readiness or aptitude to overcome and assimilate experiences, which are psychological filters that decant the purest nectar from the cognition that conceals its lessons behind its material exterior of facts, be they exceptional or common. The mentioned attributes define quite clearly a being extraordinarily constituted and who is additionally animated by a spirit of eternal essence.”

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At that point, a member of the audience asked for the floor, showing his clear intent to sound out the speaker’s opinion on a highly debated metaphysical issue.

“If the spirit is of eternal essence, as you have just mentioned,” he said, “it becomes quite acceptable that the perpetuation of its existence is carried out by alternating periods of physical and metaphysical life. From what I understood, I would say that your thesis does not disagree with “*palingenesis*”.”

“Although the word you have used covers a very wide area in reference to the renovation or rebirth of life, I will refer to the part that is closest to my dissertation so as not to deviate from the issue. In this way, without taking an in-depth view of this

alternation, in which the spirit perpetuates its existence through consecutive human transmigration, I will focus on a point that, in addition to your immediate interest, will also be closer to our possibilities, and that is: the one concerning the ability of man to abandon a life, during the period of his existence on earth, to be reborn in another, eminently superior.”

“How can such a thing happen without the individual dying first?” objected that same participant. “We would have to attribute this to a miracle...”

“It is obviously not a question of a miracle. Miracles are opposed to reality, reason why I find it impossible not to discard them. A life can be changed for another by one just willing to do so. A man, who by his own will, abandons his old worn out habits made up of prejudices or by distorted and petty aims that do not allow for any discernment, a man who abandons such embarrassing clothes to wear the valuable and indestructible garments of a superior conception that fundamentally transforms his way of being and hence his own being, does he not abandon the life he was leading to be reborn in another? We also have the case of someone who undergoes critical periods of grief and pain throughout his existence. He might find it difficult to seek the path to happiness, yet, if he succeeds, would not such sensations of relief produced by the change make him feel reborn into another life? We can therefore see that the mutations leading to man’s spiritual evolution and his methodical steps in search of higher states of consciousness result in short, but positive survival periods, experienced by the being within his current existence. This is so real that after a while, it becomes difficult to remember the previous ways of being and of thinking, and it even becomes impossible to go back to them. Assisted by his own spirit, man can change the states

of his conscience, which tacitly implies exchanging a life for another of greater moral and spiritual hierarchy. That is why I think it is good to foster such changes since, in addition to the advantages obtained on the short term, one will know what to expect upon returning to earth after the voyage beyond the tomb... Very well, gentlemen, after this brief interruption, I will add that if the human spirit had not been made responsible for the function of gathering all that man achieves in his life, needled by the yearnings of self-improvement and of his approach to the sources of Creation, he would have had no reason to exist, nor would there be any reason for him to have been endowed with such an admirable psychological gear. It would have sufficed him to be like the irrationals who lack all the privileges granted to him for his perpetuation.

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I will now refer to the link that is truly missing, or to put it more appropriately, that has been ignored and when found could turn out to be highly beneficial to the human race. This link is the one that binds man to his Creator, the one that unites him to His Thought and to His Will. In summary, this link is the spirit, subjected to the most unfair abandonment by man who, in spite of the spectacular technical and scientific progress that characterizes our era, remains totally unaware of the mission that this spirit is called to fulfill. A mission which is to act as the trustee of the individual heritage that it safely keeps through time and as a superior being capable of enlightening human life by leading it to a destiny more in line with its great prerogatives. It also acts as the cohesive agent to the metaphysical world, which is its world and where the creative word of God vibrates continuously.

The issue, therefore, is not to scrutinize the tail for bone formations that would indicate our possible connection with the

monkeys. I insist that by following this venue and even when many have dared to proclaim the discovery of the origins of man, this research will have to start again from scratch. It is truly a useless endeavor, to search for a sign that would give evidence of our linkage to the presumed fellow locked up in the zoo. In the best of cases, this link, which has been so extensively discussed, would come to represent the non-constructive urge to have man rooted on earth instead of raising him to a higher level. And now, adding a touch of humor, one could also expect to hit the mark one day by simply attributing to such a non-prestigious relative, other than for reasons of atavistic ascendancy, the inveterate habit that some men have of copying and mimicking.

Considering that what must deeply concern man, in principle, is the discovery of this link, which will connect him to God, it is not my objective to undermine the merits of the devoted paleontologists dedicated to find a suitable place for their discoveries, since no unworthy comment can be acceptable on the noble urge that pursues the connection of the truncated threads of History and that aims to dissipate the mystery surrounding the beginnings of human life."

"You mentioned a link whose existence would not determine man's origin but his destiny," expressed with great interest one of the participants. "I would appreciate it if you could clarify this briefly."

"I suppose it would not be hard to deduce that in order to reach the truth, we must rise to it and seek the points of connection in an ascendant line, which will project the light that will reveal the secret of this origin to us. The human chrysalis must be essentially interested in the butterfly not in the caterpillar. Nevertheless,

I will say that we will start from a correct premise if we agree that man had his origin in a thought born in the Creator's mind, since it was there that everything created gained expression. In the beginning, his archetypal image had to be etched in a spiritual state and, later, as it had occurred with the minerals, the vegetation and the animals that were shaped into physical figures, the same had to occur with man, to whom God also granted exceptional prerogatives such as to surpass, by means of knowledge, the limitations of his physical and human scope. I repeat, however, that what is fundamental in my judgment must be the discovery of our destiny and not of our origin, since we would gain nothing by finding the second if we overlook the first. Let the future therefore find us holding firmly the scepter of our inner kingdom as a consequence of a determined constant endeavor, in search of the good and the truth contained in our existence. Thank you for your kind attention, gentlemen."

The speaker received applause and congratulations and was surrounded for a long time by friends and acquaintances, a few obviously seeking additional clarifications. Having complied with some of the requests, de Sándara managed to avoid staying in the club longer than necessary.

It was one o'clock in the morning when the two friends, having driven slowly along the quiet and silent streets heading home, stepped out of the car upon arriving at their destination.

Once inside the house, they had something to drink and chatted a bit.

Lighthearted and satisfied, Claudio talked with his friend in an open manner although now without the slightest indication

of the excessive enthusiasm that characterized his previous incipency, when he was hallucinated by the idea of easy conquests, which later were not confirmed by reality.

“I am sure I have discarded tonight some dogmatic roots that existed in me who knows for how long!” he said. “And all exchanged for an increase in my mental assets. The truth is that since my arrival in Mexico, they contain a far greater volume of positive values from which I aim to obtain great advantages.”

“I don’t doubt it, my friend Arribillaga, nor could I expect anything less from you,” he replied, accompanying his words with a look that deeply comforted Claudio in view of the confidence they radiated.”

He then added:

“All this is due to the cognitions with which you are familiarizing yourself and which constitute a powerful stimulus to adjust the time on the clock of life, and face the future without being hindered by a spiritual delay.”

He then stood up and, as if wishing to infuse greater encouragement into his friend’s soul, he tapped his shoulder affectionately, saying:

“We will probably dedicate part of tomorrow to carry out a meticulous review of what you keep so carefully in your assets...”

Tiptoeing so as not to disturb those who were sleeping, they both went up the stairs leading to the floor above where they separated and headed to their rooms.

Griselda enjoyed immensely the moments spent in Mariné's company, exchanging thoughts and granting her understanding and her judgment the opportunity to expand and strengthen through that exchange.

However, rarely do happy events occur without something, even a small thing, attempting to break their continuity. During these days, Griselda registered in her diary – as a record of the vacillations the mood usually undergoes when influenced by deceptive suggestions – the painful effects she felt when she noticed that she was being excluded from the attention Claudio was receiving from Mr. de Sándara. She did like to see her husband be the object of so much attention yet, she dreaded being left behind. She hid her distress as she saw that her preceptor was almost continuously dedicated to enlighten and help her husband in perfecting his spirit.

She regarded the presence of these two contradictory positions within her as being strange. She had always motivated Claudio and now, believing that he was shinning at levels that were still distant to her, she could not prevent the sorrow and the uncertainty concerning her situation from enveloping her like the cocoon envelops the chrysalis.

After strenuously searching for an explanation, it was not difficult to put an end to this conflict as she remembered that she had to discover in her mind the thought that had caused that aggravation. An array of clear images instantly invaded the area of her ideas like gathered carrier pigeons, which had been until then in hidden nests.

By clearing the clouds that darkened the sky of her understanding, her reflection led her gradually to shift her position to another

angle allowing her to make wiser considerations. By changing her angle of vision, everything appeared then absolutely natural and explainable. Both, he and she, were not meant to confront equal struggles in life, nor identical experiences. They were neither constituted identically nor destined for the same finality. What nature had lavishly granted her as a woman, endowing her with sensitivity that through knowledge made her highly receptive, had been given to him on a smaller scale due to his vigorous masculine structure destined to fight the hard battles in life by putting into play forces granted to his particular human condition. Why then, would she not think that by means of another venue, that of her natural talents, her understanding could reach comprehensions that, once adjusted to her feminine functions, would be to her as beneficial as those received by her husband from Mr. de Sándara? She had already obtained enough proof that this was absolutely possible and just remembering them was sufficient for her soul to be immersed in peace once again.

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Afterwards, she thought of Claudio, whom she placed well above herself. Had this supposition upset her? No, she could never harbor in her heart such pettiness. Furthermore, in addition to rejoicing with the idea of his triumphs, she knew that his superiority would facilitate the compliance and respect she owed him as a wife.

Bent over her small desk, Griselda reread the lines she had written about this beautiful intimate episode. Finally, with her face softened by a faint smile, she wrote with a firm hand: "After such a constructive adjustment of my ideas, why shouldn't I think also that to be excluded from Mr. de Sándara's attentions was something very well planned by him? In this case, the strategy has been successful and I must undoubtedly

thank him for the fortune of adding one more comprehension to the many I have gathered in this diary.”

A few days later, when only a short time remained in their stay in Mexico, Griselda observed that she had never experienced so severely the effects of certain truths that struggled to open a venue in her mind. Doubts, indecisions and inquietudes deluged her, producing an uneasy depression that she yearned to get rid of as soon as possible. More than one prejudice, which she had presumed to have disappeared, returned, hindering her reasoning and numbing her judgments. In fact, the assimilation of those truths, now less distant from her understanding than ever before, no matter how valuable they may have been to her aspirations, plunged her into states of perplexity.

She decided to confide such uncertainties to Mariné, who answered:

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“What is happening, my dear, should not worry you. It is a mere deviation of the great transitions that occur inside our being while we advance in search of the changes we want to introduce in our psychology.”

“I have understood, however, that we must not remain unaware of such changes....”

“Certainly, Griselda, but we must also know that while they happen we may not always be conscious of these movements. Consequently, it is natural or normal that sometimes we are surprised by the clash of elements that integrate them. We can observe, as it is now happening to you, the presence of modalities or adherences of a different composition, still not totally erased or displaced as we had thought. These modalities and adherences react and manifest themselves unexpectedly in an attitude of rejection or resistance.”

“Could it be perhaps to make us understand that they have not yet been extinguished?” Griselda asked softly.

“Exactly... But you know very well what is expected of us.”

“It is obvious, then, that my difficulty arises from non-identified thoughts that no doubt harass me to confuse me and make me vacillate in my decisions.”

“In spite of it, we should not fear them, especially if we consider that our conscience adapts automatically to what we were able to offer it.”

“Please elaborate...”

“What I mean, Griselda, is that, according to the number of cognitions we were able to entrust it with, our conscience finds at once all the necessary resources to successfully fulfill our objectives.”

“And you think that I will be successful in this regard?”

“Why wouldn’t I think so if when it comes down to it you have conducted yourself so well?”

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“I have confirmed numerous times what you just told me about the conscience. This is why, Mariné, I think I must begin a meticulous analytical critique of my internal situation without delay. In this manner, I will be able to determine, after a well-meditated comparison, the advantages to be obtained from a change of position. Otherwise, how would my conscience reciprocate in a manner equal to my merits if I continue to be distracted by idle pursuits that entertain me aimlessly?”

When called by Christina, who was in bed that day with a slight cold, Mariné took her leave from Griselda for a few moments. That afternoon, they were in a small living room next to the elderly lady’s quarters, getting ready to have a snack.

When Mariné returned, Griselda asked a new question reinitiating the dialogue:

“To what degree do you think that the woman must contribute to the purposes or objectives pursued by her husband?”

“To what degree? Oh, it finds its own level by the natural gravitation of the circumstances, do you understand?”

“I believe I do... This means that the woman’s concern, in this sense, finds its own way and is resolved according to the degree of efficiency with which she contributes to her husband’s efforts and zeal. Isn’t it so?”

“Exactly. You know that when both tread along the same path, such as ours, which is the path of truth and self-improvement, the understanding between the couple tends to expand and becomes more affectionate as well. It is necessary that both learn the task of mitigating the disagreements and difficulties produced by any difference of understanding. The harmony between both parties then emerges and this harmony, I assure you, becomes as firm and lasting as is our commitment to preserve and increase it.”

“But ideally, it is the husband who must surpass the woman in evolution, don’t you think so?”

“Look... If he who gives us his name also offers us, in addition to his love, his experience and knowledge, the communion of the spirits will tend to be faster and more perfect by virtue of what this help represents to us and by the reciprocity we feel inclined to offer him. Nevertheless, whenever this doesn’t occur or when the case is inverted, marriage can also be the place to maintain a good understanding and a stable harmony as long as, of course, we are able to intelligently adjust our behavior to the circumstances.”

"I find this easy to understand, Mariné, no doubt on account of the experiences lived in my marriage."

"Indeed..."

"I'd like to know your opinion Mariné on another matter, if you don't mind."

"Absolutely not, my dear. Speak freely."

"Well, as I observe married and single women carrying out their respective functions, I have wondered at times whether marriage doesn't grant the woman greater advantages in her task of self-improvement."

"Concerning evolution, I don't believe that this position grants her any. Married or single, the woman can also develop her efforts and follow the line of the transcendent cognition whose light excludes no one."

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"And what can we say regarding those who cannot count on such a valuable tutelage?"

"That they'll have to be guided by their own inspirations until they do find it."

"I have no doubt about it, Mariné. Claudio and I have been truly fortunate to find someone who has offered us, in this life, such cognitions with their corresponding explanations, so that we don't make mistakes in the interpretations of the secrets hidden within them."

"It's precisely in the danger of making mistakes that resides the inescapable need to be guided."

"I well know, Mariné, how difficult it is to transcend the experiences demanded by self-improvement even when we can count on this guide. That is why, it would never occur to me to

think of the possibility of achieving something effective without it. How could one, for example, be able to establish the connection existing between our inner world and the world of the spirit, if this requires one to create, beforehand, the capability to appreciate for oneself this connection? This clearly demonstrates the need to develop an aptitude, initially inexistent, which makes it indispensable to have the presence of someone who teaches us how to exercise it. By the way, Mariné, would I be wrong to think that the connection between both worlds begins to express itself with certain evidence when we experience something similar to a happy rebirth, during moments in which the need to improve all we know in our life surges within ourselves with a new vitality?"

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"You are right, Griselda. It's then that we begin to get an idea of how the two worlds connect and of what we see and learn while keeping in touch with our inner world and come to understand, either by analogy, deduction or intuition, many small mysteries that are semi-hidden in the adjacencies of the wonderful world given to us to gradually contemplate. This means that, by knowing the secrets contained in the first, we will discover the second. Only by penetrating within ourselves will it be possible to know one's spirit. The consciousness we achieve of its reality and power will help us open a passageway and tread serenely along the most beautiful of all paths."

"Appreciating these things will allow us to understand why the incorporeal world of the ideal reality is unknown amongst men where it is almost systematically denied, and even scorned."

"A clear concept is obviously lacking on this issue, and this dismisses all possibilities of alternating in both worlds and satisfying the claims and the demands of the two natures that

constitute them. In order to enjoy this prerogative, it's essential to awaken one's conscience to this reality and we know, Griselda, that this requires the participation of cognitions, unique in power and science, to preside over its enlightenment. Those who deny such possibility incur in a very regrettable mistake."

"You must have observed, Mariné, that many believe that we distance ourselves, totally and deliberately, from the current circles so as to form a group apart."

"You know that this is as untrue as it is absurd. Those who think so, my dear, are undoubtedly unaware that, in addition to living like everyone else, we greatly surpass them because we put to good use the time they lose for not having a full notion of its value, allowing us to behave according to what a broader scope of thinking and feeling demands."

Gratified by the effect produced in her by this conversation, Griselda exclaimed:

"Oh! How many happy moments the task of self-improvement provides us and how our mood becomes favorably permeated as we prepare ourselves to undertake any chore with a happy and good disposition! It's evident that our own virtues are nourished by this constant effort to extol life through the renovation of our energies and the appraisal of our qualities."

"Forgive me, dear Griselda, if I bring you back to earth from such heights," interrupted Mariné, smiling at her friend's enthusiasm. "You hardly had anything to eat! Can I help you with another cup of tea?"

"Oh! You are right! I got distracted while talking. I'll have just a cup."

Griselda followed in silence the young woman's movements. Mariné had just revived in her soul profound truths that were

assimilated by her understanding as she scrutinized, with certain mental ability, the dense and heterogeneous elements that psychologically and essentially formed her life. As a result of it, the most captivating inspirations rushed profusely to her mind mingling with the memory of her daughter. Oh, what a beautiful task awaited her mother's heart! In a world governed by confusion and distortion, she would be able to guide her correctly, supported by the truth.

The two young ladies reinitiated their dialogue, this time addressing domestic issues and later exchanging a few comments about the party given the night before at one of Christina's close friend's home, which everyone had attended.

486 Mrs. de Landivar's voice, calling them from her room, interrupted the dialogue.

"It's clear that you have improved!" Mariné said gently as she approached the sick woman's bed with Griselda.

"True, the medicine was effective, but your company will make me feel even better."

"And will relieve you from the tyranny of this prison. You have a temperament that doesn't allow you to stay put!"

"And yet, when necessary I adapt and tolerate it!"

"No one questions that! You are quite reasonable, Mother. It's a pity that although you had a slight cold last night you still went to the party."

"A small temptation... But you know that I feel much better?"

"That's good!" exclaimed Griselda spontaneously.

"Can you just fix my pillows, Mariné? And please comb my hair— it's so messy."

"You'll be beautiful in a jiffy."

When Mariné had finished her task, undertaken with zeal and tenderness, Christina breathed a sigh of relief, rewarding her protégée by exalting her kindness.

"Who knows if I have been as kind as you say!" protested the young lady. "You've been more than a mother to me and it's only fair that I aspire to be more than a daughter to you."

After sitting on the bedside, she added:

"If you recover soon, as I hope you'll do, we will take you on a daytrip we are planning."

"It will be the farewell outing," added Griselda.

"Don't mention unpleasant things!"

"They're not so any longer, Mother!"

In fact, the project that had been announced in Buenos Aires would not take long to materialize. The de Sándaras and Christina would very shortly relocate to Argentina, which was their birthplace and where they had lived many years in Buenos Aires. De Sándara had long nurtured this objective, moved by the yearning to intensify the diffusion of his cognitions in his country.

"It is a pity to have to leave this house which holds so many memories!" Mariné exclaimed.

"We will all be sorry to leave it behind," said Mrs. de Landivar with a sigh. "However, other than for the reasons that make us take this step, we must realize that life has undergone so many transformations that it becomes sensible to decide for another type of residence."

"Nevertheless," observed Griselda, "I heard Mr. de Sándara say that a similar house would be built in Buenos Aires."

"No, dear," Mariné quickly clarified "he said it and would

even do it, thinking I wouldn't be able to adapt. But Christina is absolutely right. We must reposition ourselves according to all the changes that characterize our times."

A pause followed and Christina quickly used it to ask:

"Where will we go on the outing?"

"That's still a secret." replied Mariné with a smile.

"I see. But someone more complacent than you will soon tell me." Christina said winking at Griselda.

Mariné and her friend promptly took their leave, but not before the latter whispered to Christina the answer she was expecting.

The Arribillagas' stay in the de Sándaras's warm and cherished home was permeated by sincere affection and unparalleled joy.

Claudio kept pursuing his studies in the arduous science of transcendent knowledge whose evolutionary projections outlined imponderable goals for him. There was no more doubt that, once the oscillations of his determination had been controlled, the eager recipient was prudently yet irresistibly approaching the gates of this world in whose august atmosphere the human spirit feels at home.

From her cautious position as an observer, Griselda offered her assistance with tender emotion to the accelerated development of the changes taking place within her husband's soul. She had observed how his thoughts, improving as a result of his more in-depth study, were showing great promise towards enlightening his intelligence through positive deeds of his will. It could be said that the influence of his spirit acted there with a clear sense of reality.

After surpassing the levels of mediocrity, it was obvious that Claudio had triumphed in his decision to climb the symbolic mountain of Wisdom, the highest of all goals desired by man and whose ascension requires that he first descend to the deep and ignored regions of men's inner world.

Both had seen their astonishment grow as they penetrated into the adjacencies of that incorporeal orbit, which so many times the restless human mind had intuitively expressed or imagined. The images outlined by man's fantasies about the promised Paradise for the good hearted were being replaced by the presence of an indescribable reality that surpassed them in magnificence and beauty. A new existence had dawned for them. An existence that was constant enlightenment! How far away were the old times when they compressed their days and years in the emptiness of an unproductive life for the spirit!

Griselda now felt highly motivated. When she confided to Mr. de Sándara her admiration for the panorama that life was progressively opening before her as she devoted herself to scrutinizing its secrets, he made her understand that such a fact represented the germination of a mental process that had begun in her conscience. Could that be possible? That the seed of knowledge, which in the unproductive minds remains static, had actually germinated in hers? How sweet it was to know that!

Elated by so much happiness, Griselda was determined to maintain it indefinitely. She knew that one of the keys to success consists in preserving the joys experienced by the soul, since to exhaust them on excessive surges of joy would equate losing the motivations that should be with us permanently.

Influenced by this feeling of achievement, Griselda directed her thought towards the analysis of the major qualities she needed to cultivate. "Patience," she uttered mentally, "is an admirable virtue. This virtue always offers us the joy of never having exercised it in vain. As to perseverance, it is, no doubt, another factor of utmost importance in the pursuit of our plans. Perseverance is like a huge purifying filter of our efforts that allows us to make the most of the true value of our will, thus strengthening the thought in charge of accomplishing those purposes we have conceived during the hours of inspiration."

490 In this progressive enlightenment that knowledge was promoting in Claudio and Griselda, new forms of understanding were beginning to emerge in their minds, projecting at times those to be replaced, at others those that lay forgotten or motionless, ready to be activated. In this renewed flow of images, they had found plenty of issues to stimulate the intimacy of their dialogue.

During those unforgettable days, the memory of the thoughts that had inhabited their minds at the dawning of their childhood came back, leading them to exchange their conclusions on that issue.

They started out from the accurate premise that every child is attracted to the world of the spirit. An attraction, which is defined by the frequent odd relationships maintained by children with characters that inhabit and bring joy to their small mental world and which is expressed by the influence that the spirit of each child exercises over the faculties of the gentle being it animates, and particularly over his imagination.

They had experienced personally how the splendor of those first images slowly faded away with the advent of adolescence, giving way to those that stoke the fervors of the enthusiasm at an age in which illusion lights up its beams and awakens by its reflections, strange and seductive ideas followed by painful discouragements, since the uncontrolled imagination is frequently deceived in its chimerical raptures by mistakenly taking as real, the figures that, for a few moments, are projected as a mirage on the mental steppes of unconsciousness.

Having directed their thoughts along that line, Claudio and Griselda reached the same conclusion when making a correlation between the images projected by fantasy in their minds when they were children and the secrets of the superior world, which man's intelligence discovers when enlightened by knowledge. They deduced that this correlation was more apparent than real because while in both cases the mental tonic exceeded the customary limits, they were, notwithstanding, of an antagonistic tendency. They knew that in the first case, the faculty of imagining acted without the restraint of reason, etching on the child's delicate mental screen a great number of images, many of which were related to episodes of the child's past existence that were preserved during adulthood, not just as memories but as vague impressions that usually last throughout one's whole life, perhaps with a clear intention. In the second case, the exploration was undertaken with knowledge and determination, and the most valuable elements for the conscious formation of human wisdom could be extracted from this metaphysical or superior world.

From the above mentioned perspective, they quickly came to the conclusion that the influence of the spirit, expressed during

childhood, withdrew at puberty, reason why man must seek it relentlessly until he reconnects to it. Its valuable contribution would allow him to connect to the realities of the metaphysical world, where thoughts and ideas, as autonomous entities, would serve the great objective of conscious evolution.

Bonded by the stimulating and harmonious relationship they were now enjoying, the protagonists of the drama, that one day attempted to cover with sadness the joy of their family life, were safe from the common disagreements that through accumulation, inadvertently, hinder the will of their helpless victims and hurl them incurably on the slope of irreparable damage.

It was not long ago that Claudio had allowed himself to be so aggressively and irrationally swept away by the uncontrollable impulses of his nature. Nevertheless, he had now acquired the best credentials to aspire for his preceptor's consideration. Although, every now and then, those very thoughts that used to bring about vacillations and conflicts came back to his mind, as well as the masculine episodes in the form of reminiscences attempting to resuscitate his tendency to escapades, none of it had strength within him any longer. On the contrary, it served to confirm the control he had managed to acquire over the excesses of his old weaknesses. In fact, his process had progressed so unexpectedly that he did not even have time to carry out an in-depth analysis of the events that had intervened in its acceleration.

This was how he expressed it to Mr. de Sándara in one of the moments they spent together:

“I am sure to have placed myself at a point that only a while ago was still impenetrable in the course of my evolution. Truly, Mr. de Sándara, I don’t know how to express what I feel about all the good I’ve received from you.”

“The good we do, my friend, is nothing more than the spiritual gold we save and deposit in the Universal Bank of Eternal Justice, where the credits and debits of each human being are recorded.”

“I don’t think that any other human effort can yield greater reward.”

“That is so, in fact, as long as this good represents a value that contributes to the evolutionary process of mankind.”

“By listening to you, I feel that my eagerness to increase such savings and to broaden my meager spiritual asset becomes more intense... I hope this won’t be difficult now that I no longer run the risk of deceiving my own self by believing that I could be the recipient of a happy future without having deserved it.”

“The keys to heaven, my friend, and the immunization against the accumulated errors committed throughout life, will surely not be obtained in exchange for an unconditional surrender to beliefs that nourish such a deceptive hope. No one can intervene in what is privy to our conscience and even less take on the responsibility of our deeds, shake them out in the wind and relieve us from its serious consequences. The pardons or graces conceded gratuitously to those who alienate their will under the pressure of such a huge absurdity only exist in the imagination of those who believe in this.”

"I welcome your words, Mr. de Sándara, and I consider that it's our inescapable duty to enlighten the understanding of those who nourish such hopes, unable to free themselves from the harm it produces. There is no greater heartfelt pleasure, nor greater reward than that which is provided by the good we do to our fellowman, a good that I would extend to the last man inhabiting the earth."

De Sándara, whose face reflected his approval of Claudio's spontaneous and deeply felt words, replied:

"A good that is only so when it rests upon this splendid task of extending from soul to soul, from fellowman to fellowman, the influence of high powered truths, which emancipate man's spirit from all mental oppression."

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Griselda's stature had greatly increased in Claudio's heart. He admired the way she walked by his side with no vacillations and with imponderable love and prudence.

He often thought about how much he had made her suffer when he still struggled in the darkness of incomprehension, attracted by the pleasures of the world and the frenetic impulses of passions. How many promises had tumbled down the ladder of forgetfulness! The sadness that so often hounded him was today returned by his conscience, piously transformed into the sublime effect of a more tender and pure affection he had never felt before. He felt twice as guilty when remembering that even

when he rushed into the emptiness of a sensual rapture, Griselda had always occupied the purest spot within his soul. How often had he avoided a collapse by remembering her innocent love! During those critical times, he felt as if invisible ropes, descending from high above, enveloped his body and raised him up, gently suspending and balancing him in space until his feet would touch once again firm ground. Thereafter, he would run in search of Griselda and seek in the sweet warmth of her heart, a refuge for his own, mistreated and persecuted by the weight of his errors, which made him feel ashamed. He had not been able to read into his wife's eyes the explanation for the drama he was experiencing, which was hers as well. In spite of the pain and grief, she nevertheless cured his moral wounds with the balm of her tenderness, uniquely reserved for him. After having left behind the tempestuous period of his errors, he now contemplated her from a position that he had feared he would never be able to reach, confirming, with joy, that Griselda's soul had overcome, as his did, the limits of pettiness raising his flight to the peaks where the human spirit always yearns to ascend.

One afternoon, he sat in his bedroom and was probably absorbed by the thought of those memories, judging by the tenderness with which he embraced Griselda as she approached him, seeking his company.

They delved immediately into a pleasant discussion provided by this fervent enthusiasm that seems to emerge from the very depth of life.

"I often get the feeling, Claudio, that I've added many years to my life, compressed in the short time of my evolution,

such is the force and intensity of what I've lived in this period of productive alternatives and experiences, which I see today culminating into a true apotheosis of intimate happiness. Do you know what I'm thinking?"

"What?"

"About something that is closely related to what you and I have been experiencing for a long time. At this moment, what has been lived appears to me with such clarity that I could say that only now can my thought embrace its totality. It is as if a crystal clear ray of light, penetrating freely the shadows that conceal what lies beyond, illuminates with plenitude one of the secrets that, as in a combination lock, can only be opened by he who discovers its code."

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"This happens, Griselda dear, when the dense shadows that ignorance stretches over one's understanding are dispelled by the tenacious effort, of he who has learned to wait unperturbed by the light. Now, tell me what makes your heart so happy at this moment?"

"You know, Claudio, how demanding one often is of life, without giving anything back in return or, at best, giving a satisfaction here or there."

"You're right. One seeks to draw from it all kinds of advantages to satisfy trivial pleasures and whims without considering that we must carry out what it demands of us in deeds and in behavior."

"One doesn't measure time or expenses and even mortgages one's health in selfish, passionate or ephemeral deeds. We know perfectly well that this happens because the attraction to the material predominates. However, it so happens, that even when this superior sense that blossoms like a flower in our conscience awakens within us, we continue to behave with the same despotism,

greedily seeking the pleasures of the spirit and the conquest of short term happiness, demanding that everything be granted to us in abundance for the mere fact of having had a particular interest in it. The lack of adaptation to the requirements of the reality that begins to govern us leads to these extremes... Fortunately, life itself, moved by that superior sense that has awakened in our conscience, responds with nobility claiming time, dedication, constancy, abnegation and altruism in exchange for what it will offer us as soon as we are able to conquer the essence it contains. From then on, we well know what happens: the first inner conflicts appear, aggravated mildly or intensively by our incomprehension, from which we emerge sometimes successful and other times crushed or mistreated. Only when the resistance erected by the materialistic thoughts ceases, and when thoughts that we have frequently pampered and even worshipped as well as old concepts, which have degenerated into stubborn prejudices, are replaced, only then will we begin to move with greater independence and also feel more confident in the environment that life, elevated by our own effort, offers us generously and spontaneously. Following this important change, the former world in which we lived subjected to the petty objectives of our blind ambitions disappears, leaving us suddenly as having been reborn in a different enchanting, wonderful world... Isn't this the sensation we truly experience?"

"It is indeed, darling. And as you just described it, an extraordinary mental and psychological transubstantiation is also produced in us while the purifying process of our psychological deficiencies lasts."

"We have both been subjected to the variations that indicate the first steps of our conscious mental emancipation. Were it not

so, I would not have been able to describe it nor could you have understood me as you have."

Moved by an emotion that overwhelmed her during all those days, Griselda said enthusiastically, as she savored the delicious fruits of her conscious achievements:

"Claudio, how much beauty awaits us on this path, which is so uncertain at the beginning and yet, so secure and luminous afterwards! I think that the distance we've covered in such a short time is enormous... Don't you think so?"

"Enormous within the course of our current existence, as you said, but we know that this enormous distance is only a fragment of the immeasurable extension of this path."

"That is true!"

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"You must have observed Griselda, that after a great deal of walking around and thinking, we've finally learned to assess the magnitude of the human being's problem from the standpoint of his conscious ascent to the heights of sublime Wisdom."

"Oh, yes! We have learned this while we eagerly went about searching within ourselves for the explanation of so many of life's facts and events. This is an explanation that many search outside of themselves, attempting to penetrate the life of others without realizing that those others aren't all on an equal level of evolution. Neither do they have identical inquietudes, nor similar mental and sensitive possibilities, nor the same deficiencies or the same psychological inner states."

Griselda kept quiet, and after gazing at Claudio with her eyes conveying her crystal clear soul, she said:

"You know, Claudio,. I have always wished for you what I had promised for myself, without knowing, and that is the truth, that

existed within ourselves, and so close at hand, such surprising possibilities. You are today what I intimately wished you were. Consider, then, my love, how gratefully my thought turns towards everything that has contributed to the fulfillment of my wishes!"

A sob, which is an incomparable expression of joy experienced in the intimacy of the heart as it bows reverently before the majesty of the Divine Providence, followed Griselda's words.

"Now," she said wiping her tears, "the meaning of that dream I had long ago is revealed to me. Do you remember?"

Deeply moved as she was, he held her tightly in his arms.

There, within the delicate tenderness of affection, they thanked God for the fortune of feeling indissolubly united, and once again, as a tribute to His Sublime Kindness, they consecrated the thought that would always have Him preside the joys and celebrations life might bestow upon them.

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Once this emotional moment had passed, Claudio could not hold back these words, welcomed by Griselda with a smile:

"If I had to express precisely what I feel, I would hope that all the favors we have been granted last till the end of our days. But you, my darling, how significantly you have contributed to this! You have motivated me and helped me reach this culmination, which I will call the triumph of clarity over the shadows, of light over the blindness of understanding and that of the spirit over the instinct!"

Claudio's face clearly radiated the satisfaction of having offered Griselda such a sweet compensation.

It was late afternoon. A mild temperature emerged from nature's gentle bosom, softening the rigors of the approaching autumn. Accompanied by their friends in the garden of the house, Ebel and Mariné were enjoying the fresh open air. Above them, a sky still brightened by the rays of the setting sun on the horizon was like a transparent veil that seemed to be delineating the border between earth and the high regions of the spirit.

Under its soothing influence, Claudio and Griselda contemplated it for a moment, perhaps with that concealed emotion experienced when facing the eternal mystery.

Sitting in a comfortable armchair, de Sándara was quietly smoking a Cuban cigar.

500 All remained almost silent, as if by a common yearning. One comment or another, uttered surely with the intent to interrupt so much quietude, faded out without a response.

How many different interesting images were parading on the mental retina of each one of them during that pleasant pause! Claudio, who was perhaps the most absorbed in thought, indulged himself by remembering the precision with which he had been guided to this world from which an impenetrable darkness had initially separated him. That darkness had been created by the eyes of his understanding, which had been shut by prejudice, by vanity, by intemperance and by so many similar psychological faults. The fear to open them, to see the light of this world illuminating the deep darkness of his soul and the baggage of his errors, had eclipsed his reasoning more than once. Nevertheless, the timely intervention of Mr. de Sándara, or some assistance linked to him, helped him avoid, just in time,

being harmed by his collapses until the day when, accelerating his pace, he got used to looking fearlessly onto the crystal-clear spiritual dawn. Claudio remembered this during these moments as he was experiencing the indescribable pleasure of having found the keys to his own mystery, the same every human creature must discover within the folds of his life, being careful not to get lost, since this is a zone totally unknown to common knowledge.

At that moment, de Sándara broke the silence by addressing a few words that brought Claudio back from his abstraction:

“What are you thinking about, my friend? Reminiscing, perhaps?”

“Yes, reminiscing,” he replied and then added: “I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to forget, Mr. de Sándara, the movements of resistance deployed by my inferior nature to oppose my initial efforts to liberate myself from it. At that time, I didn’t know my own reality and, consequently, my efforts to retain it were weak.”

“This rebellion of the instinct is so logical...”

“Oh, indeed it is! After having been pampered for so long, it doesn’t easily submit, just like that, to a severe abstinence.”

“As you know,” continued de Sándara, “the neurons resent, even though momentarily, the unexpected sedative treatment imposed upon the nervous fibers, after having been maintained under tension at the service of instinctive functions.”

“This happens when the superior nature begins to act by means of the psychological articulation within a new line of behavior.”

“Exactly. And it is when man finally realizes that being a servant isn’t the same as being a master, although both live in the same palace. It is also then that he becomes convinced that he’ll always end up winning if he serves his goals of self-improvement at every

opportunity, rather than join in the game of circumstances, which chance manages whimsically at his expense.”

“Initially, our conditions are so extremely precarious,” expressed Griselda, “that it isn’t easy to avoid the untimely turns of our desires. Knowledge itself has not yet been enriched by the contribution of experiences in this new way of life, leaving us with a mere intuitive glimpse of the objective we seek, often losing sight of it, on account of these same oscillations we struggle with.”

“True, but we must admit,” pointed out de Sándara broadening the concept, “that all this disappears when man commits himself seriously to the idea of exchanging his life for a magnificent one that he intuitively foresees. From that moment on, he would have already ceased to covet the seductive lives that delight this inferior nature we have been mentioning.”

502

Claudio intervened, repeating what he had grasped from these last words:

“When you mention these lives, I assume you are referring to the variety of behaviors inspired by our passions or weaknesses. They absorb a great part of the time we must dedicate to the intellectual and spiritual enrichment of the life that ought to be most precious to us.”

“So it is, Arribillaga. That is the life, which demands from us the privilege of being sovereign in our sleep and vigil, and for this, we are offered its unequalled wealth of satisfactions. For those who let themselves be captivated by the fallacies of the senses and submit to the spell of a frivolous sensual life, there can be no exorcism against such enchantments. Passions shackle man to the rock of adversity, and as he doesn’t descend

from Prometheus' lineage, it won't be easy to find the Hercules who will free him from the vultures awaiting his slow torture."

Maybe none other than Claudio himself better understood those words that penetrated deeply, allowing him to see the scenarios described by de Sándara, as if they had taken place in eras long past. Nevertheless, he felt that he would not go back to being the protagonist of such scenes. Furthermore, he knew that all the episodes he had been through were not mere effects of chance and that, sometimes, even when opposing or resisting change, he had nonetheless, progressed along the steps of this psychological process. A process that was now culminating, by awakening in him the same sensations experienced by those who, after a tiresome search, find a treasure or see their efforts rewarded by some discovery.

Having reached that point today and, as a consequence of the enchantment of the reality he had dreamed of, or better said, facing his dream come true, he felt the weight of the responsibility of possessing it and the obligation to adapt to his new existence. The doors that were opening to reveal the secret of coveted mysteries to him did not move by chance. No! He himself, through his own efforts, had made them give in, after bearing for a long time, the vicissitudes of an inner process, which, once matured in his conscience, granted him the aptitudes required by the lucid moment he was going through.

"I can clearly affirm," expressed Claudio to de Sándara, as the meeting was coming to an end, "that nothing I had read or heard concerning the superior life is comparable to what I've confirmed, experienced and understood during these past months. I'd have obtained nothing or very little without the invaluable orientation that you, Mr. de Sándara, have offered me. Our inexperience and inconstancy continuously threaten

our best purposes and if we were to add the inconveniences of doubt and the weaknesses of character, it wouldn't be difficult to assume that our will would risk sinking in the midst of powerful moral storms. With what immense pleasure I contemplate the distance covered while anchored to the impregnable fortress of my convictions! It's said that money attracts money, as glory attracts glory. However, we mustn't forget that prior to having these values come to us, we must first face the struggles, the efforts, the insomnias and the anxiety. And not in the same way human gullibility or unconsciousness sometimes attempts to acquire them by means of just an enthusiasm not exempt from selfishness. My life, Mr. de Sándara, already belongs to the generations of the spirits that follow the path of the psychological and mental emancipation of the human race. You have made me discover wonderful things of the world promised to those with an honest heart and understanding, to those who possess the gift of ubiquity, to those who, without leaving this earth, always live in the sublime regions of that world. I say this as an offering of gratitude to Providence that has guided my steps to the invulnerable summit of mastery from where I humbly invoke the historical development of events that have molded my destiny."

After following Claudio's thought closely, de Sándara stretched out his hand without saying a word.

Nothing was more appropriate to this circumstance than silence. Its extremely refined golden mesh crowned this spontaneous tribute to the truths that inspired him.

Finally, de Sándara said:

"To be fair, Arribillaga, I must add a few words to yours. Although your wife's destiny did not require her to undergo similar difficulties, she has notably exceeded my expectations and, to tell

you the truth, she possesses today several valuable elements that ennoble her in the eyes of that same Providence you have referred to. Her privileged sensitive capability has allowed her to capture the real wave that conveys to the human heart the inviolable dictates of knowledge. By following them, she has oriented her behavior, invariably dignified, towards the pursuit of her ideal, without ever wavering when faced with difficult situations, but relying solely on the purity of her feelings and, as I mentioned, on her privileged sensitivity.”

“Thank you, Mr. de Sándara. This is more than I deserve,” uttered Griselda, her voice choked by emotion.

“After this joyful moment, let us now go inside. There, we’ll toast to our future days being like pearls filled with happiness, which we’ll thread into the necklace of our life.”

505

And so it was that this unforgettable day was coming to an end under the most favorable expectations.

Claudio Arribillaga had deeply absorbed with great benefit the elements, which de Sándara was attempting to convey to him until the very last moments of his stay in Mexico, in order to equip him for a better future behavior. In addition to being receptive, he was capable of assimilating correctly such elements. He delighted in assessing the depth of the new explanations given by de Sándara to enlighten him on the constructive mechanism of certain cognitions that, once incorporated into the realm of his intelligence and, with his help, would allow him

to establish precisely the dimensions of each objective he would set for himself and its relation to his true possibilities.

He knew how to distinguish clearly between the constructive wealth of resources, which tended to activate his cognizant aptitude, those he would use to expand his mind's creative capability and those that would serve to increase his willpower and his manly resistance so as to bear, with no dejections or vacillations, the severe tests, whether they be of low or high intensity and without exception, that man is compelled to face in life.

506 Having strengthened his spirit to a high degree, he felt his forces grow and knew he was ready to undertake the return to his homeland where he would continue his studies and investigations of the noble science of the metaphysical cognition. Now, more than ever before, he was determined to occupy an advanced position in this great heroic work of emancipating the human spirit, undertaken by de Sándara. He would be able to count on the important cooperation of his friends and that of Griselda's equally valuable assistance, since she would be the most important associate as well as an essential part of his happiness and of those who surrounded them. He had finally learned how to tread along this world's paths without losing his bearings. At the same time, he had begun the journey on this Great Path, whose objective is the maximization of human accomplishments, that is, the explanation of one's own life, the election of one's destiny, the reencounter with one's spirit – alienated by man since the early years of his childhood – and finally, having mastered the science of the transcendent knowledge, to serve mankind with wisdom, patience, tolerance and prudence. By exercising the supreme art of teaching the truth, by knowing the periods of time necessary for the fruits of the symbolic tree of knowledge to

ripen, and by waiting intelligently for this time, Claudio experienced the trans-human happiness of having been initiated into the mysteries of the loftiest of sciences, that of the transcendent cognition that opens, as a master key, the doors that give access to the invisible world of universal conceptions: the Mental World of Creation.

As they all met again on the eve of their departure, de Sándara, having observed some melancholic attitudes due to the situation, said:

“Even though goodbyes always touch our sensitivity, I regard them as highly beneficial whenever they are said under the sign of esteem and friendship. They make us think and bring to memory valuable facts and details that greatly compensate for the continuous habits in relationships. When they contain promises for a new encounter, absences serve to strengthen the links of mutual affection, like the one that bonds us today, to sign off with an ‘au revoir’ at the moment of our departure.”

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With the intent of leaving behind something to be engraved in his friends’ minds and make them think, he added:

“As a final recommendation, I’ll refer to a truth that I’d like to see deeply etched in you.”

After a pause, he went on:

“Human life obeys irresistibly the oscillations of its evolutionary pendulum. This pendulum is subjected to the magnetic influence of two linguistic particles expressing two antagonistic forces which take hold and fight for authority over the events that lead to the destiny of the human creature: the monosyllable “yes”, an adverbial sign of affirmation and an emblem, at the same time, of goodness and happiness; and the monosyllable “no”, a sign of negation constituted, after setting its purposes, by adversity, misfortune and despair. When the two syllables, the “yes” and the “no” come together in hybrid matrimony and life becomes governed

alternatively by each of them in a monotonous and non-transcendent process, they form the word “sino”¹, synonymous with adversity. This is the end of all those who do not know how to build a better destiny for themselves by reducing the influence of the “no” by overcoming it, so that life can be converted into a permanent affirmation of all that exists as noble, sublime and great in the minds and hearts of men. Every human being, even unknowingly, dedicates his best efforts in trying to possess this coveted syllable as a consequence of each desire, of each aspiration or objective. It is the musical note that man longs to hear from the woman he loves, and it is also the one that presides over joy and triggers the gratitude and the exultation with which we celebrate the small and great events of our life. The opposite occurs with the “no”, whose gloomy presence is reflected in the sorrow and the tears that mist our eyes, as if to express the happiness or goodness that was denied to our hearts. In order to increase the volume of the “yes”, which in the final analysis, consists of the vital force that nourishes our hopes, and decreases the “no”, which oppresses and rejects, we must work tirelessly for the improvement of our life’s work and perfect it in such a manner that it will allow us to share generously the happiness and goodness we have conquered.”

On the following day, when their plane flew high southern bound, Claudio and Griselda immersed in unforgettable emotions, remembered the moments spent together with those beings whose souls mirrored their lives, worthy of the respect and the affection of all those who benefited from their friendship.

The clear, affectionate and convincing voice that had so generously shed over them the wealth of his wisdom would

1. In Spanish, the words Yes and No translate into “si” and “no”. Combining them gives the word “sino”, which also means fate. There is no equivalent word in English.

continue to vibrate in the intimacy of their souls, sustained by the indestructible memories of the days spent in that unsuspected oasis of dreams they had come to know in Mexico: the home of Mr. de Sándara.

Este livro foi composto em Fairfield LT Std Light.
Impresso em papel XXXXXXXX.

This is a psychodynamic novel which, while it delights its readers, it instructs them about the deepest secrets of human behaviors in their most diverse states of consciousness.

It describes special moments of human life in their exact dimensions and projects a vision of a destiny worthy of an advanced civilization.

