

The White Revolution

Koenraad DE WOLF

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DEDICATION

To the people of Cuba who're suffering yet for 60 years the
Communist yoke.

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1 MIRROR

‘Every recollection, is a form of meeting.’

The penetrating voice of José Conrado Rodríguez hushes the buzz in the packed Saint Rita Church along Havana’s Fifth Avenue.

‘Laura Inés Pollán Toledo died five years ago, on that fateful 14th October 2011, in mysterious circumstances.’

The small priest with his thick-set figure hits a raw nerve.

‘Her physical features appear less sharp into our mind while the ravages of time mercilessly completes her work. But the longing to meet that exceptional woman again, brings us together. We safely rely, as Christians, on the fact that we’ll meet her again when also our way comes to an end.’

A mischievous smile appears on his face José Conrado’s sense of humor comes to the surface.

‘I want to reassure some of you. The pastor of this parish is impeded by circumstances.’ He coughs. ‘Therefore, the family asked me to lead this celebration. And by coincidence a favorable wind brought me from my Babylon in Trinidad to the capital.’

Laura’s widower Héctor Maseda Gutiérrez sits on the first row. The man with his short hair and sharp looks, wears his best costume. Next to him are his stepdaughter Maria Labrada, the daughter of Laura from a previous relationship, her cousin Celia and Celia’s daughter Azahara. After the death of Paula, her twin sister, Laura vouched for Celia’s education. The three women wear a white t-shirt with the image of the deceased leader of the Damas

de Blanco, the well-known female opposition movement in Cuba. Azahara, the youngest member of the family, attracts attention by her extravagant hairstyle, gel nails, plucked eyebrows, rings and big earrings.

More than one hundred women in white are gathered in the Church. José Conrado directs a conspiratorial wink to some familiar faces. Then, for a second, he fixes his gaze on a man with a beard and gray hair behind Celia, with next to him a young man with black hair and a mustache. ‘I don’t know them’, he mumbles inarticulately.

The priest puts his hands on the lectern. His wide-open fingers are stretched tight and the grooves on his face show the traces of his years of lonely fight against social injustice and the curtailment of liberties. The “Cardinal of the people” has always been an idealist. He states in sharp words what many people only secretly think.

‘The cheerful Laura. That literally small lady with her spindly green eyes and blonde hair was great in her simplicity. She loved her cats and took care of her plants every day. And she diligently carried out her job at the university. She taught thousands of students the love for South American literature. Gabriel García Márquez, the maestro of magic realism, gave color to her life. Till the Black Spring in March 2003 exploded, the darkest page in recent history. 75 men...’

A woman in the second row shakes her head. José Conrado looks Martha Beatriz Roque in the eyes.

‘Sorry, Martha. 74 brave men and one courageous woman were sentenced to 1,500 years of imprisonment. The world of Laura collapsed when her husband Héctor was sentenced on a show trial to twenty years. That ruthless persecution hardened her soft voice. Denouncing this injustice day by day made her tongue as sharp as a knife. But what can one woman do against an oppressive system that was and still is ubiquitous?’

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José Conrado takes a few secret agents in his sights. They're spread out in the Church and also wear white t-shirts. Most attendees recognize them because of their cramped attitude. The man who makes notes, stuffs his booklet covertly in his back pocket. The priest continues calm but confident.

'Laura with a handful of companions founded the Damas de Blanco. Her house in the Calle Neptuno 963 became the headquarters of the movement and a haven for sympathizers from all over the country. Every day her front door stood wide open. Laura invariably dressed in white welcomed her visitors with a broad smile. And on Sunday mornings she sat here, on the first row. After mass she demonstrated in silence with her colleagues in the nearby park under the slogan *Todos Marchamos – We march together*, only armed with a white gladiolus.'

José Conrado elevates his voice.

'No scream sounds as loud as silence. Those brave women were presumably arrested a hundred times. But the harder the repression struck, the more their peaceful marches aroused admiration in the entire world.'

By his penetrating voice and inspiring force the audience hang upon his lips.

'Laura's struggle however didn't end with Héctor's release. She remained a pebble in the shoe of this heartless regime because she identified herself with the women of all prisoners of conscience. *Our fight goes on until the last is freed*, was her life's motto. Pope Francis would love her because she has, as he asks, shown mercy by her every day's fight for justice and solidarity for people who're suffering and whose rights are violated. But who would dare to think ...'

José Conrado gets a frog in his throat.

'... that she wouldn't leave the hospital alive because of a respiratory infection.'

His anger once again takes the upper hand during the

subsequent silence;

‘It’s imperative that people can talk with no holds barred and *a calzon quitado* – *without underwear*. Because on everyone’s lips the questions: “what went wrong?” and “could she been saved?” still burn. He once again lifts his voice. ‘Did this regime want her to survive?’

His hard language stirs many emotions, but with both hands he calms the attendees, keeping his eyes towards heaven.

‘I can see on Laura’s face, here above, her eternal smile seeing all her loved ones again. And it seems that also the white gladioli on the altar still mourn her death. The gladiolus was her and the Damas de Blanco’s favorite flower because of its beautiful form and symbolic meaning. The Latin word gladius means “sword”. Flowers as swords in a peaceful fight for justice. The liturgical color in this celebration is also white. And *La Santa Mambisa*, the statue of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre in the left side chapel, also wears a cloak of gold and white. The color white as the aggregation of the colors of the spectrum not only represents Christ, the light of the world, but also the virginity and the innocence of Mary, a person who was so close to Laura’s heart. Furthermore it symbolizes the goodness, the truth, and above all the love that she has given us in abundance.’

His voice echoes in the Church. The parabolic arches of the imposing building, in which the horizontal concrete beams lay the attention on the altar, strengthens the power of José Conrado’s words. When he takes a respiratory pause, only the monotonous sound of the fans and the rushing cars on Fifth Avenue break the silence on this sultry evening.

‘Laura dreamed to wake up one day in a free country. *What*

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Cuba needs, is real change, real freedom and real democracy, she always said. She harbored the same thought of José Martí, the father of our fatherland. A century ago he bundled the forces to free Cuba in a peaceful way from the Spanish colonial yoke, just as Laura and her Damas de Blanco did. But Martí in the end took up arms.'

The priest is lost in thought for a moment.

'At my arrival this afternoon I remembered the words of poet Pedro Luis Boitel who felt like a child at home in this church: *They use brute force, but I have the moral force*. Pedro died forty years ago after a hunger strike. Orlando Zapata Tamayo followed his example. He told me when I visited him shortly before his death: *When I die, others will continue my action*. And that happened.'

The lower lips of the priest vibrate.

'Wilman Villar Mendoza was the next one.'

'And Payá?' someone asks loudly.

'No, I've not forgotten Oswaldo. How could we ever forget him?'

Payá was the beacon of the pacifist Christian Liberation Movement MCL, a dissident party advocating political change in Cuba. His Varela project collected 25,000 signatures in an attempt to enforce a referendum on freedom of speech, press, association and religion. According to the Constitution 10,000 signatures suffice, but what followed was the Black Spring. Forty of the 75 convicts are members of the MCL. And the *Dirección General de Inteligencia*, the hated secret service DGI, killed Payá in a staged car accident.

'Laura, Pedro, Orlando, Wilman and Oswaldo are martyrs of our time.'

José Conrado bends his head.

'Let's pray that they may rest in peace and in freedom.'

He waits for one moment.

‘I was fascinated on my way to the capital, by the question what has become of Laura’s inheritance. The handling of her mortal remains touched me deeply. One half is located with her family in Havana, and the other half in Manzanilla, her hometown. Only after a long search at the cemetery I found her anonymous grave with the letters LIPT, the initials of her name.’

Perseverance sounds in his voice. The priest has visible difficulties to bridle his anger.

‘But what hits me even most, is that only a shadow has remained of her inspired movement.’

A reproachful look goes from left to right.

‘Let’s reflect in this memorial celebration on the question whether we’ve honored Laura’s memory’, he continues painfully slow. ‘And that we will do with some music.’

José Conrado nods to the man with a guitar in the doorway of the sacristy. Under the big sunglasses and black hat of musician Carlos Varela his gradually gray beard, mustache and long hair appear. Many attendees react surprised. The man is not allowed to perform in Cuba by the hidden criticism in his lyrics. He hangs his guitar over his shoulder and modestly says: “For Laura. A Holy woman of our time.”

From the first note a spontaneous applause breaks out. *Una palabra – A word* is one of his most famous songs. Although that music is taboo on the state radio and TV, many know the text by heart. Varela’s music is often played on radio and TV Martí in Miami. Others know it from *El Paquete* and *El Paketito – The Package*. These USB-sticks contain music, movies, entertainment, TV shows and documents downloaded from *You Tube* or other social networks that circulate on the Black Market.

Varela brings an emotional interpretation with his raspy voice.

Una palabra no dice nada

A word doesn't say anything

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Y al mismo tiempo lo esconde todo
And at the same time it hides everything
Igual que el viento que esconde el agua
Just like the wind that hides the water
Como las flores que esconde el lodo.
Like the flowers that hide the mud.

Una mirada no dice nada
A look doesn't say anything
Y al mismo tiempo lo dice todo ...
And at the same time it says everything ...

Una verdad no dice nada
A truth doesn't say anything
Y al mismo tiempo lo esconde todo ...
And at the same time it hides everything ...

Si un día me faltas no sere nada
If one day you need me, I'll be nothing
Y al mismo tiempo lo sere todo
And at the same time I'll be everything
Porque en tus ojos estan mis alas
Because in your eyes are my wings
Y esta la orilla donde me abogo,
And the shore where I drown

José Conrado remarks how one of the agents of the DGI leaves, after having eye contact with his colleagues. That's a bad omen. The church thunders on its foundations at the end of the song. But the priest restores the peace with a wide gesture and his natural charisma.

'We're now listening to two Bible texts that were very dear to Laura. The first is taken from *The Letter of St. Paul to the Galatians*.'

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

José Conrado looks up and repeats determined. 'We're free people because Christ has set us free.' He nods to Carlos Varela who repeats the first stanza of *Una palabra*.

'The second reading comes from *The Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians*.'

We are subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out but we never despair; we are pursued but never cut off; knocked down, but still have some life in us.

He bows, kisses the text and puts the Bible on the lectern.

'The words we've just heard, my beloved believers, date from the earliest years of Christianity. The first communities were at that time heavily haunted.'

By the vibrant timbre of his voice the Church becomes noiseless.

'These texts sound so familiar to us because the persecution of faith is of all times. Christ gives us the courage to meet the great challenges that also arise in our country. The first reading tells us the essence. Christ wants everyone to enjoy freedom.'

He lifts his voice once more.

'Christ died, is risen and has sent us his holy spirit for our unconditional and not to restrict freedom.'

To let these words penetrate deeper José Conrado holds on for a while. 'And everyone recognizes the second lecture. Yes, we're tested and embarrassed every day. Yes, we're persecuted and trampled. But we'll never be crushed, driven to despair or let down, because at any time we can count on the power of God. No one

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can seize that weapon from us.’

The priest doesn’t mince matters.

‘For 60 years any kind of free speech is curbed. Who among us has never been arrested, tortured or imprisoned?’

Many attendees nod.

‘Only exceptionally someone surrendered. I personally don’t know a believer who has renounced his faith behind bars. Quite the contrary. This regime will never succeed in its goals, even when everyone here present would be arrested and thrown into prison. Why?’

His voice echoes in the Church.

‘Because faith is the most invisible but most powerful weapon on Earth. And we Cubans, still have an additional weapon: *La Santa Mambisa*.’ He once again points at the statue of Mary in left side chapel.

Twenty years ago at the commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of Our Lady of El Cobre ‘Our Holy Pope, John Paul II, said: *Totus Tuus – I am wholly yours*’. Whenever we’re persecuted or when the truth is disguised as lies, *La Santa Mambisa* and God are our rocks, our grasp and mainstay in heaven.’

The priest throws a wink to Varela. The musician is surprised. He takes his guitar and sings the well-known song *Colgando del cielo – Hanging from the sky*.

Also now many attendees sing along the chorus:

Yo he visto al bien con los ojos del mal

*I’ve seen the good with the eyes of the evil
como un ciego feliz en la oscuridad*

like a happy blind man in the dark

nena no se lo que va a pasar

a baby that doesn’t know what will happen

si la mentira se disfraza como la verdad
If the lie is disguised as truth

Pero Dios, pero Dios
But God, but God
sigue siendo tu anzuelo
he's still your hook
colgando del cielo.
hanging from the sky

José Conrado continues even more resolute when he remarks some dozens of armed agents in the main entrance on Fifth Avenue.

‘God won’t abandon us even now. But if we want that Paul’s words become a reality, we’ve to join forces. The question is whether this is possible in a country where “others” always solved our problems. After the independence of the Spaniards the Americans, the Soviets, the Chinese and the Venezuelans came. Today we’re facing the challenge to put our destiny into our own hands. That’s not easy at all in a country where everything is controlled and everyone lives continuously in fear of being arrested and to lose their job and their home. Or even worse. The fear that their parents and children will also be sacrificed. It’s true that this regime is at a dead end for years. That I already wrote in my *Open Letter* to Raúl Castro in 2009. I’m sure that in the short term a turning point is unavoidable.’

The man clenches his fists.

‘I can’t stand the suffering of my people and the growing inequities any longer. And every sane person shares that view. Long ago the Italian writer Dante Alighieri wrote in his *Divine Comedy* that the ninth circle or the deepest pit of hell is reserved for the traitors: those who stand idly by and remain silent in times of crisis. Well, I don’t want to end up in hell, but in heaven.’

José Conrado becomes bold again.

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‘A lot of things will occur in our country. But whatever may happen, you can count on my full support and the support of all inspired church people. The answer to the question “why?” is quite simple. Because that’s the essence of being a Christian. A priest has to live as the Good Samaritans in solidarity with anyone who stands up for freedom and justice, who suffers, who needs help and who sins. So the Church will be an ally of the Cuban people in what is forthcoming. A spiritual struggle between good and evil, between God and the devil will arise inevitably. Many of you cherish a special veneration for Saint Rita of Cascia, the patron saint of this church, whose image you see behind me. She’s, as you can read on the banner, *El abogado de lo imposible – The advocate of the impossible*. But our fight isn’t impossible. With the positive cooperation of everyone we can create a better society for everyone.’

The pastor takes a note from his prayer book. ‘José Martí wrote in 1875:’

A people starts to be independent when it advises concepts of life who are radically opposed to the habits of servility of the past. Juntarse: ésta es la palabra del mundo – Come together is the most important word of the world.

‘The two keywords are: *Cubanos Unidos – Cubans United*.’

These words cause a huge sensation. The just launched emotions makes way for an icy silence. On a reproachful tone José Conrado continues modestly: ‘My heart weeps when I look at the increasing disagreement within the opposition. Not only between the Damas de Blanco, but also between several groups in favor of a gradual transition towards democracy and those who want to make a radical descent with the regime.’

The opposition leaders look, visibly surprised, desperately at each other.

‘I don’t have any political or other ambition. I want to help

where needed as a man of God and a man of the people, thus both are inseparable for me. But to what extent surmount the personal ambitions of some to the pursuit of happiness for the Cuban people?’

His eye catches once more the man with the gray beard behind Celia who wholeheartedly agrees. The priest uses the approved carrot-to-stick technique to bring the people to a deeper insight.

‘Every recollection is a form of meeting’, he continues with a soft voice.

He points at a photo of Laura on a tripod in the main corridor.

‘I would like to invite you for the sacrificial ceremony. We can express our appreciation for Laura with a bow or by touching her photo, and a kiss on the cross to show our respect, devotion, and love for all that Jesus has done for us by means of the cross. Because Laura’s picture finds oneself behind glass, our image will be reflected in hers. That mirror confronts us with the question whether we’ve entered in her footsteps.’

An instrumental song by Varela accompanies the sacrifice ceremony. Many are overwhelmed by a strange feeling and don’t know what attitude to adopt. And during the Sign of Peace José Conrado invites everyone to express their love and sense of community. He shakes the hand of the people on the first row but many attendees feel embarrassed and uncomfortable about the idea of shaking hands or sharing a kiss of peace with other people. And a possible reconciliation between the two groups of the Damas de Blanco is out of the question. Maria Labrada, Laura’s daughter, with her supporters in the right aisle, and Berta Soler with her followers in the left aisle don’t even adjudge the merest glance.

Carlos Varela sings during the communion *Cambia – Change.*

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Te hace mal

You feel sad

La desilusión, la noche, el día.

The disappointment, the night and the day

Te hace mal no reír

You feel sad not to laugh

Y te hace mal que otros se rían.

And you feel sad that others laugh to themselves

Te hace mal

You feel sad

Los diarios, la televisión,

The newspapers, the television

Las viejas profecías.

The old prophecies

Te hace mal

You feel sad

La ciudad que no fue

That the city wasn't

Como el sueño que una vez tenías.

Like the dream you once had.

Cambia

Change

Cambia de color, de gurú, de chamán

Change of color, guru and shaman

Cambia el norte, cambia el sur

Change the north, change the south

Y hasta cambia el mar

And change even the sea

Y verás que va cambiando todo lo demás

*And you will see that everything else is going to
change*

At the end the call *Cambia* sounds louder and louder and José Conrado loses control. Armed security forces storm forward along the aisles and block the side entrances. A wave of shouting and screaming echoes through the Church. The pastor who's cleaning his ciborium, recognizes their Commander: Director-General Jesús Camilo Losaja, the head of the Secret Service GDI.

The priest grabs the microphone. 'The more batons of hatred and revolvers of cowardice are used, the stronger our voice will resound.'

The altar boys keep the agents who want to silence him standing. 'The more resentment we share, the more love we give. The more we're trampled, the more respect we show. The more violence we're affected by, the more peace...'

The agents overpower José Conrado and put him in handcuffs. Paralyzed with fear Carlos Varela puts his guitar in the air. He's removed while an agent smashes his guitar on the ground. A clanging flute tone echoes through the speakers when Losaja puts the microphone almost in his mouth. 'The building will be evacuated and everyone's identity checked. Who doesn't follow our orders, ends up behind bars for three months. Article 204 of the criminal code', he grinningly adds.

But people full of fear start shifting the benches to prevent that they're taken away. And who's caught, gives resistance. While Maria Labrada tries to escape, the man with the white beard takes Celia's by the arm. She's panicking.

'It's me, José Espinosa Chepe. The professor.'

Celia designates him first, and then cries out: 'The professor?!'

'I'm disguised', he tries to convince her. He opens his shirt and shows the amulet of Our Lady of Charity of El Cobre. 'Blessed by the Pope. Laura ordered you to give this to me.'

Celia is transfixed.

The man anxiously looks around. '*La Santa Mambisa* has always protected me. And she'll also do this right now. But we've

to leave immediately. There's still one way out: the sacristy!

Celia takes her stepfather and daughter by the arm and follows Gonzalo, the also disguised grandson of the professor who pushes a way out into that direction. The professor shoves an agent who tries to seize his foot on the stairs of the choir out of the way. The agent loses his balance and falls.

The professor notices in a flash how other agents come into their direction when he finally enters the sacristy. Gonzalo locks the door and with joined forces they barricade it with the heavy sacristy wardrobe. They flee across the adjoining rectory and parish hall to the adjacent park.

From behind the tropical trees they see how Fifth Avenue is barred in the direction of Miramar. Around the corner towards Third Avenue Celia throws herself at the professor.

'I finally meet the man I heard talking about my entire life.'

But the professor reacts aloof. 'I had no choice but to disguise me. It's still not allowed to contact your family.'

Celia weeps tears of happiness. 'Now you've to go with us. We've lots to talk about.'

The professor who hesitates, introduces his grandson and commands him to hold a taxi. Moments later a Chevrolet from the 1950s stops. In Havana some ten thousand of these old cars still drive around.

'Where do you want to go?' the man smiles.

'Calle Neptuno 963.' Celia replies enthusiastically.

'Take the place in front.' The professor opens the door for Héctor. 'Out of respect for everything you and your wife have done.' Then he urges the others to hurry up. 'Or are we waiting for our arrest?' he whispers between his teeth.

Azahara crawls on the lap of her mother, where upon Gonzalo and the professor get in. He orders the driver two blocks further to return in the opposite direction to Fifth Avenue. So they can see at the opposite side of that broad avenue what's happening in the Church. Hundreds of security forces lead the churchgoers with hard hand to buses with a running engine around the corner of the Calle 26. José Conrado suffers hard strikes and someone pulls at Varela's hair. Also María Labrada is taken away. And an old woman, who's not fast enough, suffers blows from truncheons. In the meantime a team of Cuban television makes recordings.

'An *Acto de repudio*', the professor reacts disgusted. 'That repudiating action gets the support of paramilitary units. Students from the universities and colleges as far as I can see. Those people are still easy to manipulate for money.'

'That's true. Fifty pesos or two CUC per evening', knows Azahara.

The professor looks her straight in the eye.

'I've never participated', she says indignantly, 'although I desperately needed the money. I'd rather work for a starvation wage as a dishwasher in a state restaurant where Transtur conveys busloads of tourists.'

'I'm willing to bet that in the Police Office of Miramar everything is prepared to register the detainees', Gonzalo says businesslike. 'And these signs and banners from the depot of the Secret Service are employed at every repudiating action. In advance the young people get unlimited rum, whereby intriguers stir the rivalry. And those who remonstrate the hardest, get an extra bottle.'

Azahara looks him in the eye. 'How do you know this?'

The young man doesn't hesitate. 'I work for the DGI.'

'What? We've a traitor on board? Are you organizing that *acto de repudio*?'

Gonzalo, who dislikes people who dominate him, shakes

his head. 'I've nothing to do with it.'

'I hope so!'

'I work as an engineer on the Logistics Department. And that's not the job of my life', he whispers. 'I only accepted it to please my grandfather.'

The professor wants to intervene, but Azahara beats him to the punch.

'It's his fault for sure', she reacts cynical. 'How old are you?'

Celia changes the subject straightaway. 'Look at these kids in their red t-shirt?'

'They were already here before the celebration', assents Azahara with a long lip. 'How old are they? Seven or eight?'

'Younger', judges Celia. 'Five, up to six.'

'Are they rewarded with candy?'

'This I notice for the first time', Gonzalo says amazed.

'Using children as informers. Congratulations!' the young woman spits up.

'Azahara!' Celia severely intervenes.

The woman wants to make an end to the bickering, in order not to spoil the atmosphere even more. Because the meeting with the professor, in whose eyes she gazes, makes her deeply happy. But the man still keeps his distance.

Héctor looks, absent-mindedly, in front of him. He has yet to recover from that brutal raid and thinks of his deceased wife.

The driver meanwhile looks nervously back and forth. The words of the professor and the squabbling between the young hawks makes him nervous. He anxiously keeps an eye on Gonzalo through the driving mirror. He doesn't trust that man of the Secret Service at all. Because a pile of illegal CDs, he has been selling with a large profit to tourists is right next to him.

The professor gives the driver a sign to continue his way to the city center and starts the conversation again.

‘The Press Agency Prensa Latina will work overtime. *Contra revolution nipped in the bud* or *Coup d’état has failed*. Aren’t these fancy titles for the TV news tonight and the front page of the party newspaper *Granma* tomorrow?’

With a cynical laugh he adds: ‘The website *Juventud Comunistas* of the Union of Young Communists will triumph, now the youth has defended once again successfully the ideals of the Revolution.’

Celia looks him right in his eyes with surprise.

‘The media don’t report on what happens in this country, but only print ideological propaganda in the minds of the people.’

‘How many arrests will take place?’

When Héctor speaks up for the first time everybody turns silent by his melancholy undertone. ‘Following the Black Spring of 2003, the Black Autumn of 2016 is on its way.’

Gonzalo who secretly peeks to Azahara, asks the driver: ‘How much for the ride?’

‘Hundred pesos.’

‘Hello?’ he responds surprised.

‘You’re with five people.’

‘And that for an illegal taxi? I’ve already noted your license plate. Only your name is lacking.’ Gonzalo takes his ID. ‘*Dirección General de Inteligencia*.’

‘Car ... lito’, stammers the man.

‘Passport!’

The man panics. ‘I’ve a wife and two children and only earn 490 pesos a month. I’ve paid 56 pesos for the new Chinese refrigerator the Committee in Defense of the Revolution obliged me to buy. And the down payment of building materials for repairs of my home amount to fifty pesos. They take another 25 pesos every month since the introduction of social security. I can’t support my family with 359 pesos. Moreover prices rise every month and my wife is seriously ill.’

Gonzalo looks incredulously at him.

'On top of that there's my mother', the driver continues emotionally. 'She can't survive from her pension of 250 pesos. Without my support, she's not able to afford more than a meal a day. And there's no money for new cloths or shoes she urgently needs. We don't have a *Yuma* in the family who sends us dollars.'

'And your *libreta*?'

'No one can live from the rationed amount of rice, bread, beans, tomato paste, oil, sugar and milk. My neighbor gives the *compañera* in the shop a tip not to stamp his *libreta*. But we can't afford to do same.'

Cold sweat appears on his face. 'When my wife still went out working, she prepared ten portions of her specialty "*moros y cristianos*" a day. She secretly sold that preparation of pork meat with black beans and rice at the servants' entrance of the hospital. Now that bonus has disappeared, I'm working in evenings as cabbie.'

'Who's the car owner?' continues Gonzalo severe.

'A ... friend.'

'How much for the key?'

'Forty CUC till midnight', he answers trembling. 'Before thirty. You also know how much the gasoline prices increased.'

'Where he gets his gasoline? On the Black Market?'

He shrugs his shoulders.

'His job?'

'Chauffeur at Cimex.'

'He steals gasoline?'

The man quakes in his boots. But also Azahara's eyes spit fire.

Gonzalo holds on. 'Will fifty pesos for the Calle Neptuno be enough?'

'Eighty. I haven't made a lot of money tonight. I need to pick up some tourists urgently. They've convertible pesos and pay without hesitation the tenfold of an ordinary Cuban.'

Now intervenes Azahara. 'I've enough of all this

posturing.’

The grandson answers: ‘Who’ dramatizing?’

But the young lady silences his mouth. ‘What? That’s easy for you to say, earning the double of an ordinary employee.’

‘Enough!’ Celia intervenes again.

The woman clenches her teeth when the car passes a board with the slogan *La revolución necesita sacrificios – The revolution requires sacrifices*. It feels like yet another humiliation at her family’s address. But nasty memories are also pop into the professors mind. He closes his eyes and stubbornly puts his lips together.

‘Every Revolution requires sacrifices’, he says moments later.

‘What on earth are you babbling on about?’ says Gonzalo. ‘How many Revolutions did you experience?’ The young man points with his index finger to his forehead.

On the professors face an obstinate feature appears. ‘I know what I’m saying.’

‘What do you mean?’

But the man remains silent.

Also Azahara looks amazed.

Celia counters the growing tension again by changing the subject. ‘Your decisive action saved us from a humiliating arrest. Thanks.’

The professor still looks surly. ‘We dodged the bullet. All the more that exposure have risked our future.’

‘Now I can’t follow’, intervenes Azahara. ‘In what way?’

But the professor on his turn changes the subject by pointing to his grandson. ‘That escape was his work’. Than he takes off his wig and beard. In turn Gonzalo also removes his wig and mustache. Overcome by fear the driver doesn’t notice one of the pot-holes in the street. But the suspension of the limousine still

works well.

‘Agents of the Secret Service sometimes adopt different shapes’, the young man reacts with a smile.

But his humor falls on a cold stone. The teeth of the driver rattle, while the two women look bewildered at each other.

‘Soon everything will become clear.’ The professor wants to lay his hand on Celia’s leg to reassure her, but Azahara prevents that.

‘Keep your hands to yourself!’

That’s enough’, governs Celia. ‘You don’t decide what I should do. The professor is a friend.’

Beyond the tunnel of La Pintilla, under La Boca de la Chavéra, the driver takes a left turn on to the broad avenue in parallel with the Malecón, the mile-long pedestrian promenade along the Straits of Florida. The waves, powered by the wind, strike above the quay wall with a lot of noise. Suddenly the professor bursts into tears.

‘What’s happening, grandpa?’

‘Nothing, my boy.’

‘I don’t believe you.’

‘A nasty memory. I don’t want to bother you.’

Now Celia lays her hand on his knee.

The driver takes the Avenida de España to the popular neighborhood of downtown Havana. The sixth street in this working-class quarter on the right hand side is the Calle Neptuno. Here and there, old cars are parked between the piles of garbage and construction debris. This street painfully illustrates the past glory of the capital. On the right a building has collapsed. And just down the road there’s a parking lot between two houses. Dozens of young and elderly people gather around the metal kiosk where

rum is sold. Havana chokes her sadness and grief in alcohol.

Héctor asks the driver to stop at the corner of Calle Arambuzu. The two gentlemen on the back seat supposedly live around the corner. But the real reason is the camera just around the corner that records all movements around the house 963. Hector states that his house isn't under tight security. Over the years he knows all the old fashioned Lada's used by the secret agents of the DGI.

It's his intention to take both guests to his home through the hidden emergency exit of the former cinema, the present Palacio de la Rumbra, along the Calle San Miguel.

The professor and Gonzalo greet their companions. Only Azahara looks unmoved to the clear starry sky. Celia whispers in the professors ear that her daughter will pick them up at the kiosk in front of the Palacio. The professor gives Héctor three folded notes of fifty pesos when he shakes his hand. The man understands that these are destined for the driver.

Next the taxi drives a few dozen meters down the street to house 963. In this that part of the street a permanent parking ban is applicable for due to the continuous surveillance.

'Four convertible pesos?'

'Where should I get these *chavitos*?' demands Héctor surprised. 'I'm not a tourist.'

'An informal demand', Carlito apologises.

Héctor compassionately shakes his head. 'That nonsensical double currency system only strengthens the greediness.' But at the same time he shows his compassion and gives him the hundred and fifty pesos. 'Take good care of your wife. Being widower, is no fun. I know what I'm saying.'

Pleasantly surprised the man gives him a cd of the Buena Vista Social Club in return.

'I don't like Castro-music.'

'That's the very best thing our country ever produced.'

‘According to the Castro brothers.’

‘Worldwide millions of copies are sold’, the man continues with excitement, who doesn’t understand Héctor’s negative reaction. ‘Two years ago they performed for president Obama in the White House.’

But that comment works like a red rag to a bull. ‘I don’t like music of people with blood on their hands.’

Celia takes him by the arm. She feels that the situation getting out of control. ‘Let’s go inside.’

But he distances himself. ‘Yes, blood’, he repeats.

‘I don’t understand what you mean’, says the still perplexed driver.

‘You know Omara Portuondo?’

‘The figurehead of the Buena Vista Social Club!’ He points the cover of the cd. ‘A fantastic woman. What she still can do at her 85th!’

‘And composer Leo Brouwer?’

The man jolts. ‘I don’t like modern music.’

‘And Chucho Valdés?’

Carlito doesn’t know what’s happening. While closing her eyes, she realizes that intervening doesn’t make sense any more, now that old wounds are torn open again.

Héctor calls with a caustic voice the names of Marta Valdés, Roberto Fabelo, Cintio Vitier, Carlos Puebla and El Pitirre. The driver doesn’t understand the link between those musicians, artists and writers and the high security prison in the San Miguel del Padrón area.

Héctor responds as if stung by a wasp that while he perished in El Pitirre in degrading circumstances, the intellectual elite accused him, in an orchestrated media campaign, of being a CIA agent and a member of a fifth column in service of the United States.

Carlito wants to reimburse his mistake. He shows diligently

other cd's from which he can choose. Héctor's body vibrates upon seeing the name of Carlos Pueblo. *Hasta siempre, Comandante*. The echo of that tribute to Che Guevara still rings in his ears. At the beginning and at the end of every re-education session he's obliged to sing aloud *Farewell, Commander*. And when he doesn't do so, the isolation cell awaits

Tu amor revolucionario
 Your revolutionary love
te conduce a nueva empresa
 Leads you to a new adventure
donde esperan la firmeza
 where we're hoping on the firmness
de tu brazo libertario.
 Of your liberating arm

Seguiremos adelante,
 We will continue forward
como junto a ti seguimos,
 and in brotherhood we follow you
y con Fidel te decimos :
 and say to you with Fidel:
Hasta siempre, Comandante
 Farewell, Commander!

'For seven years and eleven months I've experienced this revolutionary love', he continues acrimonious. 'But I didn't experience the power of Che's liberating arm.'

The prisoners hardly get to eat and corrupt guards humiliate and beat them at the slightest incident. The camp is lacking any basic form of hygiene and medical care. The slogan *The work makes the man* of Lenin above the entrance gate makes clear what it's all about. Every day the detainees cut down sugarcane, pick tobacco or weed marabú. That highly aggressive and

ineradicable tree species, also known as the sicklebush, covers 1.7 million hectares of once productive land.

And the inmates who don't reach the quota are punished. A cellmate who refused food and drinks, died in Héctor's arms at the end of his wits. Another one hung himself in the morning at the window lattice.

'That's the reality behind the facade of Cuban music', raves Héctor. 'Just think about that.'

After departure of the panic-stricken driver Celia tries to heal his wounds with conciliatory words and a tender embrace. In the meantime Azahara still stands unmoved on the pavement. Emotionalism is not her thing. In the reflection of the light of the full moon on the window she tends to her hair style and takes out her lipstick.

Celia scuffles with Héctor to the front door, when they hear in their back the squeaky door of the neighbor across. *Big Brother*, as the man is scornfully called, makes a state of affairs outdoor after having informed his patrons of their homecoming. But none of them look back at the proud president of the CRD, the powerful Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. As chief of the spies in his district, he coordinates the "eyes and ears" of the people. That permanent vigilance is necessary to keep the revolutionary spirit of the inhabitants sharp. *Big Brother* not only reports all unusual behavior immediately, but is also responsible for the hurricane prevention, the garbage collection, the public hygiene, the fight against vermin, the preventive actions in health care, the replacement of the light bulbs by energy saving light lamps and the composition of the list of candidates for the elections.

Also the other neighbors register all the movement around the house. But they're apparently chained to their TV. Héctor looks at his watch. At 8:30 pm *Cubavisión* broadcasts the daily soap, a popular music program and *Mesa Redonda – Round Table*. In that

boring talk show the “missionary-presenter” Randy Alonso makes everyone believe that Cuba is an earthly paradise. And at *Tele Rebelde* a game show and a quiz are followed by a game of baseball. Or is there football on the program tonight?

His gaze slides to the roof beyond. There lives a businessman. Judging by his new Peugeot the man makes good deals. The dish antenna on his roof gives him the possibility to look at *Univision*, the Spanish-language channel in the United States. The payment of hush money makes *Big Brother* squeeze a blind eye to that illegal practice.

While Héctor looks back with a look full of contempt, Celia and Azahara squabble with restrained voices.

‘Pick up the professor and his grandson, darling. You’ve the key of the portal.’

‘But can we trust them?’

‘The professor has studied with mama and aunt Laura’, Celia appeases. ‘They were very close.’ The woman radiates. ‘You can’t imagine how happy I am to meet him. I trust him for one hundred percent.’

‘And that arrogant young guy? We take the Secret Service in!’

‘Don’t you understand what’s happening? He just wants to impress you.’

‘Then he’s barking up the wrong tree.’

‘You’re such a beautiful woman. Don’t distrust him because he’s not your type. His explanation sounds plausible.’

‘You’ve underlined a hundred thousand times to always be beware.’

Celia nods. ‘The exception confirms the rule.’

‘Is it wise to let them in by the underground area?’

‘When they come through the front door they will be arrested within minutes. Don’t you understand? I can’t pass up that unique opportunity to speak to the professor.’

Azahara sighs deeply.

‘We’re not going to continue this discussion’, whispers Celia. ‘You’ll see. It will to be a warm meeting with a real friend.’ She combs through Azahara’s hair with her fingers. ‘And finally there’s one more thing.’

‘What then?’

‘Be sweet and bright.’

‘What? He started it!’

Celia presses with her index finger to her nose. She knows how to handle her rebellious daughter. ‘Go now’, while she takes her stepfather by the arm.

‘May I also ask to be nice and bright?’ whispers the man.

Celia startles. ‘What?’

‘You’ve forgotten the words of José Conrado? *Cubanos Unidos*. We must unite. You know very well the pernicious effect the division between the Damas de Blanco has.’

‘What happened two years ago in our own house with Alejandrina García de la Riva, a cofounder of the movement and a good friend of aunt Laura? Berta Soler and some women I’ve never seen insulted her of being a traitor. That’s unacceptable. Maria Labrada was right to break with the Damas and to throw them out. But what do you expect from me? She’s my only niece. I grew up with her. I won’t let her down.’

‘You know perfectly well that the incident with Alejandrina was an repudiating action of the DGI. It’s time to turn that page.’

‘Working together with Soler is anything but obvious.’

‘Everyone has his character. But look at what unites us.’

‘You’re right. I’ll talk with Maria Labrada.’

2 LET'S TRY

'Music softens manners', says Celia while she locks the front door. She lights the candles and turns on the lights.

Héctor takes a deep breath. 'Quite a day we've had.'
'With your sense of beauty you'll find something.'

His eye falls on the cd *Fidelio*. Beethoven's opera tells us the story of a woman who rescues her husband from death, disguised as a prison guard. Héctor, as always, puts on the aria that's very dear to his heart. How many times has he sung this song, the canto of the prisoners' chorus, with some singers of the National Choir of Havana in the courtyard of El Pitirre? His blood runs cold from the very first note.

*Oh, what a pleasure once again
Freely to breathe the fresh air.
In Heaven's light we live again
From death we have escaped.*

He embraces Celia and repeats the lyrics with trembling voice. 'It must be a joy to breathe free air. Hopefully one day I can experience this.'

With trembling hands, he switches to the final.

*Punishment befalls the wretch
Who oppresses the innocent.
Justice holds aloft, for punishment.*

Héctor quakes in his boots. ‘Will those scoundrels be punished? Will justice prevail?’ Celia cuts the cd. ‘It doesn’t make sense to submerge you even more in black pessimism. Don’t you understand? Our guests are coming. I’m burning with desire to meet the professor. Put some lighter music on.’

Héctor tears up and looks into the closet. ‘Well, that’s a long time ago.’

‘What then?’

While fluffing up the pillows and bringing some glasses to the kitchen Celia reacts agitated from the first note she hears. ‘Not that East European whining again. They wore that music out in the old days. But despite the lessons in Russian no one understood a word.’

A sober smile appears on Héctor’s face. ‘Laura got that music box as her farewell gift at the University. How do they otherwise get rid of these trinkets?’

Héctor’s mood has changed to her relief since the man is of a melancholy disposition and has a tendency to depression.

‘The good old days’, he chuckles. ‘You recognize this?’

‘The Bulgarian Biser Kirov?’

Héctor looks surprised.

‘Most girls from my class were in love with him.’

‘Didn’t you have a thing for that Czech singer?’

‘Karel Gott?’

‘You remember his name?’

‘That, you dreamed. He was slobbering at his mouth.’

In the bathroom Celia lifts the lid of the cistern that leads to the underground room. By the second song she gets nervous. ‘Stop that artificial thing. Put some Son, Rumba, Salsa or Songo on. Let it swing.’

Héctor shakes his head. ‘We’ve to think at those who tap us’, he cynical says. ‘It is our patriotic duty to play only music that radiates joy, optimism and gladness. So the spies remain immersed in the Socialist Realism and inspired with the sacred fire. I wouldn’t have it on my conscience that they start doubting at the infallibility of the Revolutionary ideals.’

Celia gives him a hug. ‘Well done! You can only laugh at Communists.’

But tears are once again rolling down his cheeks. ‘Establishing that there’s no light at the end of the tunnel is so

frustrating.’

‘Don’t be pessimistic.’

‘No, I’m realistic.’

Azahara, accompanied by her guests, enters. Celia feels awkward because the professor also now keeps his distance. She intuitively feels that something doesn’t make sense, but she doesn’t let it show. When Héctor points to the wall and the ceiling, the guests know that they’ve to stay still. The host leads them to the hall. Nothing has changed since Laura’s death. On the wall next to her picture, amidst a bouquet of red gladioli, hangs a photo of a mass demonstration of the Damas de Blanco in Havana. A painted portrait of Laura with a drawing of Héctor on her white t-shirt draws the attention. Now also she holds a red gladiolus in her hand. And on a coat rack hangs her inseparable white hat and a white t-shirt. The figure 75 refers to the number of arrestees during the Black Spring with underneath the text *Libertad a los Presos Politicos de Castro – Freedom for Castro’s political prisoners*.

Out of respect the professor bends and Gonzalo follows his example. Next to the Cuban flag on the ground there are flower pots and funeral wreaths. Their white glint made way for a shallow pale sheen hemmed by brown edges. With the help of fragile cobwebs the withered flower stalks are still standing.

‘Many people really loved Laura’, Héctor whispers with a lump in his throat. ‘Her spirit lives on in those flowers. The remembrance to Laura will stay alive as long as one stalk or leaf is standing.’

The guests are visible impressed, partly because the candles on the two tripods immerse the space in a mysterious yellow light. In fact, it seems that Laura’s spirit is still present. The mourning registers contain hundreds of personal messages of simple people as well as well-known opponents. In front are the names of Elizardo Sánchez, the President of the Commission on Human Rights and National Reconciliation, Dagoberto Valdés of the magazine *Convivencia* and Antonio Rodiles of the opposition

movement Estado the Sats. The text *Todos marchamos para siempre – We march on together forever* is followed by the signatures of hundreds of women. The ink has been blended by the shedding tears. The name, Berta Soler, is in first place. ‘At that time The Damas de Blanco were still a cohesive movement’, mutters the professor. The wall behind it shows a pale letter of former US president Barack Obama and the plaque of the Sakharov Prize the Damas received of the European Parliament in 2005. An enlarged copy shows the text *Laura se fue – Laura is no longer* posted by journalist Yoani Sánchez on her blog *Generación Y*. The text makes the professors skin crawl away.

In the same days, Laura Pollán was dying in the Intensive Care Unit of the Calixto Garcia hospital, the television ran a program in which she was offended. Characteristic for the lack of grandeur of the Cuban Government is its inability to respect a political opponent, even when she’s dying.

Out of respect he touches the text and looks over his shoulder for the last time before following Héctor to the adjacent space where the Damas de Blanco met. In the middle, there’s a mural painting by graffiti artist Danilo Maldonado Machado. *El Sexto*, as he is known, found his inspiration in the *Guernica* of Pablo Picasso, that monumental indictment of the atrocities by the troops of Franco during the Spanish civil war in the 1930s. A Cubist displayed crocodile, the national animal, attacks in this Cuban version the tormented double head of the Castro brothers. At the right hand side the gaping wings of a trogon symbolizes the future the Cubans are dreaming of. The national colors blue, white and red are woven into the birds’ coat.

‘Such an imagination’, whispers the professor.

Gonzalo looks surprised. For the first time he hears his grandfather talk about art.

‘A masterpiece’, agrees Azahara. ‘Especially made for my great aunt.’

‘My daughter and art’, sighs Celia. ‘She’s so excited about the developments in the art scene.’

‘A lot of interesting things are happening here’, responds the young lady with shining eyes. ‘Without that scourge of censorship Havana could be the most dynamic and inspiring place of the Caribbean and the Americas. The capital has always played that role in history.’

‘I didn’t know.’ The professor reacts surprised.

‘Cuba can be proud on its great cultural diversity. The country is located on a crossroads of sea routes between Europe, Africa, North and Latin America. That melting pot includes indigenous cultures, mixed with Spanish influences and on top of that the contribution of African slaves, Haitian plantation holders, who fled their country, and Chinese immigrants.’

‘Are you also arts and crafty?’ asks Gonzalo disdainful.

‘I make constructions with waste material’, she firmly replies. ‘The cellar under the Palacio is, as you’ve seen, filled up with interesting degradation materials of the movie theatre and building debris. And I collect inspiring “poor materials” as pieces of wood, steel, stone and dust I encounter on the road.’

The professor sits as if turned to stone.

‘Where the idea to get involved with that old stuff comes from is beyond me.’ Celia shakes her head.

‘Mom!’, Azahara reacts angry. ‘You have no idea what’s going on. All these materials are teeming with life.’

‘What exactly is it all about?’ Gonzalo asks amused.

‘Look: my most recent work. I found a weathered wooden door like a hundred years old with on the inside a mixture of paint traces and puckered fungi. That’s a perfect background for an abstract urban landscape that takes shape with small wooden blocks in flaking colors. These suggest houses and a church tower. On top there’s the serrated wood of the inside of a chair. Doesn’t it look like a castle?’

‘What’s the point?’

‘An indictment of the consumer society. Despite its poverty, our country dumps widely usable objects. And I bring these back to life in a creative way. From my commitment to nature I always show respect for the degradation process of organic material. This work is by nature brittle and fragile.’

‘I don’t understand why you’re drawn towards this.’

‘The combination of different types of waste material and the optical effect by the varying depth. At first glance I assemble

simple affairs, but these are full of poetry and rich in content. People have to think twice on the transient nature of life. Do you feel what I mean?' she challenges the guests.

The professor still watches breathlessly.

'I don't feel anything at this moment', Gonzalo says with a smile. 'But that can still happen.'

Azahara looks hypothermic.

'I already gained many impressions', the young man continues. 'But one thing is clear.'

'What then?' Because of the appreciation failures, her undertone is bitter.

'This is very cheap art since these materials cost nothing.'

The young woman feels humiliated. 'What's that got to do with it? Cheapskate! The creative process takes longer than painting a canvas. At the other side of the Atlantic people pay fortunes for that kind of work.'

'What do you think Grandpa', Gonzalo asks, he doesn't understand why his grandfather all this time sits transfixed in front of the painting.

'Do you hear that siren?' Celia intervenes.

These words make clear that their conversation risks drowning out the music. At the same time Celia avoids in a subtle way that the discussion gets out of hand. The woman repeats aloud that she's going downtown and Héctor announces that he goes to sleep. The man beckons the professor and his grandson to the bathroom where the lid of the cistern is still clear. They descend by the stepladder to the underground room. In that space of five to six meter there's a table, six chairs, a bed, a wardrobe and a bookshelf. It has a solid structure of beams and a floor of stamped earth. The processed horse hair plaster against the wall is crumbling. Inside a musty odor is in the air. The ventilation is assured only by two small ventilation grids in the bathroom and some openings at the back.

Pornographic films were shown here for an all-exclusive male company till the mid-1950s. After the bankruptcy of the movie theatre Carlos Gutiérrez, a relative of Héctor, established in this room the secret headquarters of the University Students Federation FEU. The right hand of FEU-President José

Echeverría, made an aperture from the cistern. That was established during the construction of the house at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century in function of the water shortage, but had never functioned because of a crack. The room is ideally located at a few hundred meters from the University. The leaders of the FEU planned the raid on the Presidential Palace of March 13, 1957 here. But the assassination attempt on president Batista failed. Thirty five participants were killed, among whom Carlos and José Echeverría.

The professor points to a picture on the wall. ‘Your uncle?’ he asks.

Tears trickle over Héctor’s cheeks. ‘Yes, next to him is Echeverría, or *Manzanita* – *Small Apple*, like they used to call him. My family lived here in hiding during the following wave of repression. Despite several searches the room was never discovered. Many sympathizers of the FEU, including my father, joined the *Movimiento 26 de Julio* – *Movement of the 26th of July* of the brothers Castro.

‘I don’t know that story’, Gonzalo reacts surprised.

‘FEU is only a footnote in the history books since the Castro brothers reclaimed all attention’, knows the professor.

‘You can still see the bullet holes of the raid in the Presidential Palace, the current Museo de la Revolución. And the bullet-riddled delivery van stands next to the boat Granma, the Revolutionaries used to make the crossing from Mexico in 1956.’

‘Let this be a lesson’, underlines the professor. ‘We’ve to plan everything to the tiniest detail when another rebellion is coming up.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Azahara’ Celia calls her daughter to order. ‘Let the professor finish. That’s not how I raised you.’

But the man backs down a little. ‘The lesson to be learnt here is: only together we can make a change. The priest in mass has expressed that perfectly: *Cubanos Unidos*.’

‘The motto of the FEU was: *All for one and one for all*, Héctor remembers. ‘But today that’s an unattainable dream. Soon the opposition has as many movements as dissidents.’

‘Was your father a communist?’ interrupts Gonzalo the

loaded silence.

The man smiles scornfully. 'At that time there barely were Communists in Cuba.'

Many committed and public-spirited young people were militants of the reform-minded Orthodox Party in the 1950s. That was also the case for the young Fidel Castro and Huber Matos, a friend of Héctor's father. Huber convinced him to join the *Movimiento 26 de Julio* and both took part in the Revolution. The young Héctor stands with his mother in the front row when the *barbudos*, the men with beards like the Revolutionaries were popularly called enter the capital on January 2, 1959. Héctor's father sits next to Huber and Camilo Cienfuegos on an army jeep. His wife and son crawl proudly on the hood and enjoy the triumph. At his glorious entry a week later Fidel Castro promises democratic reforms and free elections. But a few months later the conflict with the United States escalates and Castro sympathizes with Communism. The key departments in the Government were taken by Communists and the media excluded other opinions.

In October 1959 Huber Matos quits when it becomes clear that nothing will come of the *compromiso democrático*. His friend Camilo Cienfuegos gets the assignment to arrest him. Héctor's father is very upset. The front page of the newspaper *Granma* shows above Huber's picture *La traición – The betrayal*. Fidel Castro personally leads the process on the Plaza de la Revolución. Castro brought thousands of factory workers to the square by bus. The crowd, stirred up by police in plainclothes and supplied with free rum, scream for *Paredón – The firing squad*. Héctor's father wants to rescue his friend, but is stopped by his 12-year-old son. The kid realizes that his father will also be destroyed. That day is his childhood history.

But Fidel is a cunning fox. Under influence of the first Soviet advisors he applies the tactics of party leader Nikita Khrushchev. Opponents are no longer physically disabled, as it was in Stalin's time, but psychologically pressured until they crack. Fidel plays the crowds with his natural charisma. Instead of the death penalty he demands 20 years of imprisonment and pontificates that a period of reflection, in combination with the re-education, will bring him closer to the true ideals of the Revolution. So Huber can

put these into practice after his release. The *Comandante* and *Chefe* never looks Huber straight in the eye.

Camilo Cienfuegos, the number four of the regime, after the brothers Castro and Ché Guevara, is very affected by that sentence without any proof. Two days later his military plane crashes during a domestic flight from Camagüey to Havana, officially as the result of bad weather. But Héctor's father will question that version all his life. The fact that no search had been undertaken to find the crashed plane proves the elimination of Cienfuegos. A few years later Che Guevara on his turn is conducted towards the exit under the guise of "the international export of the Revolution". The distinctive feature of the regime's hypocrisy is that both, Cienfuegos and Guevara, are still worshipped as national heroes.

As an opportunist Fidel Castro embraces Communism because it guarantees him a lifetime of exercising power. For almost half a century he manages Cuba as his private company.

'What happened to your father?' asks Gonzalo.

'We lived here in hiding. My aunt was the only one who had a key to the hidden gate. She supplied us with food and contacted a fellow student of my father once the peace was restored. The man, a former revolutionary, helped my father to a job at the cigar factory La Corona. There he worked for forty years tight-lipped, not to jeopardize my future.'

Héctor compassionately shakes his head.

'My parents collected a box full of medals. These rewards were given to the "servants of the Revolution". I've copies with images of Lenin, Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfuegos and Fidel Castro with and without beret or cap. And father got a medal with a machete when he helped in the felling of sugar cane. On other medals are a hammer and sickle, a red star and the Cuban flag. He hung all his medals on his *guyabera*, his most beautiful shirt with short sleeves and deep pockets. Father was obliged to participate in official parades, such as the celebration of May 1. He didn't puff up his chest forward, such as the guardians of the Revolution, but marched with a curved back, as if he was weighed down under the weight of that collection of tin. That was his way of defying the regime.'

‘They sell these medals on the Plaza de Armas to tourists’, Gonzalo knows.

‘They’re worth up to fifty pesos’, nods Azahara. ‘And these with the image of Fidel Castro doubled in value after his death.’

‘For those enameled trinkets.’ Héctor utters a deep breath. ‘Father told his life story on his deathbed.’

‘You then joined the opposition?’ asks the young man.

He shakes his head. ‘Only from 1980, following the flight of thousands of Cubans to the Embassy of Peru. At that time everyone who wanted to could leave the country. Thousands of yachts, fishing boats, sailing boats and cargo ships from Miami picked up family, friends and fellow countrymen in the port of Mariel. 125,000 so called *Marielitos* emigrated to the United States. Also among them the by Fidel Castro dumped mentally ill, cancer patients, homosexuals, social outcasts and criminals.’

‘Did you too wanted to emigrate?’

He shakes his head. ‘I worked as an engineer at Cenic. All the employees of the National Centre for Scientific Research were obliged to help prevent the exodus of intellectuals. Only that group wasn’t allowed to leave. I didn’t take part in their verbal and physical harassment since I respected the choice of my colleagues. I lost my job and was convicted.’

‘Any regret you didn’t get on the stage?’

‘I’ve been through hell, but met Laura. ‘Tears trickle once again over his cheeks. ‘I still miss her every day.’

The professors’ attention is attracted to the bookshelf like a magnet. Mario Vargas Llosa holds a prominent place. His novels *The Green House*, *Conversation in the Cathedral*, *Pantaleón* and *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* were published after 1968. The writer, who first had defended the Revolution, was then cursed by Fidel Castro.

With shaky hands the professor picks out some later works of Llosa: *The War of the End of the World*, *The Spirits of the Andes* and *The Feast of the Goat*. Only during foreign congresses he has seen these.

‘Miguel Barnet?’, he reacts surprised. ‘The only merit of that puppet is his canine wedding to the regime.’ The professor

looks up. ‘And did you know Roberto Fernández Retamar is the president of the Literature Institute Casa de las Américas?’

‘Don’t you understand?’ Celia opens a book under his nose.

The professor looks closely and smiles. ‘How ingenious. Is that *Antics of the Bad Girl*, Llosa’s second last book?’

‘Aunt Laura got a hold of these censored books illegally with the help of foreign tourists. But one day the book with the cover of Barnet was discovered in her briefcase during inspection. The agents encouraged her to continue the Revolutionary path. Officially Cuba counts no illiterates, but being able to read, is something different.’

Héctor frowns. ‘Fortunately the fraud has not been discovered. If that were the case, she could have lost her job and rights. And pending her trial she could have been detained. Anyone who’s sued, always gets a condemnation.’

‘She also used my schoolbag without my knowledge’, smiles Azahara.

‘Why did she take such a great risk?’ asks Gonzalo.

‘Those books were vital for her’, testifies Héctor. ‘They gave her the oxygen to survive intellectually in a world full of lies. And they were safe in the underground room.’

‘Except that one time’, Celia remembers. ‘She had forgotten to hide Llosa’s novel *The dream of the Celt* when a raid took place during a meeting of the Damas de Blanco. Everyone was questioned for hours, but no one knew the origin of that book. In the end the case was classified.’

The professor as a bibliophile caresses the copies he cares deeply about. He cherishes *Mea Cuba* by Guillermo Cabrera Infante and kisses a bundle of poems by Maria Elena Cruz Varela. A copy of the *Trología* of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez is also hidden on his desk.

Next to each other there are four books of the Brazilian “red Archbishop” Dom Hélder Câmara. He and the sisters Pollán were secretly introduced in the writings of a pioneer of the Liberation Theology at the University.

The professor takes the book *Spiral of violence* and in an automatic reflex he flips to the page where Câmara explains the meaning of the ancient wisdom *Change the world, start with yourself*. The

annotations with a red ballpoint pen are by his hand. Furthermore there's *The Theology of Liberation* by Gustavo Gutiérrez and a couple of books of Leonardo Boff and Oscar Romero. The radical choice of the Liberation Theologians for the poor and the oppressed, the respect for human rights and the pursuit of a non-violent Revolution have strongly influenced their life choice. Above the bed on his dorm room hangs Câmara's slogan: *When we only dream, there is only a dream. When we dream with others, that's the beginning of reality.*

The professor looks petrified at the book *Crónica de un desastre* and *Cuba, revolución o involución* of his nephew Oscar Chepe, a former top advisor of the Government. Oscar gets acquainted with the new economic theories of Lieberman, Havemann, Medwejew and Luckacs as liaison to the Cuban Embassy in former Yugoslavia. Their dissent from the planned economy inspired Soviet Party Leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. But the pursuit of openness and changes falls on a cold stone in Cuba. Oscar is convicted as counter-Revolutionary and later kicked-out of the country. "Why didn't they apply his ideas", muses the professor.

All this time Azahara suspiciously kept an eye on the young man beside her. He still holds his and his grandfathers' disguise in his hands.

'That man of the Secret Service owes us an explanation', she keenly says. 'Or are you disguising yourself again?'

Gonzalo doesn't immediately know what to answer, although he hates to be challenged.

But the fury of the young lady isn't tempered yet. 'Why did you handle that poor taxi driver so rough?'

'From my aversion to corruption and fraud.'

'And the solution is intimidating people who are victims themselves.'

'It's clear she's a descendant of the Pollàn family', Celia says.

'Sorry for making a scene', excuses the young man. 'You're doing a bad job, Gonzalo', he says to himself while he hits himself in the face.

Everyone looks amused, but the young lady is still

unmoved. 'You are really eager to impress?'

'Azahara' Celia intervenes.

'I'd love to hear some explanation', says Héctor serene.

Gonzalo looks at his grandfather. 'Last year the Secret Service offered me an attractive job with a good wage just before I graduated. At grandfathers urging I accepted it. Do you know that more than half of my classmates already emigrated? Civil engineers specialized in electronics are also wanted in the United States.' He hesitates for a moment. 'I can't leave grandfather alone.'

'And your parents?' asks Azahara.

The timbre of his voice changes. 'They died shortly after my birth.'

This time the young woman is speechless.

'I want to have real-world experience and to make contacts prior to embarking upon an independent life. New prospects are coming up since the Government opens up more businesses for competition.'

'What kind of work are you doing?' asks Héctor.

Gonzalo hesitates. 'That's a state secret.'

'Now you see he's not to be trusted at all', Azahara reacts. 'Who knows, maybe he will lead us all to the gallows.'

Now Gonzalo reacts angry. 'The opposite is true. I'll be executed when it turns out that I've spoken to someone about my job.'

'I'm still not convinced.'

The professor takes the floor.

'The basis of the extremely sophisticated Communist system is an institutionalized distrust. When three people were gathered in the former Soviet Union one of them was an agent of the KGB. Also in Cuba the authorities constantly create an atmosphere of distrust without the people even realize it. That's also the hidden agenda behind the crime series on TV. These series make people believe that there's a secret agent behind every door. But that's not true of course.'

He stands up and opens the door of the underground room into the basement.

'Come and take a look', he challenges Azahara. 'Is anybody here?'

Celia looks at him in full admiration.

'Let this be a lesson. We're unable to rebuild our society

without trust.’

Gonzalo looks nervous from left to right. He feels that he has to break the ice. ‘What I’m going to tell you, has to remain between these four walls. Agreed?’

Also Azahara nods.

‘The Government has received into the context of the bilateral agreement with China new electronic listening devices. I’m with the division that replaces the old devices of the Stasi, the Secret Police in former East Germany. These setups still function, but the digital devices are more compact, a thousand times faster in processing data and have an unlimited recording capacity. They are among the most advanced systems worldwide. That conversion isn’t obvious, since different types of these sets are common.’

‘So we may expect you soon’, says Héctor.

Gonzalo shakes his head. ‘I work for the software division. Is the wiring incorporated in the wall?’

‘I’m quite sure.’

‘An employee of the electricity company will pay you a visit. By testing your pipes in the context of the fire prevention he’ll discreetly place the new devices.’

‘An exciting occupation’, snaps Azahara. ‘You also report on the conversations bugged in this place?’

‘I’m not interested in the content’, defends Gonzalo himself. ‘Only involved with the software.’

‘I’ve seen so in the taxi.’ Azahara again rubs salt into the wound.

Gonzalo doesn’t respond. Despite her rebellious character he is attracted to the young woman.

Celia straightens her daughter out once again with wide open eyes and changes the topic.

‘The professor was mama’s and Aunt Laura’s best friend. You were studying at the end of the 60’s at the Havana University, right?’

‘The twin sisters were very special. We were kindred spirits.’ He gets a blush in his cheeks. ‘We shared the same interest in Liberation Theology and magic realism in literature. The future looked bright till I was called up for my military service.’

Cuba controlled the international politics in the heyday of the Cold War. In April 1961 an invasion of exiles and mercenaries

in the Bay of Pigs, planned by the American Intelligence Service CIA failed. And the missile crisis a year and a half later brought the world at the edge of a Third World War. US president John F. Kennedy kept his military establishment under control and resisted the adventurous Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. The latter lets the boats with nuclear warheads on board return. Whipped into rage Fidel Castro mobilizes the population. Millions of throats scream: *Nikita, mariquita, lo que se da no se quita – Nikita, sissy, what you've ever given, remains*. In return tens of thousands Soviet advisors land on the island and Cuba becomes a satellite state of the Soviet Union. In the city of Lourdes the largest spying station in the world taps telephone calls in the United States.

At the University José Espinosa Chepe and the twin sisters Pollán question ever more the practical application of Marxism-Leninism and the passionate words of *Comandante* and *Chefe* Fidel Castro in his endless speeches. With growing reluctance they participate in the mandatory *name and shame* sessions. These aim to purge counter-Revolutionary students morally. It suffices to cry out *depuración* to rail at someone.

But that's small beer compared to the cadaver discipline in the army, which is permanently in the heightened state of alert since a new US invasion can take place at any time. The militiamen remain 36 months under arms. They're ingrained that only heroism can save the fatherland. And the indoctrination teaches them to overcome any kind of philistinism, cowardice and weakness. No one gets a moment of rest. The orders sound continuously: *José, keep straight. José, march like a man. José do this and José do that*. Only a lifted look of a superior make the militiamen shake in their boots.

Immerse in anonymity, always shut up and develop a double personality. These are the methods to survive mentally, without serving that insane system nor to be plunged into it. Who doesn't operate between the lines, ends up in the infamous *Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción*, prison camps where the inmates are subjected to forced labor from sunrise till sunset. Also gays, hippies, Jehovah's witnesses, artists, musicians, authors and dissidents are locked up over there.

When José after three months gets a few days free, yet another disillusion follows. He experiences how the local presidents of the Communist Party and the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution are only interested in their own interests

and privileges. The intervention in favor of Odila, his 75-year-old neighbor whose pension is no longer paid, opens his eyes in the labyrinth of bureaucracy and the caste of parasites that's manning it. At the end the unblocking of her file only required one signature that never came. José's parents supplied Odila with food although they were short on money too. But the woman lived in retirement and shortly afterwards José gets her obituary. That same evening he mentally breaks with communism when his superior, who secretly had read the letter, challenges him to the extreme. Referring to the slogan *La revolución necesita sacrificios* on the wall this man pontificates that its due time that the spoiled caste of intellectuals show their service to the Revolution with deeds. He orders José to polish his shoes. The young man doesn't understand because they're shining. With long teeth he carries out that order when his chief spits on them. The commander shouts that he feels disdain for manual labor and reminds him to work faster. "That attitude will change", he roars. José gets the assignment to clean the floor of the toilet with a toothbrush and during control they oblige him to lick the inside of the toilet bowl. When he only pretends to do so, he has to appear for the court-martial that same evening. His refusal to execute an order is regarded as a counter-revolutionary activity.

José ends up for three months in the isolation cell. His leave is revoked and he can't write letters nor receive the food his family sends. That stuff disappears into the pockets of the guards, while his ration is halved. Life without daylight in a smelly dungeon of three by three meters where the perpetual silence reigns makes many crazy. José's neighbor smashes his head against the steel cell door.

The young man buys from a guard two packs of cigarettes rolling papers and a pen with a note of five pesos he had hidden in a plastic bag in his anus. Thereupon he writes down his thoughts and poems.

'Did you have contact with my family?' asks Celia.

'Of course not. But I've seen Laura and Paula shortly afterwards.'

Celia has no clue of what is going on.

After the return to his unit José gets the announcement of the visit of his mother and sisters. He has been giving a stern warning in advance. Only familial topics are permitted. And the conversation will be stopped at every reference to his living conditions, military issues, current events, the party or the Government. If so a punishment follows. A kiss or a handshake are only allowed on arrival and departure.

The young man gets transfixed in the reception hall. To his pleasant surprise Paula and Laura have taken the place of his sisters. While shaking Paula's hand, he cold-bloodedly opens up his middle and index finger with between the compressed rolling papers. Discreetly she puts these in her pocket and makes a heart with her thumbs and index fingers.

'These rolling papers are at Aunt Laura's office', Celia reacts surprised.

'What was discussed?' asks Héctor.

'Everyday affairs. I felt that Paula wanted to say something, but we couldn't talk openly.'

'You loved grandma?'

Tears roll over his cheeks. He wants to say something, but gets a lump in his throat.

'When did you see her again?' Celia demands.

The professor shakes his head. 'That wasn't allowed anymore.'

He clenches his fists in anger.

'By whom?'

'The Secret Service.' His teeth are chattering. 'A taxi brought me to the University when I mustered out from the army. I was summoned by the Dean of the Faculty of Letters, an eminent connoisseur of South American literature. I was close to him as a student.'

The professor gasps a deep sigh. He needs to release energy.

'Water?'

The man nods.

‘Can you get that in the kitchen, darling?’

While Azahara goes upstairs, Celia lays her hand on his knee. ‘I hope we can make up for the last forty years.’

The professor freezes up again, overcome by emotions.

‘Our security is guaranteed’, says Azahara cynical on her return. She puts a bottle of water and five glasses on the table. ‘Through the window on the first floor I’ve seen on the corner of Calle Arambuzu the familiar blue Lada.’

‘They keep watch again?’ asks Celia puzzled.

‘That’s logical, now we’re not arrested in the Church’, Héctor reacts.

In the meantime Gonzalo is overcome by cold sweat. ‘They’re also at the back? That will be the end if they find me here!’

‘Don’t panic’, the host reassures. ‘No one knows that hidden exit and the door is locked.’

All eyes are focused once again on the professor.

‘Where was I?’

‘The visit to the Dean.’

The Dean has read the report of the military commander. José realizes that the condemnation by the court-martial will never be forgotten, so he confesses to the Dean that he acted in a moment of temporary insanity. He seemingly serious adds that his stay in the isolation cell brought him to a deeper insight and that since then he is a faithful servant to the Revolution.

The visibly relieved Dean reports that his superiors will give him a second chance on one condition. José will be included in his team, as well as a woman whose father is a member of the Politburo. Following the adoption of the new organization the latter will be promoted off to the head of the archive with the degree of professor. The Dean ensures that José will succeed him, because he’ll never tolerate any loss of quality at the Faculty. That has to remain at the level of the South American literature: world-class.

‘What’s that got to do with mom and Aunt Laura?’

The professor bends his head. ‘On leaving he revealed the one condition. I knew what was coming up when he spoke out the name Pollán.’

The Dean recommends to get rid of that mortgage. In José's self-interest he was no longer allowed to meet Laura. If not the well of oblivion awaits. When José asked what has become of Paula, the Dean is shocked that he doesn't know what has happened to her. The young man seeks for support at the door when he explains that she has chosen the path of evil. The Dean can barely suppress a smile when he talks about her unmarried motherhood. Because Paula doesn't want to reveal the father's name, he hints that she had, as Our Lady, an immaculate conception. But her artwork is unacceptable for the authorities because that disgraces the country and the Revolution. When the photos, she has sent to museums and galleries of the *Yuma's*, are intercepted, Paula commits an act of desperation. Celia turns purple and Azahara screams, since both only hear that story for the first time.

'Suicide?' 'The young woman asks stunned. 'Did grandma make assemblies?'

'Compositions with materials she found on the street. I don't have any feeling for art, but looking back I've to admit that these images are still etched in my memory. When I just saw your work, I thought right back at the work of your grandmother. You and Paula were two of a kind.'

Héctor also looks surprised. 'Can we pick up again where we left off? Tell us more about that Dean.' The professor has to draw breath again in view of the emotions on display. 'He told me that Paula's daughter was placed in an orphanage till Laura took care of her. And that I couldn't jeopardize my career for them. I had no choice with that knife at my throat.'

Azahara grabs her mother who almost faints.

'Didn't Laura tell you?'

'She promised to do so when the time was right', stutters Celia. 'But it never happened and then her sudden death came.' The woman slowly gets a second wind. 'I knew one day I would be confronted with the truth. But the question remains why?'

The lips of the professor are quivering, but he can't utter a word.

'What exactly happened?'

He bursts into tears again. 'The true face of communism is

inhumane. The two people most precious to me were forcibly taken away.'

Celia decides to relieve tension although she senses that he knows more. 'Despite everything I'm grateful. Aunt Laura surrounded me with the best possible care, as if I was her own daughter.' She reaches out a hand to the professor as a sign of reconciliation. 'We'll come back to this later.'

To Celia's disappointment the professor, inhibited by all the attention, distances himself again. He narrates scrupulously how he had built up a new life without Paula and Laura. He married not to be labeled as a homosexual, who have been prosecuted for decades. So he entered a marriage of convenience. When talking about his relationship with his son, he becomes breathless.

Gonzalo, who hears his family history for the first time, watches in amazement.

With shaking hands the professor takes a sip of water.

'The sacrifices the Revolution requires on the human level are so huge that it's better not to talk of it. Life just becomes easy when you ignore everything. In Communist thinking we are not individuals, but mechanical components of a machine controlled by the party. Everyone has to play a role in function of the system. There's no free choice and whoever doesn't carry out what is imposed, gets eliminated. The mind control in education teaches everybody to act in function of the collective. Human feelings are in such a climate obstacles to be eliminated. And that happened with Paula, Laura and me.'

You can hear a pin drop.

'But for years and against all odds I corresponded in secret with Laura.'

'Many things come clear', reacts Celia relieved. 'Maria Labrada and I had to deliver regularly a letter to an address four high in a side street of the Malecón, near the Casa de las Américas.'

'That included the so-called correspondence with a common friend from the University and a poem.'

'And we received letters in turn.'

'Didn't that happen after school?'

Celia nods.

‘A million times I stood hidden across the street or was waiting in a taxi. I’ve seen you grow up to an adult woman.’

‘What did you write?’ interrupts Azahara. ‘Letters?’

‘Poems. Mystical poems.’

At the University José and the sisters Pollán took classes on European medieval mysticism. Mystics are clergy in male and female monasteries who correspond with each other by deep-thinking poems. They write about the encounter between God and man in his physical, psychological and mental shape. Love is the central idea. God is love, but also man is love in his innermost being. The central idea is that people can love each other without physical contact.

When Azahara frowns her eyebrows, the professor clarifies that he has felt himself for years mystically connected with Laura, and that he had experienced that love. Their secret correspondence was a source of deep happiness that made both of their lives more meaningful.

‘What are these poems about?’ Azahara asks.

‘Issues concerning everyday life. But that happened anonymously. Only Laura and I understood these hermetic verses.’

‘How were you doing that? By the use of images?’

‘You’re a wise woman. A recurring theme was the gladiolus. These flowers bloom on either side of a stem. You were the right flower and Maria Labrada the left one. And Laura stood for the stem in the middle. We used the Chinese Zodiac to appoint data and...’

‘Why gladioli?’ interrupts Azahara. ‘Also the Damas de Blanco used these.’

‘That’s a pretty good guess! Your grandmother had a particular fascination for the gladiolus, her symbol in the fight against the regime. She used these in her assemblies first as a painted image and transformed these later to an abstract form composed of waste material. I’ve also seen a composition with a real flower in it. That visionary art was way ahead of her time. On Laura’s demand the gladiolus became the symbol of the Damas de

Blanco. In that way the spirit of her twin sister lived on.'

'They're plenty of poems on the bookcase in aunt Laura's office', nods Celia.

'Those are mine. And I've her collection: five thick storage folders. We were so close that you can hardly distinguish the poems one from the other.'

'How come I've never seen these?' Azahara asks reproaching.

'Nor I looked at them. Aunt Laura didn't want me to. I've read some after she died, but couldn't get heads or tails of them. Now everything becomes clear.'

'Wasn't your handwriting different?'

'We used the same Soviet-design typewriter, like everybody in this country.'

'Never had difficulties?'

'Only once the Secret Service intercepted the correspondence, when I forgot it on my desk. They grilled me about the content of the poem since the letter only talked about the weather forecast. But no one could make any sense of my magical realistic explanation. In the following letter I put a silk glove. In that way Laura couldn't leave any fingerprints behind.'

'Get the bottle of rum, darling', commands Celia. 'Behind the paper towels in the storage room. I have saved that bottle for years for a special occasion like this. It will allow us to flush all emotions out.'

The young woman looks worried on her return. 'There's also a car at the Calle Hospital.'

Celia looks questioningly at Héctor.

'They've sent their special forces', she continues since Gonzalo doesn't understand what she means. 'The first one is cross-eyed and his colleague wears a cap of Micky Mouse.'

Celia looks worried at Héctor. 'Something else is going on.'

But he dismisses her concerns. 'Presumably the changing of the guards. I can't see why reinforcement should be necessary.'

These words reassure Celia. She proudly presents a bottle of *añejos*, a 5-year-old rum. The woman makes fun of the

clandestine fired rum, made with alcohol, stolen from the hospitals, and burned sugar.

The widespread poverty has made of Cuba a nation of alchemists. Nothing is as it seems. The stewed tomatoes on the Black Market don't contain tomatoes, but a mixture of cooked beets, sweet potato, spices, cornstarch and red dye. The bottles of shampoo are filled with washing powder and the cigarettes sold on the street are counterfeit. Bread is baked with flour for the production of pasta and noodles, but rises out of proportion by adding too much yeast. That ever-harder and dryer "air" bread provides sore gums and not saturated stomachs.

Celia in her endless mildness is sensitive to that trickery. According to her also those producers must survive. But her daughter is upset that the Government tolerates that deceit, all the more the Public Health is in danger. Celia doesn't leave that criticism in her heart. She fills the small glasses again and toasts on this eventful evening and the unexpected guests.

'To Laura', the professor responds to her gesture. 'She brings us together.'

'On friendship', confirms Héctor.

'Real friendship transcends death.'

'On the special forces of the Secret Service'; says Azahara who has a clear shot at Gonzalo. Before the young man reacts she adds: 'I'm talking about the guards outside.'

Celia changes the subject. She isn't in the mood for a new round of bickering. 'Now that I know their context I burn with desire to read these poems, especially because my life story is woven within.'

'I'll publish an anthology once our country is freed', announces the professor.

'Who for heaven's sake is interested in mystical love poems nobody understands?' Azahara sharply intervenes.'

'Also universal themes are addressed like the suffering, the loneliness and, above all, the dream of a free homeland. Some verses of Laura are gems. I visited all continents, but no country is as beautiful as Cuba. But due to the communist mismanagement nobody pays attention to it.'

Héctor nods with a look of determination. 'Yet two generations of intellectuals have been victimized by the slaughter of the

Revolution,.’ Melancholy overwhelms him once more. ‘And who knows what’s going to happen.’

The professor is touched by the tone of his voice. In one go he empties his glass and asks: ‘Refill!’

Startled Azahara looks at her mother. She does what he asks. Also Héctor sits on the edge of his seat.

‘Well, I’ve a confession to make’, says the professor hesitant. Once again he empties his glass in one go and plucks up his courage to do a painful admission. ‘I’ve seen Laura before her death in the Calixto Garcia hospital.’

Everyone reacts surprised. Celia hangs on to her daughter.

Also Héctor has no idea what’s coming. ‘How could that be? On the Intensive Care Unit no visitors were allowed. Maria Labrada and I in turn only got a short briefing from the doctor every night.’

‘Every day I came by that Unit for a different reason’, says the professor. ‘My wife was treated after a major surgery.’

‘You are not a doctor?’

‘My sister-in-law Odalys, the Chief of that Unit, gave me doctor’s equipment and a badge. I supposedly was a general practitioner who got the permission to visit my wife.’

Celia apologizes. ‘I didn’t know your wife was ill.’

‘Breast cancer. After the amputation her agony lasted two more years’, he says restrained.

‘My condolences.’

‘What happened exactly?’ asks Héctor with a trembling voice.

‘I was in the hospital when Laura was brought in with the ambulance. She laid in a bed right next to my wife. The Deputy Head Doctor handled her file since Odalys wasn’t of service. The man lived at odds with my sister-in-law. He too was a candidate to obtain her function. But the connections of Uncle Diego outweighed his political support.’

At her hospitalization Laura is short of breath, but still bright of spirit. After a forced separation of forty years both of them have much to say. Despite her rapidly deteriorating health situation they experience one of the most intense moments of their lives. The clock is put back for forty years to the clandestine lecture

of the inspiring words of the Liberation Theologians at the University. They state with pain that the steamroller of Communism has left no space in their lives to put their ideals into practice. That same evening the professor promises her to build at their long-expected common dream.

Héctor is affected. 'What happened exactly to my wife?'

'She got an airway the next day.'

'How's that possible?' responds the man outraged. 'Two days before her death the doctor only reported on a minor viral outbreak and some symptoms of an infection with dengue. I had good hopes that she could return home.'

'The man didn't tell the truth.'

'Was I so naive?'

'Guilt feelings are out of place', Celia intervenes. 'How could you know? It was forbidden to visit her.'

'Was great Aunt Laura murdered?' Azahara asks sharply.

'I don't know. I stayed there often, but not permanently. At that time I was still teaching at the University. And I'm not a doctor. I can witness that to my astonishment they barely looked at her. They never checked her temperature, nor took her blood pressure. And when she built up water the last day nothing was done to save her life. My sister-in-law was powerless because she didn't follow up her file.'

'Excuse me?' Héctor reacts disturbed.

'What's the difference with murder?' asks Azahara.

The professor bows his head and starts weeping. 'She also got a fever the last hours.'

Héctor gets scared. 'I didn't know anything about that.'

October 14, 2011. At 6 pm the guards stand in line at the entrance of the Intensive Care Unit. An important visitor is on his way. The door swings open and the Deputy Head Doctor comes in with some nurses and a high-ranking officer. The doctor reports that "patient Pollàn" is a diabetic who from admittance was facing a high blood pressure. He describes her respiratory infection in combination with dengue as a deadly cocktail. The doctor raises her dress and points at the splotches on her body and the fever. He

shortly expects her death.

The officer is delighted that the Government will get redeemed of that nuisance in a natural way. The publication of her medical report will prevent a tirade from the foreign press and the human rights organizations. Dismissive he wonders what respect one can have for people who don't have any regard for the 99 percent of good things that happen in Cuban society, but continuously insist on a few minor downsides such as freedom of expression, that neither existed before the Revolution. Only his good education and his loyalty to the communist ideals keep him from spitting in the face of that lackey in service of the CIA and big business, but who is in the first row when she is in need of the benefits of the health care services.

When the nurse notes that her temperature has spiked to 40.1 degrees the doctor beams. Things go faster than expected. The officer assures that the services provided by the man to the Revolution will not be forgotten. He clicks his heels together, gets back in line and leaves. The doctor recommends burning her clothes and sheets after her death.

'Laura died at 7.30 pm.' out of respect the professor bows.

'So her condition was hopeless', Celia reacts passive.

'She was killed', protests Azahara.

'I think that medical neglect resulting in death is the right diagnosis', states the professor.

'Who was that officer?' Azahara wants to know.

'Losaja, since two years he's the head of the DGI and the same person who just led the raid in the Church. The professor burst once again into tears. 'My promise to Laura ... I tried to achieve these in my own way. So far I didn't share my plan with others. I still haven't made good on my promises. I'm a coward.'

'What is this all about?' asks Gonzalo surprised. 'Which plan?'

He shakes his head. 'It doesn't make sense. You guys already think I'm a coward anyway.'

'Why should we? You've just explained how this perverted regime functions', Héctor reacts.

'Nobody has any reason to complain after all you've meant for mom and Aunt Laura', comforts Celia on her turn.

But the professor is inconsolable. 'I couldn't do anything. The unmasking by the Deputy Head Doctor could have led to the dismissal of my sister-in-law, the discontinuation of the treatment of my wife and Gonzalo's expulsion at the University. And also my fate could have been sealed. Ordinary bastards these Communists are', he cries out angry. 'Did you know that the Dean set up a meeting during Laura's funeral!'

He looks teary-eyed at Celia. 'I couldn't make contact afterwards neither. I'm supposedly no longer followed since my retirement a month and a half ago. But I don't know if my phone is still tapped.'

'Don't carry any illusion', Gonzalo knows. 'The only difference is that your name is probably no longer on the list of people who are permanently kept under review. But my contacts don't go that far. Not yet. I hope to figure that out by establishing a trusted relationship with one of the new trainees.'

'Philanderer', reprimands Azahara. But her ironic tone reveals that she's starting to develop romantic feelings for that handsome young man.

'I'm definitely not', he answers confidently. 'I've a business relationship in mind with a higher purpose.' His sensitive nerve has nevertheless been hit. 'Or is it forbidden to help my grandfather? He's all I've got.'

'You may be proud of him', Celia agrees.

'No incense', dismisses the professor the compliment. He too is recovering from his emotions. 'My desire to establish contact with the family has succeeded. To this end I last week bought the disguise on the Black Market.' He looks at Celia. 'Can these stay here?'

She nods. 'A lasting memory of this unforgettable evening. Because despite everything, we're gathered.' She looks up at the sky. 'Thanks, Aunt Laura.'

Now the dust has settled in, everyone is deep in thought.

'Another rum?' breaks Celia the silence. She goes around with the bottle.

'And now?' Héctor asks.

The professor scares.

'What are you going to do?'

'I beg your pardon.'

'With your retirement, and with your plan?'

‘And what about your plans?’ he echo’s back.

‘What can we do?’ Héctor wonders desperately. ‘It had often been said that this regime is a giant with feet of clay.’

The professor agrees. ‘I was already absolutely sure about that in the 1990s, during the Special Period.’

After the fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989 the Eastern bloc collapsed. And two years later after the closing down of the Soviet Union, Cuba lost its annual endowment of six billion dollars. When on top of that the United States tightened their blockade and the price of sugar on the world market collapsed, the foreign trade fell by 75 percent, the buying power by half and the Gross Domestic Product by 35 percent. During the *No-bay* period scarcity was the norm. The shortage of basic amenities such as food, clothing, footwear and public transport grew by the day. Many die of starvation. The Americans speculated that the starving Cuban people will rid themselves of the regime. It cracked on all fronts, but it held on. Fidel Castro accelerated the development of tourism, attracted foreign investors and legalized the possession of US dollars.

‘A quarter of a century later the Castro family still is in charge’, the professor says bitter. ‘Because the system is rotten to the bone one push will suffice to bring it down.’

‘Which push? Where? And how?’

‘The membership of the bastions of the Revolution is in free fall. That goes for the Communist Party, the women’s Association, the National Trade Union and the Union of young communists. The figures decline so dramatically that they’re no longer published. And who wants to be a member of the CDR? Only a shell remains of their functioning.’

‘Except this district’, Azahara interrupts.

‘The exception proves the rule. All over the country the payment of bribes ensures a recommendation for a job application or a positive advice. The People’s Assemblies who rarely get the quorum illustrate the ruling inertia. Things just started to snowball when Raúl Castro took power. At that moment the last reasonable persons, such as Carlos Lage, disappeared.’

‘That was before my time’, Azahara intervenes. ‘Why then?’

‘To make room for military. For half a century Raúl was the Minister of Defense. There lies his power base. But his approach quickly undermined the institutional mechanisms.’

‘You’re yet a member of the Communist Party’, blames Azahara.

The professor is startled. ‘Temporary. Only on paper. And for an another reason.’

‘A hidden agenda?’

‘No’, he firmly says. ‘Don’t get the wrong idea. It’s not what you’re thinking. Only a strategic move for reasons that I can’t get into right now.’

‘A form of schizophrenia?’

‘There’s a world of difference between who you are on paper and who you really are.’

Since Azahara still looks at him invasively the professor goes for the counterattack. ‘What’s your hidden agenda?’

Now the young woman doesn’t know what to answer.

The professor puts her further in the defensive. ‘And your plans? Are you also going to cut your losses?’

Azahara is speechless, till unexpectedly Gonzalo comes to her aid. ‘No young guy drives himself into destruction, because that fate awaits anyone who colors outside the lines. Only who operates subtle in the margin makes a chance to slip through the net. And even then.’

‘Who are you thinking about?’ asks Celia.

‘Fernando Ravsberg, the former correspondent of the BBC. He is a sympathizer of the Revolution and no dissident. But some articles on his website *Cartos desde Cuba* rubbed the wrong way. Like his harrowing report about the death of thirty patients in the psychiatric hospital of Havana due to neglect. And more recently his article on the abuses in the transport sector let to a stream of suspicions and physical threats. Only one journalism couple seem unassailable at the moment: Yoani Sánchez and Reinaldo Escobar with their blog *Y generation* and the digital newspaper *14yMedio*.’

‘You know these?’ Héctor asks amazed. ‘I thought you could only read these abroad?’

Filters are made to be bypassed. My colleagues eagerly

comment when the bosses are absent. Both have a keen understanding of the Cuban society, but are isolated.’

Héctor’s dull look betrays that his defeatism is taking over again. He realizes that time made a dying breed of the dissidents. And any opposition gets muzzled. On an even more sophisticated way. In Cuba there are hardly critical voices despite its large number of scholars. The most important success factor at the University isn’t knowledge or insight, but ideological loyalty. And an academic degree is a popular gift for canine loyal militants. Logically the intellectual debate is only allowed within the ideological basic outline.

Azahara straightens herself out in a passionate way. ‘What good will it do to resist an enemy who’s a hundred times stronger?’ She focuses her attention on Héctor. ‘They’ve cracked you in the camps and destroyed great Aunt Laura.’ Consequently she’s grilling her mother. ‘Why are you supporting Aunt Mary Labrada with her torn-off group of the Damas de Blanco? To ease your conscience?’

‘You don’t talk to me that way. I thought your puberty was behind you.’

‘What do the Damas still signify? They don’t fight any longer.’

‘That’s not true. On April 1 fifty women were arrested in Havana, Matanzas, Villa Clara and Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo. The authorities wanted to prevent the demonstrations as part of their campaign *Todos marchamos – We march on* that involved the release of all political prisoners.’

‘That’s a one-time-only. The Damas demonstrated every Sunday when great Aunt Laura was still alive. I accompanied her plenty of times to the Saint Rita Church as a young girl. The accusation of the Government that the Damas get money from the *Yuma’s* isn’t even unjustified. And you know that. Many members are out to get money from Miami, which is mainly provided by the U.S. Government. Isn’t the plain truth that the Damas are a springboard to emigration?’

Celia reacts as a bitten dog. ‘You’re barking up the wrong tree with your criticism. Complain to Maria Labrada or Berta Soler.’

Héctor wants to close the discussion. 'Now the Damas meet in a house in Lawton that issue is no longer appropriate.'

But Azahara still has her rage. 'I'm not going to wait another twenty years for something that might never happen. What future can I expect? Playing a slave? Or becoming a district spy to get a mobile? Why then?' She looks at Gonzalo. 'Our friend listens to all our calls.'

'I've never done it', he protests.

'Perhaps read my emails or letters?'

'Azahara!' Celia attempts to restrain her daughter.

'What? Are you also going to impose rules as the officials, party members, agents of the DGI and the CDR? I want to be free! Collect information without any restrictions. Move where I want to go. Decide for myself what I'm going to do. My family is very dear to me, but I want to emigrate.'

'Azahara!' repeats Celia aghast. 'What are you saying, darling? Think twice!'

'My decision is final. I'll send money every month, just like hundreds of thousands of emigrated Cubans.'

Celia protests. 'Remember Aunt Laura's words: *Running away is a form of cowardice*. I doubt you'll be welcome with the *Yuma's* when Donald Trump becomes president.'

'I can understand her point of view.' The young woman scares when Gonzalo once again takes her side. 'Everyone must make a decision in good conscience. Which perspective do young people have? The older generation does not have the right to lecture us.'

Héctor feels endorsed. 'You guys only think about making as much money as possible. I've sacrificed my whole life for a free Cuba. Unfortunately my generation has failed to do so. But sometimes it doesn't take much to make major changes. On their arriving in 1956 only twelve Castro's remained. However, two years later they succeeded in overthrowing the Batista regime. Why shouldn't that happen today?'

'You can't compare the current state of affairs with the military situation of that time', corrects the professor. 'The Cuban army is heavily armed and has huge economic interests.'

The military holding Gaesa controls sixty per cent of the economy, including the key sectors: the tourist industry, the

currency transactions and transfers of money from abroad, the department stores, retailers, banks, shipping companies, petrol stations, restaurants, nightclubs, the free trade area and container port of Mariel.

The control of that empire by Colonel Luis Alberto Rodríguez, the son-in-law of Raúl Castro, illustrates how deep nepotism is anchored.

“Being family of” opens the door for political functions, a higher place on the waiting list for a house or a car, access to the best hospitals, a place in the elite schools and even a quicker cremation.

But whoever bothers the son of a powerful father or rejects the fickle sister of a general awaits the well of oblivion.

‘Can no one, within the army or the police, turn the tide?’ asks Celia.

‘The discontent is enormous’, knows the professor.

‘Oh, yeah?’

‘But it’s not what you’re thinking. Many hardliners want to turn back Raúl Castro’s reforms. But no military will fight for substantial changes. That’s normal. They’ve the highest wages; get benefits in kind and a convenient financing when buying a house or a car. The higher someone moves up the ladder, the more benefits he gets.’

‘There’s nothing you can do about that’, confirms Héctor bitter.

‘I didn’t say that’, refutes the professor.

‘Let’s call a spade a spade’, challenges Azahara him. ‘That’s the second time you suggested something without playing off your back foot.’

The professor scowls and doesn’t know which attitude to adopt.

‘I don’t know if you’ll succeed’, Gonzalo reacts. ‘I have been living with him for 22 years. He’s a most wise and amiable man. But I don’t know anything about him. He never tells me what he’s doing.’

The professor reacts irritated. ‘I know what I’m doing. But there’s such a thing as timing. I don’t know whether the time is right to come forward with my plan.’

He waits for a while.

‘And I agree with Celia. Will the time ever come?’

Meanwhile Gonzalo reads a copy of *Convivencia desde el interior de Cuba*, the only tolerated independent magazine. Azahara draws his attention to an article on the censored exhibition *Dissidents and Utopias* of painter Pedro Pablo Oliva. Gonzalo has hardly any interest in the subject, but his eyes are drawn like a magnet to the young woman. But since his derogatory comments about her work she holds off.

‘*Convivencia* exists for ten years’, Celia starts. ‘But how long will that magazine of the Diocese of Pinar del Rio still appear. The arrest of journalist Karina Gálves, officially on account of tax evasion, increases the pressure on Chief Editor Dagoberto Hernández.

‘Each dissident ecclesiastical voice is finely ground’, agrees the professor. ‘History threatens to repeat itself. Dagoberto will probably be forced to resign. That previously happened with the editors of the critical magazine *Vitral* of Bishop Siro and *Espacio Lacial* of the Archdiocese.’ ‘Why doesn’t the Catholic Church adopt a more assertive role’, Azahara wonders.

‘Don’t the church leaders understand that their nationwide organization is the only countervailing power?’

‘I can’t objectively judge as an atheist and a member of the Masonic Lodge’, Héctor intervenes. ‘I really appreciate what the Church is doing and don’t minimize her input. But what about the bishops who cooperate with the regime? And I’m wondering in particular about the role of Juan de la Caridad Garcia Rodriguez, the new Archbishop.’

‘Wait and see’, responds the professor whose rage has passed once again. ‘He’s only been in office for a year. But I appreciate the policy of his predecessor, Jaime Ortega. His diplomatic approach led to the release of thousands of prisoners.’ He looks at Héctor. ‘The man also mediated for your release, didn’t he?’

Héctor wants to intervene, but the professor takes the floor again.

‘Ortega was locked up himself in an internment camp. Only a few people realize he prevented a worse repression. Never was a priest, nun or Bishop killed in Cuba as in all other countries of Latin America. The Government recognized under his administration Christmas and Easter and agreed with the construction of two new churches and a seminary.’

On Héctor's face a grin appears.

‘This might be little’, continues the professor, ‘but all of that is unseen in a communist country. Homes for elderly people and soup kitchens for the poor are established. The authorities allow processions again and the Church gets ample attention in the media.’

‘Ortega got a lot of sweeties’, Héctor replies. ‘But the master of Realpolitik never knocked his fist on the table. I’m not judging, but some facts speak for themselves. He never supported the priests who criticized the regime, such as José Conrado, and he neither reacted when Oswaldo Payá and the MLC launched their Varela project. What I don’t understand is that Ortega elaborated mass for the sick Fidel Castro. This former pupil of the Jesuit colleges in Santiago and Havana made, his lifelong, every effort to ban the Church from society. Didn’t Jesus chase the merchants and hypocrites out of the temple? Just think about it.’

Héctor continues, noticing that the professor gets confused. ‘The other side of the coin isn’t that beautiful.’

Nevertheless continues the professor in defending the former Archbishop. ‘Easy for us to talk. Put yourself in his place. The man knows that each call is tapped and he has no choice but to cooperate with clerics who openly or, even worse, secretly are on the payroll of the DGI. He had no choice but to compromise. Radical positions would have caused more harm than good.’

Next he turns to Azahara. ‘You’re right. The Church won’t strike a decisive blow to the regime.’

‘Who will?’ Azahara repeats. ‘And answer my question.’

After some hesitation he firmly says: ‘There’s a way out. For five years I’ve been hatching on a plan ...’

Suddenly there’s a bang on the door. Nobody understands what’s happening. Héctor gets up, closes the lid of the cistern and puts the carpet on it. Next Azahara locks the lid from the inside.

Celia shudders. She previously had a feeling that something wasn't right.

Once again there's a bang on the door and also some shouting. When Héctor opens the door even in the underground room they hear how a dozen of men enter. When Héctor loudly expresses his indignation their leader with a shiny black coat picks him up.

'Where's Celia?'

'And your search warrant?' bites Héctor.

'There's no need for that when investigating Counter-Revolutionary activities.' He orders his men to search the house.

Héctor, who feels aggrieved, challenges the man. 'What do you expect? An expression of self-criticism like Heberto Padilla, who publicly accused his wife of counter-Revolutionary activities? You've got a problem. You already eliminated my wife.'

Furiously the man grabs Héctor by the throat, while two companions grip his arms. In the underground room Celia and Azahara sit down as if paralyzed. Although he usually keeps his cool, also Gonzalo trembles on his legs. He recognizes the voice of agent Camilo, the head of the notorious anti-terrorist unit *Sección 21*. The great cynic at every opportunity trumpets off the rooftops that he personally will crush every opponent. Gonzalo realizes that his assignment isn't a good omen.

'Don't you have any respect?' Héctor reacts violently. 'Next to the disgraceful smearing of the remembrance of my wife in the Church, on top I'm molested in my home.'

Camilo signals at the agents to cut him loose. 'We're looking for two subversive individuals who participated at the counterrevolutionary gathering in the Church.'

'Oh yeah?' bites Héctor. 'I thought you know everyone who even said one false word about this perverted regime.'

'In my endless goodness I've already forgotten these defamatory words. But I can reassure you, our services are doing wonderfully well. Presumably are these subversive persons contra

revolutionaries who infiltrated after the liberalization of relations with the *Yumas*.’

In the underground room the little hairs of the professor stand on end, while Gonzalo searches support at the wall.’

‘What does this have to do with me?’ Héctor asks.

‘Do you really think we’re retarded, aborted chimpanzees? Where are they?’

Héctor hears them searching the rooms on the first floor.

Also Camilo looks up.

‘You’ll never leave the cell alive when they’re here.’

‘I don’t know who you’re talking about’, answers Héctor unmoved.

‘Film images will refresh your memory’, he roars. ‘You fled with them through the sacristy.’ Camilo pushes his revolver under Héctors throat. ‘Who are they? And where are they?’

‘I’ve never seen them before.’

‘Liar’, growls the man. ‘Celia talked with them. And it was apparently a warm meeting.’

‘I don’t know. I was in shock by the bestial way the DGI has acted.’

Camilo punches him in the nose. ‘Last chance: where are they?’

‘We went our own way and took a taxi home. Didn’t the people next door inform you? Or have the surveillance cameras stopped working?’

He gets a slap in his face again. ‘Where is Celia?’

‘In the city. You know her ways better than I.’

‘Her mobile is here according to our records’ his assistant intervenes.

‘Call her!’ commands Camilo. ‘Then we know for sure that she’s not hiding in a secret place. In this house already a number of strange things have happened.’

Stunned Celia takes her mobile in the underground room. Gonzalo grabs it and turns it off just when he feels a vibration. Cold sweat runs over his body.

In the living room Camilo’s assistant states that the phone is switched off.

Gonzalo stands rooted to the spot with the mobile in his

hand while Celia's teeth chatter. Azahara shows her appreciation by giving him the thumbs up. They realize that the underground room would have been discovered when the mobile had rang a fraction of a second later. And who falls into the hands of Camilo is transferred to the Villa Marista, the infamous interrogation center of the Secret Service in the former school of the Marist fathers.

'Find that mobile', commands Camilo. 'It will for sure contain information on those state dangerous individuals.'

'But we haven't found anything', responds someone.

'You still don't have ears to your body? And this time thoroughly.'

Reluctantly they execute that order.

'The neighbor has only seen the departure of the young woman', reports an assistant.

'Merde! The only thing these aborted chimpanzees have to do, is to keep an eye on this ramshackle building. That's what they're paid good money for. But no, they prefer to sleep in front of the TV. And what do the recordings of the cameras tell us?'

'We can have them at the earliest tomorrow in the late afternoon.'

When the mobile remains untraceable, Camilo subsides his anger on Héctor. He grabs him by the throat again. 'Contact us on her return!'

'Isn't that my neighbor's job?' challenges Héctor. 'I'm going to sleep.'

'I don't know if they will still be serving us tomorrow', he answers seething. 'The law obliges you to transmit all information on suspicious persons. If not I'll have you persecuted you for culpable omission.'

'I'll do that "without any delay"', Héctor grins.

He immediately feels Camilo's curse on him.

'Article 154 of the Penal Code literally states these words, or am I mistaken?'

Camilo smashes his face again. 'Don't make any illusion, aborted chimpanzee. The police has distributed the description of those criminals and their e-fit all over the country.'

Camilo is about to leave when an employee calls him.

'I've possibly found a trace, chief.'

Héctor feels his heart going right through his feet when he accompanies Camilo to the bathroom. The man points to the lid of the cistern with the carpet in his hand.

‘What’s this?’ Camilo raves.

‘A broken cistern. This has never served.’

Camilo hammers on the lid. ‘That space sounds hollow.’

‘Of course, because it’s empty.’

‘I need to be sure. Get a blowtorch.’

‘No problem for me’, Héctor says icy calm, while the nerves run down his throat. ‘But when you break something I demand that you restore everything to its original state.’

‘You’re not in a position to demand a great deal of anything.’

In the underground room everyone wants to escape through the former emergency exit of the movie theater. ‘Maybe we should wait a little longer’, Gonzalo whispers. The young man stays cool-blooded. ‘They’re not in yet.’

‘We’ve to request that kind of equipment three working days in advance’, Camilo’s assistant reports while he looks at his watch. ‘Shall I fill in a request form to the technical service tomorrow morning?’

‘All that freaking bureaucracy’, roars the chief of *Sección 21*. ‘There was a better government in the middle ages! We’ll settle this in our own way. Get a crowbar, chisels and hammers.’

The agents are unable to open the lid despite their best efforts. The anchoring on the inside holds up, also because Gonzalo holds on to the horizontal bars. At last Camilo leaves muttering and swearing without looking back. When he hears Héctor sniggering, he returns, smashes his face and promises him that he will come back one day to settle the score.

In the underground room Gonzalo falls, in a delirium of joy, in the arms of Azahara, but the young woman distances herself.

Celia reacts emotionally. ‘I’ve to turn up tomorrow. But what can I come up with?’ she cries. ‘I can’t betray the professor!’

‘Name an imaginary person’, proposes Azahara.

'She can't get away with this', judges Héctor.

'Tell them you've met to your surprise someone from your youth who has emigrated',

Azahara makes another attempt.

Now the professor shakes his head. 'Anyone who digs in the file Pollán, ends up with me.'

'No single file has pieces of evidence prior to 2008', proclaims Gonzalo not without pride. 'Including that of grandfather.'

Everyone scares.

'I thought you were only interested in the technical aspect', bites Azahara.

'I secretly looked at his file on the account of my boss. I don't see what's wrong with it.'

'That's the first thing I hear about that', reacts the professor upset.

'I just don't advertise secret information.'

'Secrecy is apparently a family trait', pesters Azahara.

'What's in my file?' asks the professor seriously.

'An overview of your biography, your conviction by the court-martial and the six-monthly reports of the University. All of them are positive.'

'Who has written these?'

'I only know code names.'

'But what happened in 2008?' informs Héctor.

'During the passage of Hurricane *Ike* two trees fell on the roof of the Central Archive. That collapsed partially, after which the building flooded by the torrential rain. Hundreds of thousands of files in paper and tape recordings have been destroyed.'

Also Héctor frightens.

'What I'm telling you is only known by insiders.'

'So there's little chance they detect the link with the professor', breathes Celia relieved.

'My line of approach of that old school comrade was pretty good', repeats Azahara. She also now craves for recognition, but to her disappointment no one gets into it.

'I've hidden a bottle of rum too', beams Héctor in a rare cheerful moment. 'Laura still got these. And I've preserved it as a relic, because rum gets better with age. But now on this very special

day I pop the cork. For the second time we have threaded the eye of the needle.'

'Where have you been hiding these?' Celia asks surprised.

'Don't hold much hope. There's a good chance that they just took them.'

'This house has multiple secret spots', smiles the host.

Héctor triumphs when he enters with the bottle in his hand. The host toasts on Celia's mysterious school friend when he pours in the small glasses. The woman laughs at the thought of the search of two ghosts by the Secret Service.

Everybody is laughing when the professor and Gonzalo disguise again, till Azahara gets in with a sharp comment.

'Great aunt has given her life, but we only want to limit the damage.'

Celia wants to react, but the young woman is imperturbable.

'When no one is doing something, nothing will change. I repeat the words of the professor: "aren't all of us cowards?"'

The man is hit on his nerves. 'I worked out a Future Plan as I've promised Laura', he says in fits and starts. 'I called it The White Revolution.'

'What?' scares Azahara. 'Then at least a Revolution!'

'You've never spoken a word of this', reacts Gonzalo surprised.

'It's a theoretical model', he modestly says.

'Tell us more!', invites Héctor.

Startled by the reactions he backs down. 'It's only a construction on paper.'

'Not too modest', says Celia. 'Knowing your name and fame, no one will be able to put a word in edgewise.'

'That's by no means certain.'

'You make us only more curious.' Azahara sits on the tip of her chair. 'When will this Revolution take place?'

The professor hesitates for a moment. 'On 25 February 2018, when Raúl Castro resigns.'

'A perfect moment', agrees Héctor. A big smile appears on

his face.

‘Will that White Revolution,’ the fire is sparkling in Azahara’s eyes, ‘be an ode to the Damas de Blanco?’

‘In the first place to Laura. There’s more than meets the eye.’

‘What’s going to happen?’ Celia asks curiously.

‘That’s a long story. My play book has 250 pages.’

‘There it is!’ the woman gloats. ‘What did I say? This text is finalized to the smallest detail.’

‘How long are you going to beat around the bush?’ Azahara intervenes.

The professor, whose nerves are strained, doesn’t answer immediately.’

‘Or are you going to take your secret to your grave?’

Once more he shows restraint. ‘I don’t know if my plan is a good idea anyway. I’m not satisfied with the result. There are still too many gaps. And the distribution could in addition imply Gonzalo’s death sentence. I can’t do that to him.’

‘I don’t think I’ve a lot to lose’, refutes the young man.

‘You know what the DGI is capable of. They’ll destroy not only you, but all of us until we go crazy or commit suicide. Your life has only just begun, my boy.’

‘Paralyzed by the silent terror of harassment?’ throws Azahara him at his feet.

‘The execution isn’t all that simple’, counters the professor. ‘There are a couple of insurmountable technical and organizational bottlenecks.’

‘One couple is two.’

‘At least three.’

‘What then?’

‘First we need a secret coordination center that also houses the electronic listening devices we hope to recover.’ He looks at Gonzalo but the young man doesn’t understand what he means.

‘Does this space comply with your expectations?’ beams Héctor. ‘This place is at your disposal. You can enter and exit unseen by the underlying street.’

‘Thanks.’

‘I’ve no merit in this.’ He looks endearingly to the picture of his late uncle.

The professor suddenly turns white as a sheet. ‘It won’t be

that easy anyway. Suppose we're installing listening devices here; these will consume a lot of electricity.'

'So what? Here's a socket', shows Héctor.

'We'll be found out.'

'Sure? Ever heard of stealing electricity? Hundreds of thousands of Cubans are doing so. And it's easy as pie. I'm a civil engineer.'

'Me too', reacts Gonzalo surprised.

'We'll badly need both of your knowledge', nods the professor.

'There goes that problem', triumphs Celia.

'And number two?'

'It's no coincidence that Gonzalo works for the DGP', he continues reluctantly.

'Hello?' reacts the young man appalled.

'My Plan will never succeed without inside help. Beside you we will need a technical manager at a high level who can be manipulated.'

'That's what you've been looking for for months!' Gonzalo sees how the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. 'Why didn't you ask before? I'll find someone.'

'Bribing people costs a lot of money', says Celia soberly.

'I've put the proceeds of my publications and lectures aside abroad. That'll save us provisionally.'

'And three?' Azahara already throws one arm in the air. 'We're almost there.'

'I doubt it.' The professor tempers her enthusiasm. 'We can't succeed without a quick and efficient communication network since more and more people will be involved in the implementation. We're facing, in addition to preserving the code of silence, the challenge to communicate discreetly. Internet is indispensable. But that's a fiction in Cuba.'

'Unrealistically expensive', confirms the young woman. 'Navigating on the Nauta-server costs 4.50 CUC an hour. Who can afford that? And the free Wi-Fi hotspots aren't usable.'

'What's that?'

'The places in the city where hundreds of Cubans meet day and night. But cameras of the Secret Service scan everyone and all internet activities are controlled.'

Gonzalo is lost in thoughts. 'Can anyone in the

neighborhood give us access?’

Héctor shakes his head.

‘And that businessman a couple doors down?’ beams Celia.

‘How far is the distance?’

‘Ten, maximum twenty meters.’

‘We can fix it.’

‘But the man has to cooperate’, tempers Héctor.

‘He’s often abroad, but his wife is always friendly’, says Celia. ‘And she knows our situation. In her look I can feel sympathy for us.’

‘Bet they’re lackeys of the communists!’

‘I don’t have any indication in that direction. They’ve never assisted a meeting of the Committee in Defense of the Revolution.’

‘Now, how would you know that? You never participated yourself’, teases Azahara.

‘Next time you’ll go!’ clowns her mother. ‘And they don’t have contact with the CDR President.’

‘That’s true. Except for the payment of the bribe for their dish antenna.’

‘Leave that to me’, beams Celia.

‘But access to the internet doesn’t mean we’re establishing a social network’, intervenes the professor.

‘The technical evolution doesn’t stand still, grandpa’, gloats Gonzalo. ‘And Tor then?’

Héctor scares. ‘That was my nickname at school.’

Everyone laughs spontaneously.

‘The Onion Router, comrade.’

Onion Routing gives the users of Facebook anonymous and encrypted access to all data on the internet. Sending messages by onion routers or network nodes can be compared to peeling an onion.

Each router removes a layer of encryption to discover the navigation instructions and forwards the message to the next router. These intermediate nodes can’t find out the origin or the destination nor the content of a message.

Héctor nods in agreement. But the professor, who listens with the open mouth to the explanation of his grandson,

is still skeptical. Therefore Gonzalo installs the torsite on Celia's mobile.

'I'll send you a message', gloats the young man.

'What are you writing?' asks Celia curiously.

'We're preparing The White Revolution in the underground room at Calle Neptuno 963', he says with a smile. 'No one can read this.'

But the professor reacts angrily. 'Are you completely mad?'

Azahara wants to take the mobile, but unsuccessfully.

'Just kidding', replicates Gonzalo.

'That isn't funny at all! What has he written?'

Now Azahara obtains the mobile and rushes into laughing. 'Nice to meet you, madam.'

But the professor reprimands him. 'Preparing a Revolution is not a joke. We'll keep these till February 26, 2018.'

'So all problems have been solved.' Azahara puts both arms in the air.

'Not so fast', repeats the professor. 'I can in addition hardly overlook the number of substantive obstacles.'

'Like what?'

'The cooperation of actors as alter egos of minister of Defense Frias and Alejandro Castro, probably the next president.'

The succession of Raúl Castro stirs up the emotions for quite a long time. The name of first Vice President Miguel Díaz-Canel, the current number two of the regime, is most quoted. But things will probably turn into a continuation of the exercise of power by the Castro family, because of their gigantic ancestral and financial interests.

The best placed candidate is Alejandro Castro Espin, the only son of Raúl. The man who lost his left eye during a military expedition in the Angolan capital Luanda, should be an engineer and a specialist in international relations. Since 2008 he has been preparing for his new task as the personal assistant of his father.

But also other members of the Castro clan cherish big ambitions. Next to Raúl's daughter Muriela, the Director of the Cuban National Center for Sexual Education, there's his

grandson Guillermo Rodríguez. His nickname is *El Cangrejo* – *The crab*.

‘Only few people really know what happens in the power center’, states the professor.

‘However, I’m convinced you know more with your wisdom and insight’, replies Celia.

‘I’ve to disappoint you. My name is Chepe, not Castro.’

‘But what is the link with these actors?’ Azahara asks.

‘To perform as look-alikes. I know a candidate for the role of Alejandro. But that man will have to take a huge risk. And I don’t know if he wants to.’

‘Did you already ask him?’

The professor reacts piqued. ‘I’ve already told you I haven’t spoken to anyone about my Plan.’

‘Uncle Diego is as director of the National Theatre perfectly positioned’, intervenes Gonzalo. ‘In addition his influence extends as far as the nightlife of Havana. And he can’t refuse you any request. Without your help he would never have obtained his degree.’

The professor looks like a beaten dog.

‘Don’t blame me. That’s what you’ve always said. Furthermore uncle Diego admires you boundless.’

‘Let’s try’, encourages Azahara. ‘I don’t know your script, but I suggest starting with the first step. And when we succeed, the second will follow. And if we fail, no one can blame us for trying.’ The young woman gets a big smile on her face.

‘What do you think?’ Also Celia looks the professor straight in the eye.

‘On condition that everyone cooperates and that all noses point in the same direction.’

‘Of course’, says the woman.

‘That implies to put the old prejudices aside.’

‘That’s self-evident.’

‘I don’t know if it’s so obvious.’

‘Why?’

‘What’s coming up is a David against Goliath battle. History will possibly repeat itself and we may suffer the same fate as the FEU. The success rate is objectively small. And if we don’t

join all forces, it will even be less than nothing. This will apply in the first place to the Damas de Blanco.’

‘I’ll talk to Maria Labrada.’

Gonzalo raises his hand for a high five. Azahara answers that gesture. They clap their hands and tap their clenched fists. Also the professor and Héctor express their agreement. Finally Celia agrees. ‘On The White Revolution!’

3 YOU'RE A REAL FRIEND

'Pablo?'

Hola, Gonzalo.'

Both greet each other abundantly.

'What a match!' The man in his forties proudly puts his scarf in the air. He's celebrating the 8-4 victory of Industriales on their arch-rival from Santiago de Cuba. Together with the elated supporters they both leave the Stadium Latinoamericano. The large square in front of the main entrance is immersed in a sea of Royal Blue.

'That's terrific. It's incredible, baseball!'

'Did you see how our Lions reversed the disadvantage into in a 5-3 lead in the third inning? The pitchers Arleys Sánchez and Yoandri Portal were extraordinary. And what about catcher Alden Mesa?'

'Manager Estelar Jardinero does an excellent job', agrees Gonzalo. 'As a former player he exactly knows what to do.'

'For the third time of row we win the *clasico*.'

'We'll become champions if we continue this way.'

His older colleague isn't convinced. 'We haven't been able to do so since 2010. We only stand a chance when naturals like Alexander Malleta return.'

'Are you coming along to the VIP bar?'

'How do you get in there?'

'Connections.'

Gonzalo whispers something in the ear of the doorman

and sticks discreetly a couple of notes in his hand. Both go inside.

‘Take what you want. Everything is free.’

‘Thanks!’

‘Why shouldn’t colleagues do each other a favor?’

Both toast with a Mojito.

‘Rum with lime is a delicious combination.’

‘Too much cane sugar’, Pablo notices.

‘Oh, we’ve an expert among us.’

‘No, a man with thirst’, he smiles. ‘There’s no better thirst-
quencher.’

‘Such a fanatic supporter?’

‘I don’t miss a single home game.’

‘Do you fancy a VIP card for the game against the
champions, the Tigers of Ciego de Avila?’

‘That’s what I’m dreaming of for so many years’, Pablo
reacts beyond belief. ‘But how will you handle that?’

‘Diego Chepe is my uncle’, he whispers.

Gonzalo and Pablo are dressed in their best suit when they’re queuing for a rich buffet in the hotel of the Industriales, near the stadium. On the facade there’s the monumental letter I in Royal Blue. Just before the start of the match they take their seat at the lowest section of the grandstand, near the field.

Pablo is watching every move of the quintet of the Tigers who play for the Cuban national team. Their names are etched into his memory, although they’re from a small province in the center of the country. Especially catcher Roger Machado is in great shape. His brilliant performance exposes the weaknesses of the Industriales: the lack of a top-quality pitcher, both Arleys Sánchez and Yoandri Portal are having an off-day.

When a woman in her seventies comes along with soft drinks and confectionery Gonzalo orders a Tukola and some popcorn. It takes, to the displeasure of the rows behind them, a while before the woman finds their change. Pablo furiously eats his

popcorn when he states with sorrow how his favorite team continues to fall behind. At the break after the fifth inning the score is 3-7.

‘This is going to end up badly.’

‘The Tigers are better in all aspects of the game. But I’ve something to cheer you up.’ Gonzalo takes a pack from his backpack. ‘A gift from uncle Diego.’

‘Sorry, man. I can’t accept. What have I ever done to deserve this.’

‘Just say “thank you” is enough.’

Greedy the man opens the packaging and triumphs. ‘Whoa, a cap of The New York Yankees, my favorite club. And the best club in the world!’ He gets tears in his eyes at the sight of a sweater of star player Mark Teixeira. ‘I’m a fan for years. How do you know?’

‘I’m working for the DGP, he laughs out loud. ‘The lifting of the blockade by the *Yuma’s* has its advantages. And aren’t the Industriales The New York Yankees of Cuba?’

‘Is your uncle here?’ Pablo asks. ‘I’ll thank him right away.’

Gonzalo looks around. ‘I don’t think so. Otherwise we should already heard him.’ Then he whispers in his ear. ‘I’ll see him tomorrow. But people at the top don’t like to be disturbed. To fix something it’s better to go through me. Knowing people: that’s how’s the world is connected.’

‘Now I owe you in triplicate’, says Pablo shy. ‘What can I do for you?’

‘Friendship doesn’t pay. I only met you a few months ago, but I already have the feeling that you’re a real friend.’

‘The feeling is mutual!’

Gonzalo wants to say something, but shows consciously some restraint.

Pablo reacts immediately. ‘Hola, man. Speak up! What’s on your mind?’

The young man responds desperately.

‘Is it about women? Those are my specialty.’ He raises his voice. ‘Any problem? Don’t complain, just ask Pablo!’

Gonzalo shakes his head. ‘It’s about work, but I don’t want to bother you. Furthermore, it’s not urgent.’

‘What then?’

‘Some other day.’

‘We got plenty of time now.’

Gonzalo takes his chance. ‘It’s about my boss, the Sour Puss.’

‘That hair splitter sat next to me during the training at the DGI.’

‘His rules drive me crazy. The worst part of it is that I can only do half of my work. And when I propose to take work home with me, it’s not allowed.’

‘Be careful with working late’, Pablo admonishes him in a paternal way. ‘That never lasts and is good for nothing. Follow my good advice. The point is not to work hard, but to work the right way. Let others do the dirty work, but always make sure that you get all the glory. I’ll teach you how to do that.’ ‘I’m not a Department Head who holds a managerial position’, replies Gonzalo. ‘I also want to make a career, but first I want to prove what I’m capable of.’

‘Do you really believe that will be necessary with your tentacles in the highest party ranks?’

‘It’s a matter of honor. I wish I had a laptop with access to the active files and archives at home.’

‘Codes are needed to get permanent access. Sorry, but I’m too low in the hierarchy.’

‘You don’t understand, comrade. I only want to consult the existing documents. So I can outrace my colleagues and achieve very good results by the Sour Puss.’

Pablo warns him again. ‘Having ambition, is healthy. But always think twice. A few years back I’ve known a young man who worked himself literally to the bone. But when he crashed, no one

would even look at him.'

Because his foot-dragging makes him nervous Gonzalo asks him point-blank: 'Will you help me?'

'I can embezzle a laptop tomorrow or the day after', he promises. 'I will have it check by the IT Department and I'll deliver you a backup of the files on an external hard disk, because these cover more than a terabyte.'

They seal the deal with a hi-five. Inwardly Gonzalo triumphs, because Pablo cherishes no distrust.

'You'll get them on your desk at the end of next week.'

'I'll pick them up myself. I don't want the Sour Puss to know I got one.'

'It's all the same to me. But let's talk about the important matters of life. Next to the Industriales there's the female beauty of course.' He radiates. 'I always say: young girls are the most beautiful creations on earth. Nothing is so attractive as their beauty. Tell them Pablo has said it. But what about you?'

Gonzalo turns red.

'You're not ...' Pablo puts his clenched right fist on the bottom of his left palm.

Gonzalo shakes his head.

'Why so shy?'

'It's only the beginning.'

'Romantic love', goats Pablo. 'Keep that wonderful feeling as long as you can, because before you know it the day-to-day life starts. Tell me. What's the name of your chosen one? Does she also work for the DGI?'

Gonzalo shakes his head. He has no choice but to put everything on the table in order to not to arise suspicion. When he pronounces the name Azahara, the man knows she's a woman with spunk and character.

Gonzalo looks impatient to the new pitcher of the Blue Lions who's warming up, but Pablo is adamant.

The young man has no another choice but to show a picture. Now Pablo is over the moon. He praises the beauty of his conquest.

‘My gut tells me she’s a fury. And my intuition has never cheated me before. What does she do?’

‘She’s still studying. Her last year.’

‘Which subject?’

‘Academy.’

‘Sorry man, but that sounds dangerous.’

‘Why?’

‘Over the past few years we had more than our hands full with so-called artists who believe they can get away with just about anything.’

‘What do you mean?’ Gonzalo’s tongue prevents his teeth from chattering.

‘You can’t imagine what some clowns afford themselves in the name of art. So I had to keep an eye on the Plaza de Revolución, the sacred ground where our beloved *Comandante* and *Chefe* Fidel has kept so many inspiring speeches. Once a woman pretended to give a performance.’

‘What was she about to do?’ Gonzalo asks innocently.

‘Everyone could publicly during one minute proclaim his or her opinion on the topic of his or her choice: the sissies, the girls, the match of the Industriales, the cat of his neighbor or the snail in the lettuce of his garden.’

‘That sounds like fun.’

‘You think so, but that kind of people follow two agendas. They want to spout criticism on our beloved president and the government and, of course, glorify the *Yuma's* under the guise of art.’ The man shakes his head. ‘Furthermore there’s this wacko, called *El Sexto*. But a far better choice would be *El Cero*. He painted on the back of two pigs the names of Raúl and Fidel, the greatest of men who’ve chosen to serve the Revolution as their life work.

We cleaned up that pigsty. And those pigs have proven excellent services on my barbecue.’

‘What happened with the artist?’ asks Gonzalo seemingly curious.

‘That’s another story’, he sighs. ‘Because he felt himself high above the artist bond *El Cero* tore up his Uneac membership card. One has to intern psychological deviants as they pose a danger to society. But our Government has released that wacko under international pressure. Do you know what he has done consequently?’

Gonzalo shrugs.

‘Tattooed the portraits of two of the largest poisoned bastards on his back.’

‘Who’re you talking about?’ Gonzalo is acting oblivious.

‘You’ve certainly heard the names of those agents of the *Yuma*’s. They got lots of money from the CIA. How else can you explain they’re still stirring up things so fanatically? A man called Payá was killed in a car accident. And then there’s Pollán, the leader of a hiking club of foolish white women.’

The whistle of the referee frees Gonzalo from his pretty weird predicament. The players are ready for the start of the sixth inning. But the new pitcher of the Industriales struggles thus far. When he throws four wide balls in a row, the batsman of the Tigers proceeds to the first base. The pitcher then throws a ball straight ahead. The second batsman hits him right in the middle whereupon he disappears over the fence of the stadium. Through the speakers echoes the triumphant sound of a Homerun. Since one player of the Tigers already stood on the first base, they pick up two more points.

Pablo knocks him on the head. By the intermediate score of three against nine a severe beating seems to come up. But the next inning unexpectedly brings improvement. For a minute the fire struck in the stadium when the Industriales on their turn make

a Homerun in the eighth inning and in doing so come back to 8-11. But the gap isn't bridged in the last inning.

'Where are the good old days?' puffs Pablo while he disappears in silence. He puts on his cap of The New York Yankees. 'With longing I remember the days of Kendrys Morales and Yunel Escobar.'

'I was still in elementary school then.'

'Now they're successful in the American Major League Baseball.'

'Can you blame them? How much money made Morales here? A thousand pesos? At the Kansas City Royals seventeen million dollars a year. A man only lives once.'

'You're right, but isn't that's a pity? So far a few hundred baseball players have already left Cuba.'

'The most sensitive issue is that emigrants may no longer play for the national team.'

Pablo isn't in the mood. 'I know. We're potentially the best baseball country in the world, but traitors can't defend our national colors.'

'Shall we have a drink?' Gonzalo asks.

'It's getting late and I'm not in the mood.'

'A hard day tomorrow?'

'The move of those listening devices of the Stasi. The thought of it makes my head yet thump. Don't think it's easy to be head of the Technical Service. Because of the delivery of that new Chinese material everything has to go by the end of the week.'

Gonzalo secretly keeps an eye on that transport from his desk. The anonymous white trucks of the DGI are pulling up. Their loading starts at 4 pm to make sure they leave the next morning.

When most employees leave half an hour later Pablo and

his helper are still at work loading the last truck. Gonzalo day job is done. He realizes his moment has come.

‘Can you manage it, comrade?’ he asks jokingly.

After putting down an amplifier Pablo takes a break. ‘Thanks once more for last night. That was a unique experience despite the loss.’

‘My pleasure. You know that.’

‘You’re coming to lend us a hand?’ he challenges him. ‘We’re behind schedule.’

‘Now is a bad time’, Gonzalo says hesitant. ‘I’ve an important appointment straight away.’

‘With your sweetheart? What was her name again? Roxana? Elvira?’

Gonzalo shakes his head.

‘Her name anyhow ends on an “a”.’

‘Azahara.’

‘Yes, as a matter of fact.’

Gonzalo looks at his watch. ‘When it’s not taking too long I can chip in for a moment.’

Pablo points to his companion and whispers: ‘He’s not the fastest, but we’re handling this.’

When the man passes by with a heavy antenna Gonzalo lets his foot dangle for a while. He stumbles and falls.

‘Pinhead’, he cries. ‘Watch your step!’

Lying on the ground he grabs his sprained ankle.

Gonzalo picks up the antenna. ‘Oh! I didn’t notice you. Honestly. Shall I call a doctor?’ he asks seemingly affected by what happened.

‘Better an ambulance.’ Pedro understands the gravity of the situation.

The aide still cries out in pain when he’s discharged 15 minutes later.

‘I don’t reckon he’ll be back in a hurry’, wails Pablo.

‘Damn it. And now here I am, all alone.’

‘I didn’t see him coming’, Gonzalo apologises. ‘But that’s okay. I’ll give you a hand.’

‘And your girl then?’

‘I’ll send her a message. That’s force majeure. Work comes in first place.’

‘You’d like to do that?’ Pablo reacts relieved. ‘You’ll become a real one. We’ll carry the big pieces together their as heavy as lead.’

Half an hour later the job is done.

Gonzalo blows off steam. ‘That makes me thirsty, comrade. Why don’t we go down to the bar?’

‘And your honey then?’

‘I’ll meet her at 7 pm.’

‘Come on, I’ll buy you a brew’, Pablo gloats.

‘And tomorrow’, Gonzalo asks gently. ‘You could ask my boss if I can help you.’

‘Would you do that?’

‘I feel so guilty’, the young man dissembles. ‘I’d prefer to do it. That’s what friends are for. But the Sour Puss must agree.’

‘I really could use your help, since no one helps in the sanitation company.’

Gonzalo sends two SMS before entering Pablo’s car. He gets an answer straight away and beams.

‘Isn’t love great?’ teases Pablo.

‘Two Cuba Libre’, Pablo asks the waitress.

‘Isn’t making a toast on a free Cuba dangerous? What if your bosses hear that?’

‘We’re still living in a free country’, he refutes with a wide arm gesture. ‘With all the fuss of these know-it-alls. Do you know what real freedom is?’

Gonzalo shrugs.

‘Take a measuring cup. Fill it up with eight ice cubes, five

cl rum, a wedge of lime and a bottle of Tukola. Real Coca Cola is even better', he whispers, 'but that isn't available unfortunately. Consequently take a stirrer and pour everything into a large glass. At the moment the first drop of that nectar of the Gods falls on your tongue you'll experience true freedom.'

Gonzalo doesn't respond right away.

'You look so glum. What's the matter?'

'We're facing a lot of problems with that first shipment of Chinese equipment. Half of it shows defects on the test bench. Hopefully the final delivery has a higher quality. I fear it will take years till the new system runs at cruising speed.'

'Change isn't always an improvement.'

'Where are you taking those old machines?'

'Desequip.'

Gonzalo looks surprised.

'Never heard of it? *Empresa Desmantelamiento de Equipos* stands in big letters on the facade.'

'And where's that company located?'

'In Regla, east of the Bay of Havana. At the right side in the beginning of the industrial area.'

'I'm not familiar with that neighborhood. But isn't most of that material still usable?'

'That's a shame of course. But you know how it goes. Decisions have to be carried out. A very long time ago I stopped asking questions because I don't want to get headaches needlessly.' Pablo puffs. 'Doing transports all day long; hopefully the weekend comes soon.'

Gonzalo shoves his chair a bit closer and whispers 'Do you fancy visiting a good-time girl?'

'Most certainly', the man gloats. 'But I can't afford it.'

'Who's talking about money?'

'You're an incredible guy!' Pablo reacts full of admiration.

'Anything is possible with the right connections. You're aware of that.'

'I've been working for twenty years at the DGI. And you?'

One year?’

‘Almost.’

He shakes his head. ‘How do you want to handle this?’

‘I don’t know myself.’ Gonzalo starts laughing.

‘Through your uncle?’

‘What are you thinking?’

‘Before I forget. Setting up your laptop took a little longer than expected with that move. But he’ll be ready tomorrow afternoon, the external hard drive included.’

‘How did you manage this?’ Gonzalo teases.

‘You think there’s nothing I can arrange?’

Gonzalo gloats. ‘I see my uncle this evening. What do you think? Shall we arrange that visit tomorrow?’

Pablo responds surprised. ‘Hola! Why not.’

‘During working hours.’

‘Ideally, because I don’t want this coming to the attention of my wife.’

‘I’ve an idea: when we’re doing that transport tomorrow. I’ll drop you off and pick you up again after the delivery at Desequip. What do you think?’

‘Fantastic!’ The man is moved to tears. ‘You’re still so young, but you really know what a real man needs.’

The next morning Gonzalo is constantly looking on his watch. How long has Pablo been sitting in Sour Puss’ office? Cold sweat is running down his neck.

Suddenly the door swings open. His friend comes out with a broad smile and gives a sign to follow him.

‘Massage work had to be done, since your boss wanted to send other people with me.’

Gonzalo shrieks of laughter when Pablo imitates him. ‘It’s unacceptable that a civil engineer performs manual tasks.’

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Pablo tells how he managed to make the Sour Puss change his mind. Behind the façade of that perfectionist, wisecracker, eternal critic and cool frog there's in essence a hyper sensitive man. It was enough to dig up some old memories to break the ice. In addition to his admission to accompany Pablo Gonzalo even gets a positive note in his personnel file.

'Hola, man, aren't we too late?' Pablo says when they jump in the truck.

'Relax. In the morning it's almost always calm.'

After leaving the parking Pablo puts the truck aside. He opens his suitcase and takes a shirt with bright red flowers. The man wants to look pretty now he's having an adventure.

'Where are we going?'

'La Rampa, near the Malecón.'

'That's outside the normal trajectory.'

'What do you mean?'

He points to the tachograph.

'You know that everything is checked at the DGI.'

Cold sweat appears on Gonzalo's head. 'And how do we deal with that?' he stutters. 'Do we have to call off the meeting?'

'You may think so, but every system has a loophole.' Pablo unties the cable, so the tachograph doesn't work any longer. 'A technical defect ensures that the system is temporarily out of order', he roars. 'And later we link it again.'

Gonzalo smiles, but above all he is relieved.

'Remind me to modify the clock. Smart guys, those people of the DGI. But who will be the smartest?'

Gonzalo puts his thumb in the air.

'So, where are we expected?'

'Club Cabaret.'

'That name sound familiar.'

'You've already been there?' Gonzalo asks amazed.

'Passed by. That's one of the most exclusive private clubs

in Havana!

'I only get involved with top quality', he taps on Pablo's shoulder. 'Lucky you!'

The man is on cloud nine.

'Well, what do you think about taking a blue pill?'

'Absolutely not necessary', he brags. 'I'm still in top form.'

'An hour is plenty of time. If I were you, I wouldn't take the risk.' Gonzalo takes a box out of his pocket and opens it. 'However, it's said that the results are miraculous.'

'Hand it over!' gloats Pablo. He takes the pill and drinks some water from the bottle next to the gearshift.

'I still can't feel anything', he says a few minutes later.

'It only starts working after a quarter of an hour.'

'And your cap?'

'That of The New York Yankees of course. Or what were you thinking?'

At the approach of La Rampa Pablo gets overwhelmed with doubts. 'You are not going to fool me, are you? Aren't the data of all visitors registered?'

'So little trust, comrade?' Gonzalo answers. 'When I do something, I do it thoroughly. Drive to the left once on the parking, we're taking the backdoor.'

'Do you come here often?'

Gonzalo scares. 'I've never been here.'

'I beg your pardon?' Pablo reacts upset while he hits the brakes.

'Don't panic', Gonzalo tries to reassure him. 'My uncle is the owner of this club.'

Pablo still looks suspiciously at him.

'I'll accompany you to the entrance, drive than to Desequip and pick you up again afterwards. And no one will ever have heard or seen anything. My word of honor!' He sticks two fingers in the air.

The White Revolution

Pablo's last doubts fade away, even more because the adrenaline starts pumping through his body.

Both walk along the wall to the backdoor and put their caps on in front of the camera above the entrance

'That way we're beyond recognition', convinces Gonzalo his companion.

The young man knocks on the door. The doorman, with a black suit and sunglasses on, opens it.

'Diego's customer.'

'Follow me.'

'Knock your socks off!' he encourages Pablo.

Beaming he puts his thumb in the air.

Gonzalo rushes to the van and sends an SMS. In full speed he drives to the square at Calle San Miguel. There the professor, Héctor, Celia and Azahara are impatiently awaiting him. At the former emergency exit of the movie theater they've placed a few two-meter high fences. Those come from the kiosk on the square that's being renovated, but the workers haven't shown up yet. In this way the unloading of the material, which seems to be destined for the Palacio de la Rumbla, is hidden from view. It's good fortune that the Palacio is closed in the morning.

Héctor gives a sign to drive backward, but Gonzalo panics. He has never done this before. Héctor takes over, although it dates back to his military service he has driven one. He breathes a sigh of relief once he passes by the fence.

Celia suspects that the satellite receiver and satellite dishes are worth a lot on the Black Market. She wants to sell these with the help of the wife of the neighbor-businessman and put the profits in the greenhouse.

Gonzalo gives the professor and Celia a sign to take the lighter pieces and challenges Azahara to hold her own.

‘We’ll immediately see if you’ve got the balls’, she answers with a wink.

Twenty minutes later the last piece is in the underground room. Gonzalo takes the wheel and leaves, while the others put the fences back around the kiosk.

Héctor gloats with tears in his eyes. ‘I’ll start to figure out the pieces.’

‘Can you still put everything together?’ Celia challenges him.

‘Now I think you’re underestimating me.’ His old pride comes back to the surface. ‘At Cenic we worked with similar material of Soviet-design. I still have my manuals.’

Celia embraces him.

‘That material makes our fight tangible. Once more our house becomes the headquarters to liberate Cuba from tyranny. And I hope this time forever!’

On his way to Regla Gonzalo puts the van aside, changes the clockwork and reconnects the tachograph. But to his bewilderment a police patrol stops.

Seemingly icy calm he greets the agents and shows his ID. The men aren’t impressed by his announcement that he has no cargo. The point is that he’s alone on the road with a service vehicle. Gonzalo reports that his colleague is picking up medicines for his wife at the pharmacist. With a heart full of fear Gonzalo gives the papers of the car to the second agent.

‘No, this is not for real!’ the man proclaims.

Gonzalo almost gets a cardiac arrest.

‘Pablo, my God! I watch baseball with him. That creep received a full VIP treatment for the last match against the Tigers’,

he says to his colleague. 'But I didn't know his wife was ill. However, I've seen her last week.'

'I don't know the details.'

'Please give him many greetings and wish him the best for his wife.'

Gonzalo drives on the main road again, waving his arm widely, while the agents keep the traffic standing. The gatekeeper at the entrance of Desequip opens the barrier and refers to the third hangar at the left hand side. When Gonzalo makes clear that he's only picking up electronic devices, he has to go to the first hangar past the main building on the right.

Gonzalo shows his ID and follows the controller to a coffin with thousands of devices. 'They're indestructible. What a pity to throw these away.'

Gonzalo puts five copies in a bag. On his way back to pick up Pablo he turns off the tachograph again. From a long distance Gonzalo recognizes Pablo in his shirt with bright red flowers.

'The most intense experience of my life', he beams. 'And I was to my amazement tireless.'

'That blue pill, you know.'

'My thousand and one nights! How can I thank you?'

Gonzalo makes clear to him that he has done this with pleasure.

'You're a real friend' thanks Pablo him. 'Speak up when I can give you a helping hand. Promised?'

'Agree.'

'How was the unloading?'

Gonzalo boasts. 'Can't you see? It's all gone.'

'How did you arrange that?'

'I've acquaintances everywhere.'

'You're a genius!'

‘Oh, before I forget. On my way the police checked me out. Fortunately the agent knew you from baseball.’

‘What did he look like?’

‘Not too big and with a mustache.’

‘Julio! A cool guy. Our wives are friends.’

Gonzalo turns white as a sheet.

‘What’s the matter?’

‘I had to make something up because I was alone in the van. I’ve said that you stood in line for medication for your wife.’

‘No problem’, Pablo smiles. ‘I’ll call him right now.’

‘What you’re going to say?’ Gonzalo panics.

‘That your ears are full of wax, because those pills are meant for my mother in law.’

They’re sharing a laugh, but Gonzalo puts the van cursing aside down the street. ‘We’re almost at the office and I’ve forgotten to reconnect the tachograph.’

‘That’s okay. I’ll inform them that there’s a bad contact. But wait a moment.’ Pablo takes the opportunity to put on his every day shirt. ‘But what’s this?’ He takes the bag with the devices. ‘Souvenirs.’

‘Why do you need these?’

Gonzalo trembles on his legs, but reacts calm. ‘A surprise for my boss, but keep it quiet.’

Pablo pats him on the shoulder. ‘It looks like your relation with the Sour Puss isn’t that bad.’

Gonzalo reacts relieved. ‘We’ll do our best.’ He hesitates. ‘Can you deliver some UHF devices.’ Because the plan of the professor provides a dual circuit for capturing information.

‘What are you up to?’ he asks surprised. ‘Only the counter-espionage uses these.’

‘That service is cats and dogs with ours.’

‘Well, leave that to me’, Pablo tries to reassure him. ‘We have our fingers in many pies.’

‘Doing each other a favor: isn’t this just the most wonderful thing?’

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Pablo agrees exuberant.’

‘Fancy a new adventure?’

‘I would never turn down such an offer.’

‘What do you think about a threesome?’

‘Never done anything like that.’

‘Me neither, but it seems to be an unique experience.’

4 LIFE CAN BE BEAUTIFUL *SOMETIMES*

The double of Alejandro Castro Espin straightens up when he steps out of the elevator on the 14th floor of the DGI headquarters at the corner of Calle Linea and Calle A. The man in his elegant military uniform doesn't pay attention to the glass panels with a breathtaking view of the Vedado district and the Malecón and he ignores the statue that visualizes the Revolutionary victory against the background of a Cuban flag.

His heart beats in his throat when he resolutely approaches his goal. The stride of his leather boots echo in the marble hallway. He wants to knock on the door next to the signpost "Sign up here" when a man leaves with a file under the arm. This scares him silly.

'And you are?' the actor asks arrogantly.

'Captain Manuel Liñero, the Secretary of the Director-General.'

The man brings the military salute with his head held high. He puts his right hand with contiguous fingers flat against the right bottom of his hat. Surprised by the unexpected encounter with the person which he believes is the son of the president his file falls on the ground. In panic he picks up the documents. The actor, who gives him a helping hand, looks at some papers.

'Those are secret', the Secretary stammers.

'Revolutionary bannerman don't have any secrets.'

'There's a double agenda behind the admission to take free copies', he confesses. 'Every ten copies a double is made automatically.'

The actor nods. 'And those lists?'

'A print-out of all staff members for each section.'

'The results?'

'Unfortunately a lot of abuse', the man says with a trembling voice. 'Pornographic leaves, kitchen recipes, exam questions and even secret documents are copied. We've already exposed two double agents who also worked for the *Yuma's*.'

'Excellent!' the actor congratulates him. 'My father will be happy to hear that.'

Alejandro takes a gold ball pen and a notebook from his inside pocket.

'Your name?'

'Captain Manuel Liñero, Colonel.'

'Our society needs creative men to defend the Revolution.'

Beaming with pride the Secretary brings him a military salute.

'Where's Losaja, comrade?' continues the actor with a firm high voice. He already knows the answer because every Thursday afternoon the chief of the Secret Service visits the brothel Club Cabaret.

'He left half an hour ago, Colonel. A meeting outdoors. Shall I call him?'

With confidence the actor shakes his head. 'I've little time. Father expects me in the Presidential Palace right now. Foreign delegations don't wait.'

With amazed relief the man establishes that the role he's playing works perfectly. He caresses the three stars on his collar and squeezes his left eye a bit tight, referring to the disability of the character he plays. He places his brown leather briefcase on the ground, solemnly puts off his silk right glove with his left hand and firmly shakes the hand of the Secretary.

The man almost shrinks. Consequently he puts his glove back on.

'How can I help you, Colonel?' Manuel stammers.

Alejandro opens his briefcase. 'A file for Losaja.'

The Secretary stands at attention to receive it.

The White Revolution

'I'll personally put that on his desk.'

He gets ready to do so, but the Secretary stands in front of the door with chattering teeth.

The actor puts his right eye wide open and shows the white envelope with on top the text "State Secret".

'This can't leave his office.'

'Of course, Colonel.' The man straightens up once more, gets the key and opens the door. The alleged son of the president pushes with his left hand on a button of his mobile in his pocket.

'Weren't you notified of my arrival?' he asks indignant.

'No, not to my knowledge, Colonel.'

'How's that even possible?'

Cold sweat runs over the man's face. 'I haven't left my office this afternoon. Well, actually, I went to the toilet. But since then ...'

The phone on his desk rings and the man hurries to answer.

'The Colonel has just arrived', the actor hears him say.

Celia has to keep the guy on the phone as long as possible. To his relief the actor discovers that the floor plan is right as pie. From his pocket he takes a screwdriver and places a listening device under the desk. Up ahead there are six leather seats around a coffee table. Also there he affixes an apparatus. And in the closet he places UHF devices in three jackets of Losaja: in the breast pocket of two military gala uniforms and in the pocket under the breast-pocket handkerchief of his best costume. Then he hurries to the painting on the wall in order to place a device behind it. But he fails to put a screw in the wall. Is this a concrete wall? His heart rate shrieks in his throat when he hears the Secretary return. He quickly sticks the device behind the broad framework and puts the screwdriver back into his inside pocket.

The Secretary reacts surprised.

'Not noticed yet?' the actor asks seemingly harmless. 'That painting hangs off-center.' He takes a short breathing space by holding the framework with both arms, in order to get into his role again. 'I've only got one eye, but that's a painter's eye.'

A cool smile appears on his face. But the man is particularly relieved that the Secretary doesn't show distrust.

'A magnificent work', the actor continues. 'Father, uncle Fidel, and Che in their younger years.'

The red spots, also on the white robe of the female figure in the middle, refer to the blood that has been shed during the Revolution.'

Manuel nods politely.

'That white light. What a visionary work!'

Now the Secretary doesn't understand a word he's saying.

The actor knows he has to challenge the man, but only has to give a hint of what can be revealed.

'That wonderful white light.' He points to the envelope. 'Losaja will understand what I mean.'

The actor looks the man admonitory straight in the eye. 'The content of our conversation is secret, comrade. You can only talk about it with your boss.'

'Of course, Colonel.' He again stands at attention.

With his index finger in the air the actor, who nods, elevates his voice. 'The Revolution is unforgiving for those who betray her.'

'Of course, Colonel.' The man's teeth chatter.

The actor's look is fixated on the family picture of Losaja on his desk. 'A beautiful portrait. A nice family too. Is that his father in the background?'

Manuel nods.

The actor touches the picture briefly.

'Life can be beautiful *sometimes*', he grins, while he painfully slow opens his right eye wide.

As planned those words don't miss their effect. The emphasis on the word "sometimes" echoes in Manuel's ears. The beads of cold sweat appear on his forehead since he experiences this as a threat.

In the strategy of the professor, Losaja on one hand gets a unique gift, but on the other hand the fear and the doubt will start to gnaw.

Following that cold shower the actor knows he has to speak encouraging words again before he retreats. The painting

offers him that possibility. He again flashes with his left eye and beams.

‘I knew it. That signature: Raul Martínez. An early work from his abstract expressionist period. Do you know that woman in white?’

Manuel shakes his head. He’s still vibrating on his legs.

‘The Greek goddess Nike.’

The man doesn’t understand.

‘She only has one foot on the ground. You see that?’

Manuel nods.

‘You know why?’ He pauses for a while and grins. ‘Nike brings victory from one place to another. That’s exactly what will happen to the Cuban Revolution. Martínez was at least imbued with that sacred fire. But such a powerful Revolutionary visual language I haven’t seen with any other contemporary artist. Its due time that the National Culture Council and the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, focusses again on their service to the Revolution!’

‘Of course, Colonel.’

Alejandro looks at his watch.

‘I’ve to go. When do you expect Losaja, comrade?’

‘Tomorrow at 8:00 am.’

‘Will you be here?’

‘Of course, Colonel.’

Alejandro closes his briefcase. ‘The office door is locked, isn’t it?’

‘Of course, Colonel.’ The Secretary again brings the military salute.

The actor answers it and walks straight to the elevator.

Jesús Camilo Losaja who lives on the top floor of the DGI headquarters walks just like every day right to his desk. Manuel greets him as a military, but Losaja only grunts when he passes by. When he gets the envelope in his sight he stands still like a statue. He knows this isn’t right since he cleans his desk every day. First he wants to cross-examine his Secretary, who’s standing with trembling knees at the other end of the door. But as Losaja gets

closer he changes his mind. The heading “State Secret” intrigues him. Intuitive he takes out his handkerchief in order not to not to leave any fingerprints, when he reads the title: *File The White Revolution*. The contents include a manuscript and a closed envelope with the sender’s name: Alejandro Castro Espin. It’s anyone’s guess what *El Tuerto* – *The one-eyed* wants of him. In recent years the man has asked him several times to act against political dissidents. Each command was promptly carried out. Not only out of a sense of duty, but also because he shares his vision. As a follower of the hard line he can eat all opponents raw. With pleasure he remembers his first major mission: the coordination of the Black Spring. He still takes pride in arresting 75 dissidents at the same time throughout the country. He treasures *El Tuerto’s* thank-you card as a precious souvenir.

Losaja opens the letter carefully, ensuring once again to leave no trace.

*Mr Director-General,
Honorable friend.*

‘Friend’, Losaja repeats. ‘Alejandro calls me his friend?’

You belong to the select few servants that are selflessly committed to the Revolution all of their life. The administering of heavy strokes at the lackeys of the United States and the plutocracy proves that your department has performed excellent work over the past few years. The Damas de Blanco are neutralized. And the fact that no one can read the inflammatory messages of the foreign-funded blog star Sánchez is a great achievement.

‘A word of appreciation’, beams Losaja. ‘From the lips of a Castro! But what does he want?’
Eagerly he reads on.

Today I trust you with a delicate assignment. In February 2018 my father retreats. My family and the Party want to organize for his immense merits a

celebration in gratitude which will be unparalleled in the history of not only our country but in the whole of Latin America. The world will surely marvel at that unprecedented farewell, but also witness a new turn of the Revolution.

The project The White Revolution refers to an unpublished work by Colombia's greatest writer and an intimate of my family. He handed me the attached script at his last visit, shortly before his death. According to the last will of the author that text may only be distributed in 2018.

“The Colombian” has at least written about the Revolution’, the Director-General stammers. With trembling fingers he takes out the script.

‘If this is true, it’ll be world news.’

With growing amazement he picks up the text: 40 sheets, hand-written.

The events of February 2018 will come clear to your mind after reading the accompanying Novella. The capital will be submerged in a sea of white on the day of my father's resignation. Following the memorial celebration in the Capitol an open white car will bring him to the Plaza de Revolución where all sections of society will bring him a tribute.

Consequently he boards with our family and the major authorities in the port of Havana on the Granma, the boat that meant the start of the Revolution. In the capital and during the boat trip along the Malecón millions of Cubans will cheer him with a copy of the novel The White Revolution in hand. Like Mao's Red Book the White Booklet shares the dream of one of the greatest writers about the Cuban Revolution in the entire world.

In the evening a reception will take place on the squares of the city and the world's largest fireworks on hundred different places at the same time will provide a festive apotheosis. That bonfire will be answered in all cities and villages.

Only your department has the know-how, the men and the means to prepare this celebration in silence. Once the parliament has appointed me as the new president, the coming decades I want give shape to the ideals of the Revolution with you as my right hand.

Losaja's hair bristles of joy. The idea that he can safeguard the legacy of the Revolution at the side of Alejandro fills him with

a feeling of unparalleled joy. Tears of happiness stream on his cheeks when he looks at his family photo. He speaks to his deceased father who has served the Revolution his lifelong, till three days before his retirement a tragedy stroke. At the request of the *Comandante* and *Chefe* he had entered in his father's footsteps. And now the culmination of 60 years of loyal commitment of his family follows.

Manuel's ear is still anchored against the door of his boss's office. He endures mortal fears. Normally he's screamed inside all the time and gets a good blast for the smallest trivialities. But now for the first time he hears his boss talking to himself. And is he crying?

Losaja meanwhile reads the last paragraph of the letter:

The secret nature of this file requires me to an absolute silence. For security reasons no personal contact will take place. After all, each word or sign can be interpreted the wrong way. But I can assure you: the future of Cuba is in both of our hands.

To breathe up Losaja stares ahead. Deep inside he feels something isn't right, but he doesn't exactly know what. The former Soviet advisors taught him: "Be trustful, but never trust anyone". First he has to control the authenticity.

'Manuel!' he cries.

The Secretary is relieved. He puts his hat right, knocks and makes a greeting.

'Where's this coming from?'

'I had a visit yesterday evening. At half past four. Of the son of the president', he stammers.

'Sure it was him?'

'Of course, Mr. Director-General. He wore his military uniform.'

'Why didn't you inform me, wretched worm?'

'He has forbidden me to do so and after only a few minutes he left.'

'How did that file get in here?'

‘I refused him access, but he personally wanted to put it on your desk.’ The man bows. ‘I do realize this is against the rules.’

Manuel expects a scolding, but for the first time in years he gets a compliment. ‘You did the right thing. But what did he say?’

‘That this file is not allowed to leave your office.’ He hesitates for a moment.

‘What else?’

‘He touched your family photo.’

‘What? Why?’

‘He said that life can be beautiful sometimes, with an emphasis on *sometimes*.’

The atmosphere changes at once. Losaja looks at the photo and turns his attention to the image of his father. ‘Repeat!’

‘That life can be beautiful *sometimes*. I found that weird.’

Losaja is stunned. ‘What else?’

‘He hung the painting right.’

‘That man is cross-eyed.’

‘And that art must be subservient to the Revolution. And he talked about the white on the painting on the wall.’

‘What did he exactly say?’ Losaja who acts like a bully cries.

‘That this is visionary or something. But you would understand the meaning after reading his letter. Furthermore he talked about a Greek goddess. I nodded out of politeness.’

Losaja paces up and down. Out of fear Manuel closes his eyes. “Sometimes”. That single word calls Losaja’s world into question. What does Castro mean? It seems as if the accumulated pus of a fifteen year old fermenting wound has been torn open. The compassion of the top of the regime at the sudden death of his father was so great that he didn’t pay any attention to it at that moment. But this event still comes vividly in his memory. Like the look of Raúl during the cremation. It’s clear to him that Alejandro knows more.

The chief of the DGI can’t make hide nor hair to the conflicting feelings he’s experiencing. Did they eliminate his father, like a friend has entrusted him once? But why would Alejandro choose him then for that secret mission? And then there’s that novel written by “the Colombian”. Will the future president accomplish the things that went wrong in the past? But his vanity is

caressed by the idea that the way to the top lies open. And had Manuel, who isn't one of the smartest, misunderstood him, tells Losaja to himself. With both hands he wants to grab this unique opportunity to give himself a place in history.

'Did you touch this envelope?'

Manuel shakes his head.

'Ask an analysis of the fingerprints by the Forensic Department.'

'Two experts are already coming this afternoon, Mr. Director General.'

'And check the authenticity of the letterhead and the signature.'

'I expect the graphologist at any moment. He's aware of the urgency.'

'How did the son of the president get here?'

'With the elevator.'

'Wretched worm! In the building! Look at the images from the surveillance cameras. I want to know what means of transportation he used.'

'Of course, Mr. Director General.'

He looks at the manuscript in front of him. 'And find me a specialist of "the Colombian".'

'Who are you talking about?'

'Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The greatest writer of Latin America, wretched worm.'

He nods politely. 'Now?'

'Are you deaf?'

Half an hour later Manuel returns.

'I've found your man. Professor José Esmiralda Chepe of the University of Havana. He's an international authority and he has recently retired.'

'Reliable?'

'There's little to comment on his file.'

Losaja shakes his head. 'What's a little?' He looks at his computer. 'This time I want two hundred per cent certainty.'

Moments later he calls out: 'that man is condemned by the court-

martial.’

‘Forty years ago after a personal conflict’, refutes Manuel. ‘And not because of ideological reasons. That was a sin caused by his young age. Since then there are no comments. He is a Party member for 40 years. And his late wife was a lifelong member of the Women’s Association.’

‘That doesn’t count for much, you miserable worm! 99 percent of Cuban women are. Where is your critical sense? The real question is whether this guy has made revolutionary acts.’

Losaja browses further into his file.

‘The Dean and his colleagues at the University praise his loyalty’, Manuel comments. ‘And his participation in international congresses have always ended correctly.’

Losaja shakes his head. He knows those kind of people. How many intellectuals proclaim liberal, democratic and even anti-Communist opinions once abroad. But upon their return they claim that their words have been wrongly understood, and come knocking on the door of the regime again to obtain all kind of favors. The head of the DGI gets irritated beyond measure that in their scientific research the intellectual elite no longer searches for the truth from a socialist point of view.

Losaja clicks to the file of his nephew, the dissident Economist Oscar Chepe, who has in the meantime diverted to the United States. But he finds no link to the professor.

‘I wouldn’t hesitate’, Manuel insists. ‘Revolutionary blood is flowing through his veins. And you already know his brother, Diego Esmiralda Chepe. He’s one of leading party men in Havana.’

Losaja can barely hide a smile. Yesterday his weekly visit to the Club Cabaret was an utter delight. ‘That’s a plus point’, but he alarms when accessing the file of the professors son.

‘I hadn’t thought of that’, the Secretary confesses.

‘Come on! When are you going to learn your job, wretched worm? An employee of the DGI leaves nothing to chance. A poisonous snake can strike around every corner.’

He with increasing amazement is looking to the file.

‘In ‘94 this son drowned with his wife while trying to

escape. Only their child, Gonzalo, was rescued. Next he clicks to Gonzalos file. That's working thoroughly! And that's what we're expecting from every employee, because THAT makes of the DGI the elite corps of the Government and the Party.'

Losaja startles. 'That young man works with us. Recruited on the basis of his capacities.' He looks at Manuel. 'And when we click through to his personal file, we know who we're dealing with.'

He reads attentively. 'There are five stars behind his name. He's about to make a promotion.'

'You see,' Manuel says relieved. 'That professor is the man we need.'

'Your Plan B?'

'A lecturer at the University of Santiago de Cuba. But there are gaps in his curriculum. We're data-mining him.'

'How is that possible!?' Losaja scolds. 'With everyone there is always something. Where can you still find a family who's imbued with the sacred fire of the Revolution?' He takes a deep breath. 'Get that professor!'

'Now?'

'Are you deaf?'

An hour later the professor enters into Losaja's office.

'I haven't shaved yet', he apologizes. 'How can I serve you, Mr. Director-General?'

'This will interest you.' He hands him the manuscript.

The professor pretends that he has revealed the discovery of a lifetime. 'There's no mistaking. That's a manuscript of "the Colombian"'. So far he has donated two handwritings to our department. They're standing as relics at the entrance.' The professor caresses the text. 'Judging the vibration of his hand these date from shortly before his death.'

'His latest work', Losaja beams.

The eye of the professor falls on the title. 'Is this about the Cuban Revolution?'

The chief of the Secret Service triumphs.

'So it's true.' The professor takes his handkerchief. 'Do you realize this is a world scoop?'

'You bet!'

The professor starts reading out loud.

The White Revolution

On the day Raúl Modesto Castro Ruz was watching the sunset with his grandson leaning over the rail of the Granma, he saw how everything was being submerged in the bewitching white light of the revolution. Proudly standing upright, his neck and head formed a glowing ivory tower that invariably radiated power and – as the intensity of the white light increased – was blinding the bystanders with its brilliance. A multitude of white fairies on the stem, stern and in the mainmast was making waving gestures to give him high praise. All those present were deeply impressed by this clear sign of his withdrawal from public life after a lifetime of servitude to the revolution. Being elderly, he had to look for support on the shoulders of his grandson while the short sentences he uttered laboriously combined with his incessant hesitations due to his short-windedness, didn't affect his unchangeable and unimpaired regal moral authority.

‘What a way to start! From the start the synthesis of the work’, the professor gloats. ‘May I continue?’

Losaja who’s over the moon, nods.

Ángel, who only spoke when absolutely necessary, asked: ‘When did you first see this light?’

‘It was sixty years ago. In a vision. At sunset. The night before our departure.’

‘What day was it?’

‘A Tuesday. Day of Mars, God of War. It was a day of untamable energy that would only end once the goal was reached.’

‘What kind of light was it?’

Cleary delighted and with great pleasure Raúl dwelled on this miraculous, but pleasant memory.

‘The sun was on the verge of being devoured by the Rio Pantepec. Suddenly, I saw a white ball of fire on the horizon, its spiral only growing. The charm of that blazing light ignited the whole night sky. Even my clothes. The beam was blinding. It looked as though I was wearing a starbed linen shirt. And white trousers. My Magnum 357 seemed white as well.’

He gasped for air, since dishing up this story costs him a lot of energy.

‘The light filled my gun with power and strength. Only a few bullets could brutally throw the masts of the nearby ships into the seas and crush all the fish.’

Ángel gaped at him, pure fascination increasing in his eyes, as if he

was personally witnessing this astounding event.

‘Only moments later, the light disappeared. My clothes turned khaki again. At first, I hadn’t recognized the omen. I thought it was a hallucination. Or maybe a fit of insanity. But it was not.’

The professor puts his glasses down. ‘The story of the crossing of the Granma from Mexico’, he reacts seemingly excited.

He triumphs inside because his plan comes together. He’s, as expected, needed by the DGI. And Losaja doesn’t have any doubt about the authenticity of this so-called new novel by “the Colombian” he has been working on for a year.

‘I get impatient by the discovery of the biggest treasure of my career’, the professor continues excited.

Losaja brings a triumphant smile on his face.

Raúl remembered how Fidel, the proud field marshal was walking a few meters ahead, led the mob to the boarding house, since the long-awaited hour of the crossing would now come even before cock-crow. The curling of captain Norberto’s moustache when he put his nose in the air, did not augur well. Yes, there was a storm brewing. Yes, it was remarkably cold for the time of year. And yes, the Granma risked making water carrying all these people and their weapons. Still, to Fidel these bad tidings seemed only the first obstacles during his glorious campaign that would end in victory.

Turning his head for the last time at the Reforma Park, Raúl watched the bare mangrove trees with their knotty roots at the quay being clad in the extinguishing rays of sunshine. In a split second his clothes appeared aluminum. He took no notice since a bald eagle, with its majestically gilded head, its luxuriant wings and its lanky beak skimmed over their heads on the waves of the wind. Ché, the Argentinian, immediately recognized the quick succession of cries as the call for others and longed for a colony of eagles to guide them as kings of the sea on their journey.

A dull rumble announced the entry of a decrepit armored vessel of the Mexican navy. The jet-black smokescreen emerging from its fire-breathing chimneys veiled the city in mist even sooner than nightfall. The sailors were itching to steal, drink and spend their last pennies on whores. By the time they would stagger back to their lived off bedchambers on the naval base at daybreak, the Granma would have arrived at the Gulf of Mexico.

Even through its decline, Tuxpan oozed the beauty of a rough diamond. In the city center, roots played the part of natural speed ramps and the Calle Mina was as crooked as the bent backs of the old women limping back to their homes. Hovels barely supporting each other due to the cracks in their walls were waiting for the next hurricane to sweep them away.

At the patio majestically decorated with peacocks of blue enamel that once had been radiating splendor, but was now reduced to chicken coop, someone was lowering a basket with a key on a threadbare rope. Only with great difficulty the visitor could loosen the sticky pulp from the sole of his leather boots by stamping them against the wall for persistent rainfall had reduced the rich harvest of leaves to a foul mush. The scent of rotting leaves and decaying household refuse blended with the thick smoke of the sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and soot a truck was spitting into the air. A fattened up pig was tied to a nearby ox-cat transporting tomatoes.

In the semi-darkness of Calle Melchor Ocampo through the stained glass of a brothel twilight of pink light was performing a mysterious shadow play on the opposite wall. From behind the closed doors laughter and fragments of music echoed while the cigarettes of new customers were going up and down on the porch.

The professor uses some superlatives. 'What an imagination! Matchless! "The Colombian" at his best.'

'A beautiful text indeed', Losaja agrees. 'I read it straight through. It's touching how the young Raúl recognizes the white light of the Revolution.'

'I'm just dying to know how the story carries on.' With a greedy look the professor continues to read.

The narrow stairs next to a waiving awning led to the entrance of the lodging house on which the wiring crept like worms from under the peeled plastering on the walls. In the hallway, the glow of a light bulb on the ceiling was reflected in the crystal wineglasses in the cupboard. Rosa, the frail and delicate lady of the house, walked towards her guests as a live doll in a dress of equatorial flowers. Her eyes were laid deeply into their sockets due to the contrasting light eye make-up and the black mascara on her lashes. The pink blush on her cheekbones revived the fresh appearance of her visage and the reflecting, subtle lipstick made her lips look fuller. Staring motionlessly into the

void seated on the worn sofa a grandmother and a Siamese cat had the very same haircut.

The visitors' admiration for the plaster José Martí, with his bushy moustache and streaming manes, set Rosa on fire. As a fully-qualified actress in her homemade theater she performed a poem by 'El Apóstol de la Patria':

El amor, madre, a la patria

*The love for one's homeland, mother,
no es el amor ridículo a la tierra,
is not the ridiculous love for earth or grass
ni a la yerba que pisan nuestras plantas;
oppressing our plants;*

*Es el odio invencible a quien la oprime,
It is the insatiable hatred toward those who oppress,
es el rencor eterno a quien la ataca
it is the eternal grudge toward those who attack us*

While the flowers on Rosa's dress were blooming, her eyes almost fell out of their sockets because of her heart's desire that Fulgenico Batista, "El Puercu" – the pig, with his corrupt gang of thieves, cowards and sissies would be devoured by the sharks in the Gulf of Mexico.

She had grown up along the Rampa in Havana, the place of ruin on the Caribbean where men of means desperate for drinks, drugs and sex found their paradise. While fabulous amounts of money were being spent in the gilded casino's, a battalion of gold watches, dazzling precious stones, silver cigarette cases and high heels under low-cut, silk evening gowns called on the percussionist 'Mambo King' Tito Puente and the swinging salsa queen Celia Cruz in the White Room.

As soon as Ginger Rogers, accompanied by Fred Astaire, entered the room, Rosa's father would serve a gin fizz with little water and lots of gin on a silver plate in no time. His entire world collapsed, however, on the day he denied entrance to a mysterious man with a fake handlebar moustache. He had failed to recognize the disguised Batista who had come to do nasty business with Meyer Lansky, the Mafioso. Even before the Secret Service had put him away in the dark dungeons of the camps, his family was on a boat to Mexico.

Juanito, Rosa's subservient husband had silently slipped into the hallway. The salutary aroma of a cigar, fixed firmly in the left corner of his mouth, entwined wonderfully with the ideas present in the room. The smoke,

being puffed gently from the mouth of the master of the house and spiraling like smoke signals of the Natives, announced the arrival of a military force that would muck out the “porqueria”, the pigsty in the capital. The man was from Santiago in “El Oriente”, the holy grounds where Christopher Columbus had landed and where José Martí had set foot ashore to liberate Cuba from its colonial tyranny. ‘That’s the true heart of Cuba,’ the old man beamed, his eyes twinkling in his carved face. In one of his rare emotional moments, Fidel – who had learned to read and write in Santiago – prognosticated: ‘Without Santiago, no revolution!’

By the time the light bulb was barely glowing and Juanito had finished his cigar, Fidel announced it was time for bed. Startled by the sudden light in the bedroom, insects fled under the skirting-board and behind the closet. When Raúl aimed at a cockroach that jumped behind his pillow like a flash, he discovered a white scorpion, ready for attack with its pincers wide open and its body bent forward. With a single blow of his club, Fidel sent the creature to its happy hunting grounds. ‘What does this white scorpion mean?’ Raúl wondered, as if paralyzed.

Enchanted by the white stars against the dark, overhanging sky Raúl witnessed a white vulture drifting over the Granma while the anchor was being raised at the second stroke of some church bells in the distance. Only then a serene calmness came down over him because he realized the forthcoming revolution would bathe in a marvelous, white light.

The professor holds on for a moment. ‘Your words are a big shock. The blending of reality and fiction shows magic realism at its best. The atmosphere around the departure from Tuxpan is matchless. That language is so recognizable, just like the succession of wondrous and superstitious elements. And such colorful details. That unique story from world history comes to life.’

‘The best is yet to come’, Losaja continues beaming. ‘Listen to the epilogue.’

‘Can you see how the light is only growing more white from the horizon? The spiral is coming right at us, just like it did sixty years ago!’

While his raised head once again turned into a glowing ivory tower, Raúl clang with both hands to the shoulders of his grandson.

‘My hair has turned white. Yours will turn white as well. Everything turns white eventually. That is where our future lies.’

He gasped for air.

'The best is yet to come.'

Despite his quivering lips, a smile broke through on his face. 'My final destination is in sight. Can you feel how quiet everything is? There, in the light, we will find peace, harmony and happiness.'

He looked his grandson straight in the eye.

'One day it will be your responsibility to be true to the ideals of the revolution and carry on building the City of Heroes.'

Ángel looked worried.

'Will you be leaving us already?'

'The fairies that guide our boat will come for all 'historicos.' He looked at the mast. 'Only the fairy godmother knows when.'

The professor hangs off his every word. 'How does the story end?'

'That I will keep secret', he teases.

'Come on!'

'Well, I am glad your expectations are fulfilled.'

'May I study that text?' the professor asks.

'The original will be kept into protective custody. I'll make copies, but they are not allowed to leave my office or that of my Secretary.'

The professor bows. 'Thanks for the trust you've placed in me.'

Losaja gets straight to the point. 'We'll organize, based on that novel, an unprecedented celebration at the farewell of the president.'

'I would like to supply a service to you, the country or the Revolution.'

'We're talking about a State Secret here.'

'My lips are sealed. On my sacred honor', the professor states solemn. He sticks his index finger and middle finger in the air to strengthen his words.

'I want to believe you.' A sober smile appears on the mouth of the DGI-chief. 'But we'll check all staff involved in order to exclude any risk.'

'No problem. But what do you expect?'

'To help implement what's written in that novel. Everything becomes clear after reading it.'

'I'm very interested', he feigns.

'Do you want to become president of the Working Group?' Losaja gets straight to the point.

The professor refuses politely. 'I think that others are better placed and have more skills than I.'

'Not too modest. We can use your expertise and insight as a global expert of magic realism. And you through your Brother Diego have a gateway to the artistic world, which plays an important role in the implementation. He's such a fantastic guy.'

'Am I not too old for this task?'

'You're in a good shape. Thanks to our excellent health care the life expectancy increases each year.'

The professor is lost in thoughts. He wants to strengthen his position by holding off.

'Isn't this a very challenging assignment? Or are you going to rest on your laurels?'

'I don't think I'm the kind of guy you're looking for. My entire life I've been working independently and I'm a perfectionist.'

'We have been searching for someone with exactly that kind of profile. As the coordinator you will be pulling all the strings around here. You must be vigilant to ensure that the decisions get implemented.'

But he still holds off.

'You'll get maximum autonomy.'

Those were the words he wanted to hear.

'In that case ...'

'You're not doing this for free of course', Losaja interrupts. He feels it's in the bag.

But the professor makes a dismissive gesture. 'I'm not interested in money.'

'An arrangement has been designed.'

'I won't accept.'

'That's an order', the Director-General states with a raised voice. 'We're talking about an initiative of our future president, Mr. Alejandro Casto Espin.'

The professor frightens. 'In that case I agree.'

The boss of the DGI watches him from head to toe. 'You urgently need new clothes.'

Losaja takes his reference book and notes the address and the telephone number of the best tailor in Cuba. He made the costume the late *Comandante* and *Chefe* wore during the visit of the former Pope John Paul II in 1998. On top of that the president and his son are regular customers.

He further gets an envelope with an exclusive membership card. From now on the professor will make his daily purchases in exclusive stores for the nomenclature. So he doesn't need to queue any longer in the local shops where even basic things like drinking water aren't available. And in addition he gets a generous wage.

The Director-General shakes his hand friendly. 'You're a man of my heart!'

'Do you know what "the Colombian" once said?' the professor responds. '*A true friend is the one who holds your hand and touches your heart.*'

Losaja replies: '*What matters in life is not what happens to you, but what you remember and how you remember it.*' A proud smile appears on his face.

'A connoisseur!', the professor who can hardly believe his ears reacts. 'Out of his book *One Hundred Years of Solitude.*'

'I know my classics', the man beams. 'Shall I put you to the test?'

The professor doesn't know what he's in for.

'*Tell him yes. Even if you are dying of fear, even if you are sorry later, because whatever you do, you will be sorry all the rest of your life if you say no.*'

'*Love in the Time of Cholera*, of course. But isn't that a dangerous statement?'

Losaja chuckles. 'Didn't "the Colombian" say: *All human beings have three lives: public, private, and secret.*'

'Do you have a secret life?' the professor reacts immediately.

'Everyone has a dark side.'

'What do you mean?'

Losaja doesn't let himself get deceived. 'And you don't?'

But the professor is playing hard to get. 'What life is about, Mr. Director-General, is self-knowledge. To the question how a human being can learn to know himself, the German writer Goethe answered: *Not by thought but rather by action. Try to do your duty and*

you'll soon discover what you're like. Those words are my guiding principles in the mandate you've entrusted in me.'

'Come on', Losaja parries. 'I can't believe you never told a joke about the Revolution and our leaders. Not even on your foreign congresses?'

'I wouldn't dare.'

'Saints only appears in myths.'

'Would you?' The professor puts the ball diplomatic in his court again.

'Well, there are so many.' He doesn't have think about it for a long time. 'One of our agents asked a man in the street: "How do you assess the political situation?"' The man replied "I think ..."' The agent grabbed him: "You're under arrest."

Losaja rushes into laughing, while the professor is loathing inside. But he has no choice but to squeeze a smile on his face.

'Come on!' Losaja challenges him once more. 'In this place the walls haven't got ears.'

The professor realizes he has no other choice. 'Before the Revolution', he begins hesitantly, 'on a board in the zoo was written: "Please don't feed the animals."' After the glorious Revolution the text changed in: "Please don't take the food of the animals with you." And now the board says: "Please don't eat the animals."

To his surprise Losaja almost cries with laughter. 'Well, that one I haven't heard before. Brilliant! You'll never believe me, but last year we've thrown a man behind bars who had stolen a swan in the zoo, supposedly to feed his family.'

'Oh yeah?' Chills run up and down the professors back.

'Now about Fidel. A man intervened in the midst of one of his endless speeches: "We want to see an end to the oppression of the people."' Castro replied: 'Arrest him!'" But the man protested: "No, you can't, because the Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of speech." Fidel pondered and replied: "You're right. Arrest everyone who has heard these words."' Losaja rushes again into laughing, but now also the professor smiles spontaneously.

'There it is!' the DGI-boss gloats. 'I feel it. You're a man of my heart! I also know a lot of dirty jokes.'

The professor who looks nervously at his watch, announces his departure. No, he's not afraid of getting red ears.

However, he asks to keep these jokes for the next meeting.

Losaja who embraces him, announces that both are going to achieve great things.

The professor promises that he will study the text in the office of Losaja's secretary the next day. And a first meeting is planned a few days later. When the professor makes preparations to leave, another surprise awaits him. A car with a driver is waiting for him in the parking lot.

'What I feel is expressed by two Latin words', the professor who's been seemingly affected says. '*Totus Tuus*. I am wholly yours. We're on the verge of a brilliant page in the history of our homeland.'

'Trust is the key to success', Losaja assures. 'The condition is that we've nothing to hide from each other. I've nothing in my hands and nothing in my sleeves.' To prove it he shows them ostentatiously.

'I neither have any secrets.'

'Not even in your book bag?'

The adrenaline rushes through the body of the professor, because inside there's the only copy of his Future Plan. In order not to arouse any suspicion he opens it spontaneously and takes out *The Japanese lover*, the latest novel by Isabel Allende that he still has to bring back to the University Library.

'I'm just kidding, of course.' Losaja gives him a pat on his back and presses a button.

Manuel comes inside.

'Accompany the professor to his car.'

The man makes the military salute and gives a sign to follow him.

On his return Losaja beams: 'We've found our golden boy.'

'I'm glad you've followed my advice.'

But the Director-General doesn't pay any attention to it.
'News of your research?'

'We've a green light. The letterhead is original and the graphologist has no doubts about the authenticity of the signature. And the ink is the same as the one who is commonly used in the secretariat of the president.'

'The video images?'

'The Colonel used a car of a member of the service staff of the Presidential Palace and parked it along the Calle Linea.'

'That's very wise of him. Was he alone?'

Manuel nods.

'And the fingerprints?'

'We couldn't identify.'

'Why?'

'The check with the database is negative. We've no fingerprints of the Castro family, unless ...'

'What?'

'You give the order.'

'Manuel!' yells Losaja.

'I'm joking, boss.'

But his eyes spew fire. 'Your humor is completely misplaced.'

'I apologize.'

'From now on the security of the headquarters applies alarm phase two. Two agents will monitor my office 24 hours a day and seven days a week.'

Despite his outburst Losaja is still predominated by a euphoric feeling. He opens the fireproof safe in his closet. After typing the code 20182018 a double beep sounds. That year in duplicate refers to the great future that awaits him. He kisses the original text of "the Columbian" and tears up when he looks at his family photo.

5 SET UP NEW BEACONS

On leaving the parking-lot the professor looks discreetly around to see if his car is being followed. It turns out not to be the case. He realizes though that the conversations on his new mobile phone and also in the car will be recorded. And that his driver will constantly keep an eye on him.

For the professor there's only little time left to bring harmony among the conspirators. At the height of the Avenida de los Presidentes he asks his driver to halt at the University. He still has to bring back a couple of books to the library. The driver parks his car near the main entrance.

'No need to hurry', he assures his new boss. 'My hours count double after 6:00 p.m.'

'Then I'll pay a visit to some former colleagues.'

The man nods in agreement.

The professor gives a pat on his shoulder and gives him a note of ten CUC. 'I can already feel it. You're a man of my heart.'

The driver informs his bosses. Bright-eyed he plays a game on his I-Phone while the professor, who knows the building like the back of his hand, rushes through a side entrance to the Calle Neptuno. He sneaks through the former emergency exit of the movie theatre, of which he has a key, to the underground room. There he's celebrated as a hero.

'I'm so proud of you', Celia greets him. But even now he shows a lack of emotions.

'The quality of that Stasi-equipment is still excellent', gloats Gonzalo.

'May I help you in choosing your new costume', Azahara jokes.

'Your sense of humor', Héctor remarks. 'Wasn't that too risky?'

'I wanted to see if all of you were alert.'

'But still...'

'I know what I'm doing', the professor reassures him. 'And it's an unexpected bonus that this man is a fan of "the Colombian". I was stunned by the quotations of his one-liners by heart. I feel it: his love for literature strengthens our bond. Yet the man is no great light. He's typically someone who enforces authority by barking. And his paranoid perfectionism is a weakness.'

'Fortunately he didn't contact the Colonel', Héctor sighs relieved.

'That he would never do.'

'Why?'

'That letter caresses his vanity. And you've heard his jokes?'

'That man has two faces', Azahara judges.

'Like all of us.' The professor chuckles. 'The sense of humor betrays one's hidden passion. Now we know his weakness.'

'Not a fan of dirty jokes?' Azahara teases.

'Don't you understand what happened? The man screened my file and decided to engage me. If not he hadn't even invited me. That's normal. During the conversation the confidence grew by the minute. And I prevented that he openly showed me his weak spot at the moment he shed his inhibitions in a wave of enthusiasm. I'm convinced he now has complete confidence in me since I've put him as a father figure discreetly back on track.'

'You didn't answer my question.'

'Azahara!' Celia calls her daughter to order.

‘You can reach more with insight into people and situations than with weapons. You don’t need to be strong, but smart to start a Revolution in Cuba.’

‘I wish you had joined our ranks earlier’, Héctor sighs. ‘The opposition would be in a much stronger position.’

The professor shakes his head. After Laura’s death I decided to take a different road. Since then I have been working on my Future Plan.’

In the meantime Celia takes out the bottle of rum and pours the small glasses. ‘Let’s toast on a good outcome. These taste like victory.’

‘No euphoria’, the professor tempers.

‘However everything’s working out how we wanted it to’, Héctor underlines.

The professor looks into the eyes of his grandson and points to his forehead. ‘Granddad hasn’t lost his mind yet.’

Everyone has a good laugh. You don’t need to be strong, but smart!

‘But we haven’t achieved anything yet’, he continues seriously. ‘And in addition we’ve to say goodbye for a while. But don’t worry. That was a calculated risk. You can follow the conversations in Losaja’s office and I’ll give Gonzalo the adjustments to our plan.’

The professor takes out of his bag the bundle of 250 pages with on the front page in big letters *Cubanos Unidos. La Revolución Blanca*.

He asks to make some working copies, but insists that also these won’t leave the underground room.

His single-handed vision is based on different sources of inspiration. The foundations are the positive elements of capitalism, communism, the progressive Constitution of 1940, the original goals of the Cuban revolution, the Liberation Theology and the proposals of opposition movements in Cuba and the

diaspora.

The text is last but not least indebted to the writings of José Martí. Many of his ideas are currently still suitable although his language sounds archaic. Martí dreamt of an independent Cuba based on anti-racism, anti-imperialism and pacifism. He was convinced that the country has got all the assets to become a beacon of hope for the Latin American peoples. The professor offers an enthusiastic perspective that uses the country's potential for the benefit of the entire population.

'It looks like your text is on a higher level than the proposals which have been formulated so far', Héctor nods approvingly. 'I'm attracted to the subtitle: *New society model brings Cubans together instead of dividing them*. This is a godsend. When communism collapses an unprecedented moment to redesign the society is coming up. Only once in a lifetime one gets a chance like this.'

'I'm very curious', Azahara who's eagerly browsing the text says. 'But how do you give shape to such a plan?'

'To go about it in a systematic way. The first step is drawing lessons from history in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.'

'History is boring with its amalgamation of facts, dates and names.'

'I'm talking about the substantive developments. If our political leaders had a better understanding of these we could have lived in another world. The second step is judiciously setting out new beacons in the flow of society and their coordination, as in this way the streaming of the efficiency of the society improves. And finally, there's the development of a vision for all sectors in the short, medium and long term.'

'Hopefully you'll take our Cuban identity into account', the young woman continues challenging. 'If not, we'll become within the shortest times an American economic and cultural colony'

again, just as after the independence in 1898.’

The professor nods.

The foundation of his Plan is the strengthening of the natural and intellectual capital, such as the cultivation of sugar cane and the development of the rum, the music and the cigar industry. Crown jewels, as the cigar brands *Cobiba*, *Patagás*, *Romero y Julieta*, *Montecristo* and *Hoy de Monterrey* have a huge potential on the international market. And in addition to the mining of nickel Cuba has an unexplored oil and gas reserve of an estimated 15 to 20 billion barrels.

The egalitarian character of society is another precious pearl. Redistributive mechanisms have to spread the expected increase in prosperity over large sections of the population. But the greatest treasure is the newfound freedom that the Cubans have experienced only for short period in their history.

‘Governance is the first point in your Plan’, Azahara says with a critical eye.

‘Isn’t that logical?’

‘But what’s the subsidy principle?’

‘You mean the principle of subsidiarity’, the professor corrects.

After an international comparative study he opts for a new governance model that is based on the Swiss example. And that’s the antipode of the current centralized administration. The subsidiarity principle ensures that the decision-making process will take as much as possible place at the level of the municipalities, which are the closest to the population. The provinces get great powers in education, health, culture and infrastructure. And only the legislation, currency, Defense and Foreign Affairs remain

national. All major parties participate in the governance in accordance with the Swiss “magic formula”. They represent a vast majority of the voters. And the decisions are preferably taken by consensus which everyone will carry out loyally.

An expiration date in every law adopts the legislation periodically to the developments in society. Politicians can only hold a single mandate which is limited in time. And the administration acts primarily as director. She will only manage the energy supply, education and health care.

‘What will happen to the millions of civil servants who're employed today?’ Azahara asks.

‘Everyone gets fired with a term of notice, while new recruitments will take place on the basis of comparative examinations. The officials of the future are competent, have a clean criminal record and are trained at the Higher Institute for the Administration that is to be set up.’

‘Should I also pass the exams?’ Gonzalo jokes.

‘The days of favoritism are over. The civil service of tomorrow will perform on a high level, will be accessible, available, and transparent and will fulfill a serving role.’

Azahara, who’s intently analyzing the text, questions the large attention to the demographics. ‘Why is this so important?’

‘A policy in the long run requires a healthy age pyramid. But today the pyramid is standing on its head because of the low birth rate, the massive emigration of young people and the ageing. The average Cuban is 38 years old and nearly thirty percent is older than 60.’

‘How can we reverse that tide?’

‘By attracting former exiles and their families and by stimulating family policy that increases the birth rate to at least 2.1 children per woman.’

Celia looks Azahara in the eyes.

‘Plans for family expansion?’ the professor chuckles.

‘She needs a man for that’, Celia teases.

‘Mam!’ Azahara reacts angry. She focuses on the professor. ‘I thought freedom is mankind’s most valuable asset. I’ll make up my own mind about having children.’

‘For me it’s far too late to pick that up again’, he reacts.

Héctor starts laughing. ‘I don’t know if I even could.’

Gonzalo watches amused. With one ear he is following the conversation with the other he is listening through the headphones to the conversations in Losaja’s office. His gaze crosses that of Azahara. The glow in their eyes swells. But suddenly he sticks his arm in the air and puts the sound amplification system on. Losaja’s secretary has arrived in his bureau.

‘Where have you been?’

‘Making practical arrangements in the professor’s home.’

‘Found any incriminating material?’

‘Possibly some banned books. Gifts received abroad. The Customs should have intercepted these.’

Losaja shakes his head. ‘We’re the only service that still works decent. Where is he now?’

‘In the University Library. His driver expects him any minute.’

The head of the DGI nods satisfied. ‘That man will provide us good services. My late father surrounded himself with committed people that were at the end of their career. You’ve much to learn from them, they’re no threat to your job and you can dump them whenever you want.’ He holds on for a while. ‘The internet is yet a magnificent instrument.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I’d never read a book of “the Colombian”. Even in his books about the young whores I came no further than a few pages.’ A fat smile appears on his face. ‘Anyone can come up with that

kind of story. I don't understand why he's so glorified. However, the quotes I've memorized with the help of Wikipedia were an excellent way to impress. And that trick worked perfectly. In that way we speak as equals.'

'Interesting', Manuel says. He makes the military salute and goes outside.

In the underground room there's a roar of laughter.

'He got a good shot at you', Gonzalo gloats.

'I felt something was fishy with those quotes', the professor counters.

'I just heard another explanation', Azahara shares in the gloating. 'Didn't his knowledge of the literature strengthen your band?'

First the professor reacts whimsical, but then he surrenders. 'Let this be a lesson. The enemy is around every corner. It's a big advantage that we know how Losaja thinks. And I hope we can use that to our mutual advantage.' Deep grooves appear on his forehead.

'What is your concern exactly?' Celia informs.

'My little toe ...'

'Then you've to go to the pedicure', Azahara interrupts.

Also the professor smiles, but the undertone is bitter. 'Things have been progressing smoothly, perhaps even to smoothly but I must warn you, that seldom augurs well. When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in '39, the advance was ten times faster than planned, until he dug his grave in the Siberian cold.'

'As far as I know, we are in Havana. And here it's 28 degrees.'

What follows is a silence in which everyone experiences discomfort.

'Pessimism doesn't help us forward', Héctor intervenes.

'I'm relieved you look at it in that way', Celia beams.

'We've before us a stunning Future Plan', the man continues. 'But I've a question.'

'What then?'

'You haven't said one word about the economy. A coincidence?'

'Naturally, this is taken into account. That's even the most extensive chapter. But the order isn't important. All themes have to be implemented at the same time.' He points to the bookshelf. 'I've used the insights of my cousin. But the economy deliberately doesn't stand in front.'

Héctor looks surprised. 'Isn't that the engine of society?'

'People in the West only talk about money, banks and the economy. It's terrifying that these subjects have the first and last word on every matter.' The professor scratches the few hairs on his forehead and fixes his glasses. 'The economic and social policies have to keep each other in balance.'

Today, the Cuban economy is a mess. Many workshops still have Soviet-designed machines. And while officials and managers go on plundering public enterprises, a paranoid control of the liberalized sectors restrains their growth. By a lack of innovation and investment their level is not higher than most developing countries. Most poignant is the situation in agriculture. Only twenty percent of the daily food requirements are available.

According to the professor the relaunch of the economy presumes the privatization of the large companies and the stimulation of small businesses by facilitating microfinance. An agricultural reform, based on mechanization, has to lead to self-sufficiency within five years. Growth sectors are dairy production, poultry, pig farming and potato processing. And there's a huge export market for organic products since the farmers don't use pesticides or hormones.

A successful economy which creates more prosperity

requires a strong social policy in order to avoid a disaster scenario such as in the Soviet Union in 1991. The hammock, which leads to patronage, parasitism and profiteering, must make way for a strongly developed social security system. That supports people in need according to strict rules, and guides them to a job. And people with limitations, get a support in order to bridge the distance with the ordinary workers.

‘That sounds ambitious. But where does the money to achieve those plans come from?’ Héctor demands. ‘Cuba has no money, only debt.’

‘An Investment Fund will finance the major public works, such as the improvement of the infrastructure and public transport, and the accessibility of the countryside. That will be supplied with the proceeds of the sale of services, buildings and companies to foreign enterprises according to market prices.’

‘And what when that money has completely been spend?’ Celia asks. ‘We can no longer count on help from the Soviet Union or Venezuela.’

‘Denationalizing is a long-term project. The result is that the Investment Fund continues to be operational in the medium term. But this is completely separated from the normal functioning of the Government, which will be financed by a flat tax.’

Given the surprised looks of Celia and Azahara the professor explains what it’s about. The flat tax is a one-time income tax at the source in which everyone pays the same percentage. Experience has shown that when taxes are perceived as fair, much less evasion takes place. This methodology has been applied successfully in 23 countries. Additional benefits are the transparency, the closing of loopholes, an easy way to collect and the encouragement of saving up.

‘I want to believe you’, Azahara intervenes. ‘But who will hand at the helm? And what about the repression device?’ She looks at the portraits on the wall. ‘Your Plan looks nice, but only exists on paper.’

The professor is hit. ‘I’ve struggled with that very question for a long time. We can’t build a future together without coming in terms with the past.’

‘But how?’ Héctor says bitterly. He’s overcome with emotions. The text of the prisoners’ chorus in the finale of the opera *Fidelio* by Beethoven is playing in his head once again.

*Punishment befalls the wretch
Who oppresses the innocent.
Justice holds aloft, for punishment.*

‘Will those baddies be punished? Will justice prevail?’

‘Justice will prevail!’ the professor replies determined. ‘All the sufferings can’t impossibly be offset, but we can recognize and remember them. Our country needs national reconciliation monuments where these wounds can heal with composure. I suggest to transform the Plaza de la Revolución in Havana into the Plaza de la Reconciliación and set up a monument in front of the statue of José Martí.’

‘Well, I’d prefer an artistic creation’, Azahara says. ‘What about organizing an international architecture competition?’

‘That seems a valuable idea. The same thing can happen in all cities and municipalities. But just as much we’ve to prosecute the persons responsible for the crimes and misdeeds, and who have shamelessly enriched themselves. Not by a witch hunt, but by a fair trial.’

‘Don’t be naive. All the judges are lackeys of the communists’, Héctor reacts sharply.

‘I propose to set up a Truth Commission under the auspices of the International Court of Justice in The Hague.’

Azahara isn't convinced. 'How many members has the Communist Party got?'

'800,000.'

'Where and when are you bringing those to Court?'

'It doesn't work that way.' The professor shakes his head.

'Because you're a member?' Azahara reacts razor sharp.

'I only have a membership card in order not to mortgage my candidacy with Losaja and to facilitate the recruitment of Gonzalo. What matters most is tackling the hard core who pull the strings behind the scenes.'

Azahara remains critical. 'I bet that the profiteers of today will stay in command tomorrow. Those who applaud by minutes at the Congress of the Communist Party will become the biggest capitalists once the wind has turned. And they've friends at the highest decision-making levels to cover them. Isn't it?'

'Here I have to disagree. Everyone has a moral duty in preventing that.'

'But how?'

'By the creation of inventories with concrete allegations. The archives of the DGI on Gonzalo's computer contain a gold mine of data. In addition, it's my intension to ask the opposition leaders when they're consulted about the Future Plan to establish Black Lists.'

'Which leaders?'

The professor shows the preliminary list in his bundle. 'Thus, for instance *Somos Más/We are more* led by Eliécer Ávila, the *Fundación Frank País*, *Platform Otro18*, the initiative *Cubadecide* of Rosa María Payá and the *Coalición Central Opositor* of Idania Yáñez Contreras. And so on. The number of movements is much bigger than we think.'

Azahara still has a lot of questions. 'Who's going to check and assess that information?'

'The Truth Commission.'

'Such a procedure will drag on for years', Héctor states incredulously, 'and will only affect the leading figures.'

‘I don’t see any other way. Some historical examples aren’t very encouraging, such as the Cambodia Tribunal. But we face the challenge to organize a fair justice system within a reasonable period of time.’

‘I don’t believe you’, Azahara says. ‘Furthermore all the others stay in their position.’

Héctor agrees with her words. ‘Nobody is, according to a universal legal principle, guilty unless proven otherwise.’

‘You guys are critical attendees. That’s the way I like it. We can only achieve the right results in arguing to the bone. Some slippery eels will slip through the net, but the current rulers won’t play a role anymore. The Parliament has to approve the credentials of anyone who holds a high-level position in the administration and the Government. But let’s not only focus on the past. What really counts is the future and the restart with a clean slate. But that requires a change in mentality.’

‘I’m not sure I understand the significance.’

‘I’ve a question for our foul-mouthed young lady.’

‘For me?’

He nods. ‘About the values in our society.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘What guides young people while making important choices? What are you talking about among each other?’

‘Making money and entertain ourselves in the best possible way.’

‘And your fellow man?’

She takes off her shoulders. ‘I already have enough problems on my own.’

‘How do you look to the future? Ever thought about taking responsibility?’

‘What’s got into you? No one’s thinking about that. I’m living in the present and I don’t care about the people who stand in the way of that.’

‘Who do you trust?’

She starts laughing. ‘No one. Or better: myself and my best

friends.’

The professor addresses himself to the attendees. ‘You’ve heard it right. All the values the youth is standing for are orientated on the ego. “Spare my house, burn the others”. You can’t build up a society with that kind of attitude.’

‘You’re a brilliant theoretician, but how will you make them change their mindset?’ Héctor challenges him.

The upbringing and tuition play a special role in the Future Plan. It’s essential to imprint from an early age with soft hand the importance of seriousness and commitment, the inclusion of responsibility, an attitude of loyalty, respect and integrity, as well as focusing on sustainability, transparency, quality and fair trade. The primacy of these values implies a critical dealing with publications and programs that glorify the corporate greed, crime and drug use. In addition an ethical code for politicians and civil servants imposes these values with hard hand.

But changing a mentality is a long-term fight.

‘I want to see changes right now and not in ten years’, Azahara reacts piqued.

‘I understand your impatience’, the professor spawns. ‘But both: the clearing of the existing mess as the confidence-building in the new institutions will take time. However, I’m convinced that this Plan will give rise to a new dynamic.’

‘Well ...’

‘Once the tide has turned, an inclusive debate and strong social networks will increase from below. Solidarity will get more attention and people might be more socially involved. All those mechanisms will in the long run convert fear into hope. And distrust, contempt and hate into tolerance and inclusion. Intangible values are the real leverage to realize *Cubanos Unidos*.’

Celia gives once more a toothful to the attendees. Héctor and Gonzalo toast, while the professor asks for a coffee. When Azahara serves a cup her gaze crosses that of Gonzalo. On both their faces a smile appears.

‘Any news from Losaja?’

Gonzalo takes his headphones off. ‘In the run-up to February 2018 a harder repression is coming up. Foreign experts are subcontracted to restrict the social media. Their mobilization strength is feared.’

‘Which experts?’

‘From the United States, South Korea and Japan.’

‘You can’t be serious.’

‘These countries are the world leaders in technology.’

‘Is this the application of the new trade relations with the *Yuma*’s? I thought Trump would turn off the faucet again.’

‘Ideological objections don’t count if there’s money to be made.’ Gonzalo sits frantically on his chair. He makes use of the tête-a-tête to whisper the words that have been hanging on his lips for some time. ‘Can we meet tonight?’

‘What do you mean?’ Azahara reacts surprised.

‘Grab a drink, get something to eat or do you prefer to dance?’

The young lady is charmed, but throws the ball back into his court. ‘What do you suggest?’

‘You know Cafe Neruda?’

‘I’ve heard that name before.’

‘That’s a popular open-air bar between Calle Galiano and Calle Aguila at the Malecón.’

The young lady still looks surprised.

‘You don’t know it? It has a glass façade in the skeleton of an old building.’ Noticing her hesitation he continues. ‘We could also meet up in a restaurant.’

‘Any preference?’

‘Mi Hacienda.’

‘You know it?’ Azahara asks puzzled.

‘I was there last year on the occasion of granddad’s birthday.’

‘I thought the inspection had closed that food court given its great success. Has it opened its doors again?’

Gonzalo realizes his blunder and runs red. He had hoped she wouldn’t go down that road because of his penny-pinching. The young man punches in his own face to limit further damage. ‘You’re doing a bad job, Gonzalo!’

Azahara laughs out loud. She finds his clumsy performance pretty funny. ‘Is that your way to make a pass at me?’ she challenges.

‘Café Neruda, then?’

‘Can I refuse?’

Now Gonzalo doesn’t get a reply.

‘I’m teasing you of course.’

Gonzalo breathes relieved. ‘Our first date!’

‘Didn’t we just have a drink?’

‘Of course!’ The young man strikes his face again. ‘Stay calm, Gonzalo. Don’t push it, Gonzalo. One step at a time, Gonzalo.’

Now Azahara has a lot of fun.

In the meantime Celia, the professor and Héctor are lively debating about the seamless transition from the current regime to a parliamentary democracy. This has to prevent a power vacuum, or even worse: an economic, social and political chaos. The professor advocates a Provisional Government of foreign experts.

‘Come on, you don’t think you’ve a great shot.’ Héctor’s cynical smile attracts the attention of Azahara and Gonzalo. ‘I’ll bet

the military will intervene? They're going to lose their status and privileges with the planned move towards democratization. The FAR will never accept it. Just think about it.'

'Neutralizing a conservative counter-movement is crucial indeed.'

'Who could handle this?'

'An international peace-keeping mission under UN flag. They've to ensure safety, since there might also be an explosive increase in crime and violence. Pending the appointment of a new security corps that peacekeeping mission has to guard the institutions and the persons who're guiding the transition process.'

Héctor looks surprised.

'Removing the detonator from this ticking time-bomb can resolve the security issue.'

'You're expecting all hail and glory from outside', Azahara intervenes sharply.

Neither Héctor is convinced. 'Not every peacekeeping mission of the United Nations was successful. Look at Congo, Kosovo and South Sudan.'

'There's no civil war in Cuba', the professor weakens that argument. 'And the UN has known as much successful peacekeeping missions in the past. Now, it's not as bleak as that. The Future Plan aims to bring out the best in people.'

Celia shares the fear of her roommates. 'Nor I have a good eye in the presence of all those foreigners.'

'Since the communists have imprinted the fear of the unknown? These experts are desperately needed because our know-how is insufficient. And their commitment is measured: based on an inventory of the needs drawn up by the Provisional Government. An International Donors' Conference under the auspices of the United Nations shall assume responsibility for the execution. In addition cooperation agreements with foreign universities offer great perspectives.'

'I seriously doubt whether the international community will put money on the table', Héctor reacts. 'Aren't the needs in

many third world countries more outrageous?’

‘Money isn’t our first concern. Participations in the economy can generate a win-win situation as a bargaining chip for the reduction of the debts of the past.’

While Celia looks once again with a gaze full of admiration to the professor, also Azahara focuses her attention to him. Gonzalo can hardly hide his pride.

‘Who’s part of this Provisional Government?’ Héctor asks.

‘The eminence grise who’re committed not to play any role in the future.’

‘And who will be Head of State?’

‘Once more the Swiss model gives the answer. A one-time and rotating Presidency that changes every six months avoids a power struggle.’

Héctor still states some reservations. ‘To what extent are those foreigners familiar with the Cuban reality?’

‘Two million people fled Cuba since the 1960s, including many intellectuals. They themselves or their descendants will be happy to make their expertise available.’

Azahara is squirming in her chair. ‘Foreigners will be in command instead of the democracy you’ve promised.’

The professor corrects her. ‘The question is not who these experts are. But what can they contribute to realize a better society.’

According to the methodology of the Strict Gradual Approach the professor plans the transition to a parliamentary democracy, once the new beacons of society are consolidated. These will initially take shape in the municipalities, the new center of gravity in political decision-making, and later at the level of the provinces and the nation. Because after sixty years of dictatorship

the development of a sustainable democracy requires time indeed. This is needed for the development of political parties around society visions and substantive topics. National organized parties can prevent the curtailing of the newly acquired freedom in its tracks.

The Future Plan provides municipal elections in 2019, followed by provincial elections in 2021. The provincial councils designate the representatives in the federal Constituent Assembly that prepares the operation of the future Government and Parliament. In 2022 once again municipal elections will take place and the first national elections are planned in 2023. These will lead to the installation of a fully-fledged Parliament and Government. At that moment the transfer of competence from the Provisional Government to the elected Government will take place.

‘So, your experts will be in command for five years’, Azahara concludes cynical.

‘We’ve to protect democracy against itself. But for a good understanding: the Provisional Government takes the decisions, but will be assisted on all issues by advisory working groups. And everyone can take part in those. Furthermore every decision has its own expiry date.’

Héctor nods. ‘On a closer look your theoretical exercise seems balanced.’

‘Thank you.’ The professor sighs in relief.

Celia can’t once more hide her admiration. ‘This just seems like a dream.’

‘But one we’re going to implement.’

‘But all your rules are bothering me’, Azahara intervenes. ‘You’ve promised freedom, but on all sides it seems restricted. Since my birth I’ve been living in a straitjacket.’

‘I’m an unconditional supporter of freedom’, the professor defends his approach. ‘But rules are in a first period needed to stop derailments in its tracks. Hence the great importance to really

explain the plan to the people. The keywords are transparency and an open and honest communication. But once the governance runs on cruising speed you can abolish those rules for all I care.’

‘I’m going to study this text thoroughly’, the young lady announces. ‘I think I’ve some ideas.’

‘Azahara!’ Her mother straightens her out. ‘Where’s your respect?’

Soothingly the professor makes a hand gesture. ‘This is a basic text. When someone submits proposals who are better than mine, mine will be deleted.’

‘You didn’t mention one word about culture. Isn’t that a part of our identity?’

‘Of course’, the professor replies apologetic. ‘But that offer is severely undermined by the censorship. I hardly see any talent in literature.’

‘Culture is far more than that. The artistic scene of Havana will flourish again once we can breathe freely again.’

‘I barely know that world’, the professor confesses. ‘The Future Plan especially prevents that discussions have start from scratch, because then we will still be nowhere in a few years.’

While looking at the photo of his uncle with vibrating lips Héctor is overcome by a new hint of melancholy. He experiences an update of the FEU’s dream in their pursuit of liberty, equality and fraternity. For once, tears of happiness roll over his cheeks. This new Plan is, in his mind, well-conceived, complete and balanced and doesn’t require any violence, what Laura would never have wanted.

The host announces he’s ready to give up his life to that ideal, well-knowing that when it fails, he’ll languish the rest of his life in the dungeons of the camps. “No one can take away my dream of a free Cuba.”

The attendees reach out to one another referring to José Martí’s words: *Nothing shall defeat us when everyone implements his part of*

what should happen. Once more Héctor pronounces with a trembling voice the motto that determines the actions of the group: *Cubanos Unidos*. Everyone hugs. Celia wants to give the professor a kiss, but he only presents his cheek. And Gonzalo whispers in Azahara's ears: *Nosotros estamos unidos también – we're also united.* Her tongue seems paralyzed for just a second, but her critical sense comes back to the surface when the professor mentions the practical implementation.

'Who's going to contact the leaders of the opposition? Will your driver conduct you all around?'

'Azahara!' Celia intervenes.

'Your question is absolutely valid', the professor soothes. 'I can't take my responsibility due to the recent events. But there's an alternative.' He looks at Héctor. 'I've someone in mind who knows the dissident groups, who's commonly trusted and who would walk through fire to achieve the objective of the Plan.'

'Would that be me?' the host asks surprised.

The professor nods.

'It will take months to get into this subject', he holds off.

'The bare bones will be largely sufficient for informal discussions.'

'Yet I don't know whether it's appropriate for me.'

'Now, I don't understand', Azahara puts him on the spot. 'First proclaiming that you would walk through fire for the Plan, and then to keep out.'

'Azahara!' Celia calls her daughter for the umpteenth time to order.

'Everyone is free', the professor soothes. 'The White Revolution is coming up to set us free. Héctor has to decide for himself. But you've to understand my concern to keep the core group as small as possible.'

'Where will those encounters take place?' the host asks timidly.

‘In places where the walls don’t have ears. In hidden corners of public spaces for example.’

Héctor still isn’t convinced. ‘Is such a meeting between dissidents not too risky? And what with the preparation of those Black Lists?’

‘I got a cure for that.’

‘You’re a genius’, Celia says admiring.

‘Not really. This time I found the solution in the monograph of the Russian dissident Alexander Ogoridnikov.’

For the functioning of his Christian Seminary, which in the 1970s was secretly active in all major cities of the Soviet Union, Ogorodnikov developed a code language to post anonymous letters on secret places. An envelope symbol on the wall served as the key. A slash with a crayon means that a letter was waiting to be picked up. And a round circle meant “danger”.

For the preparation of the Black Lists the professor incorporates two additional precautions. Three lists will be assembled totally unconnected and guarded on several places. The first list will contain the letters with the names of the perpetrators and the victims. The second will hold the statistics with the kind of crimes. Thus, for example, 1 for murder and 2 for torture. And the third list will give, in a code language, an overview of the facts, such as “B has D 2”.

‘How do you know which list comes from who?’

‘That’s a good question. Everyone gets a code name orally that’s only known by the contractor and the collaborator. And each file has a serial number. Both come on top of each document.’

‘Is this method not too complicated?’

He shakes his head. ‘In this way we are two steps ahead of the DGI since you can’t do anything with these separate lists.’

‘You’ve missed out on your vocation’, Celia reacts.

‘My only ambition is to die in peace in a free Cuba. But now I’ve to return to my driver.’

On parting especially Celia is affected. Despite her fervent desire, a personal meeting with the professor, didn’t take place. She won’t be seeing him again but on the day of The White Revolution. To her disappointment the man is also tight-lipped during the timid hug. Is he doing so out of shame? Or out of guilt? She feels that the professor is hiding something but she can’t figure out what that is.

Upon Hector’s initiative everyone agrees to contact José Daniel Ferrer, the leader of the Unión Patriótica de Cuba – the Patriotic Union of Cuba first. UNPACU counts, as the most militant opposition party, the largest number of political prisoners. One of them, Hamel Santiago Maz Hernández, died on February 24, 2017, in the prison Combinado del Este in Havana. But for practical reasons they get rid of that idea since that party only operates in the eastern part of the country. The transfer to Santiago de Cuba with a bus will take at least 24 hours and would be a torture ride for Héctor. And the other options to bridge the distance of 900 km to the second largest city in Cuba, such as the train or the bus company Viazul, are too expensive.

Yoani Sánchez or her husband Reinaldo Escobar are put forward as alternatives. They’re the most famous journalistic faces of the opposition. Their blog *Generación Y* and the digital newspaper *www.14ymedio.com* on the developments in Cuba have millions of readers worldwide. And Sánchez has on her Twitter account 718,000 followers.

After the departure of Gonzalo, also Azahara leaves. Both go to café Neruda. Héctor goes to sleep and also Celia goes

upstairs after washing up the glasses. But the banister she's grabbing trembles by the silence that descends over the house. By a crack in the window hatch she sees how Big Brother is keeping guard with his lamp for his window.

The woman is overcome with fear for the questioning of the DGI that is coming up. The brutal voice of agent Camilo during the raid after Laura's memorial celebration echoes in her ears. She's thinking of the horror stories Gonzalo had told about Jesús Escandell, the disgraced president of the Central de Trabajadores Cubanos, the Trade Union CTC. He had made full confessions in the Villa Marista, the headquarters of Camilo's anti-terrorist unit *Sección 21*. She hopes and prays not to suffer that same fate. Meanwhile, she repeats in her mind again and again in detail the fictional story of the unexpected reunion with her former classmate Pedro, she used to be in love with. She knows not to deviate even one millimeter of her version in order to survive the interrogation of the DGI.

Celia's eyes are blank when her stepfather comes down at seven o'clock the next morning. She didn't sleep a wink. The man knows that when the tension heats up, the best thing to do is to leave her alone.

After breakfast he prepares his meeting with Sánchez or Escobar. Celia agrees it's a good idea to discreetly put a note under their door. After several attempts he writes down: "Appointment 2:00 pm. Park bus station Plaza de la Revolución", accompanied by the initials "DL of H". These refer to Héctor, the Damas de Blanco and Laura. By turning off the logical sequence he wants, regarding a possible interception of his message, to keep the DGI off trail because the letter "H" also stands for Havana. A car with sirens stops wailing at the front door when Héctor puts that note in his wallet. Fortunately it isn't Camilo, but another patrol that's picking up Celia. Determined she follows the agents.

Half an hour later Héctor identifies to his relief that he's not followed. He has to switch busses three times to post his message at the other end of the capital. His right hand holds convulsively a plastic bag of the department store Diadora, containing the disguise of the professor. And on Celia's advice he's put his old glasses on.

Two hours later the bus stops in front of a decrepit building of the 1970s. He knows the way, since Yoani and Reinaldo had invited him once before years ago. In the stairwell he notices a poster with the photos of the professor and Gonzalo in their disguise. Under the title *Buscado – Wanted* is written: *Estado peligroso. Remuneración CUC 5,000*. Who provides information that may lead to their arrest, is awarded an amount for which one has to work all his life.

Héctor has no choice but to take the stairs because the elevator doesn't work. The dull look in the eyes of some residents reflects their submission. That elevator has presumably been defect for months or years. Hector's heart beats in his throat as he gets closer to his goal: not only because of the physical effort, but he's also overcome by fear. There's to his relief no living soul on the 14th floor. He follows the arrow to apartment 1436.

As a precaution he puts his disguise on in an inlet of the stairwell, on his toes he sneaks further and slides the note under the front door. Attracted by the sounds inside he peeks through the keyhole and recognizes the type of art of El Sexto. A large painting on the wall shows a map of Cuba with agents, angels and prisons.

On his way back Héctor scares. In the portal of the adjoining apartment stands an old lady. She had presumably heard the crackle of his shoes and came out to investigate. Héctor nods and continues his way quietly in order not to arouse suspicion. Around the corner he descends with large strides. A few floors below he hears the woman screaming. It took some time, but apparently she has recognized the disguise. Héctor throws them in

a dustbin and continues his way calmly when residents here and there are coming out. He breathes a sigh of relief at the bus stop when a bus comes in. Police cars with blaring sirens are rushing in in the reverse direction when entering the city center. A manhunt had presumably started in order to capture that state dangerous individual of the poster.

Héctor drinks a cup of coffee to recover from the emotions in the decrepit bar of the bus station. He looks at his watch. It's almost twelve thirty. Still an hour and a half to go. He's hiding himself in the opposite park because he expects that Yoani or Reinaldo will be followed. Suddenly he notes an undercover agent of the DGI who talks discreetly in the microphone to his ear. The man is thicker than most ordinary Cubans because he earns double. He's sure that an alarm has been declared when he recognizes other agents.

Apparently the disguise still hasn't been found. Because how can you find a disguised person without his disguise? Even though. One can often make neither heads nor tails to the behavior of the DGI.

At 2:15 p.m. Héctor fears that both journalists are arrested, when to his relief Reinaldo gets off the bus. On a closer look he's not surprised that those old-fashioned vehicles are late. Héctor switches to the alternative he has figured out because an encounter in the park is no longer an option. On a piece of paper is written: "Estadion Universitario". He takes some coins and appeals to a skater.

'Want to earn some pesos?'

The eyes of the young man sparkle.

'Give that piece of paper to that guy with his black-grey curly hair next to the entrance.'

The young man nods.

‘Without somebody notices’, he assures.

‘The money first.’

Héctor takes some extra coins. ‘You’ll get these if you carry out that order flawlessly.’

The skater hits Reinaldo, who scares, after which the young man falls intentionally. He hands the note when the journalist helps him standing up.

Consequently the young man gives Héctor a hi-five in collecting his reward.

Héctor rushes to the bus in the direction of the Calixto Garcia monument near the Malecón, which is named after a leader of the Cuban insurgents against the Spanish colonial rule in the 1870’s.

His look crosses that of Reinaldo on the platform. By the frowns of his eyebrows the journalist understands that the message comes from him. As the last passenger on the bus Héctor squeezes in, while Reinaldo is waiting for the next one.

Héctor gets off the bus in front of the entrance of the Calixto Garcia hospital. The road on the right side downward in the direction of the main building of the University passes by the stadium. There’s a football match going on. Agents in their brown uniform are keeping guard at the entrance. Héctor goes to the top row of the grandstand and anxiously starts going through his notes. In the meantime a young crowd, divided into two groups, cheer along with the contest. Reinaldo shows up ten minutes later. Both greet each other warmly. The journalist tells how the whole neighborhood of his apartment is to his surprise combed out.

‘You weren’t followed?’

‘My guardian angel met a friend at the entrance. They are

having a little chat. He has full confidence, because the stadium has only one entry and exit. Speak up! What's so urgent?'

Following Héctor's explanation of the Future Plan Reinaldo reacts pleasantly surprised: 'I want to live in a country like that. I remained in Cuba because this is where I belong. My family is buried here. Our cat runs around over here. And we take care of our yagruma. Every man needs a place to settle. The French philosopher Blaise Pascal knew that already four hundred years ago. A home is essential to build up one's identity. You can't be a full-fledged human being without one. If you don't have one you will die of loneliness. That's the tragedy of anyone who has left the country.'

Héctor reacts relieved.

'There's indeed a need for new beacons. And some insights, such as on demography, are innovative. Is this whole thing your idea?'

Héctor shakes his head. 'A professors' who likes to stay anonymous.'

'We badly need a strong social policy because the gap between rich and poor increases every day. The number of homeless, who're looking for a something to eat in the street trash, increases every day, while by contrast more and more new cars are running in the streets. Some rich people go on vacation on the other side of the Atlantic. But my neighbor with her salary of 0.55 CUC buys two Maggi-cubes chicken broth and bath soap every day. She works eight hours to make her rice more tasteful and to take a pleasing bath. Before entering the shop on the other side of the street she sees a café where a can of beer costs 1.10 CUC. Only Cubans with hard currency they've illegally acquired or received from family members abroad can come over there. I'm dreaming that one day my neighbor can buy in that café a can of beer.'

A hell of a noise rolls down from the bleachers because a goal is made. Also the guards are coming to take a look.

'I'm charmed by so much positivism', Reinaldo continues. 'Such as the pursuit of justice through a Truth Commission and

your reconciliation monument.’ He takes his I-phone. ‘In 2003 my wife and I also made a list with ten predictions.’

‘Even before the Black Spring?’

He nods. ‘We too signed Payá’s petition. His demand for a referendum on the fundamental freedoms radicalized our commitment. In 2003 we looked once more in our crystal ball.’ He looks for the article. The text is entitled *El future, preguntas y vaticinios por romper*.

‘I’m curious, Monsieur Soleil.’

‘I’ll read what we’ve posted on the internet.’

I know it will be difficult, very difficult times are coming for everyone. To forget, as we go to bed one night, the huge problems we do have indeed, and pretend we will wake up to another day, isn’t going to happen. It’s very naive to believe we can shake off this totalitarianism and all that results from it. It’s not going to happen; new problems and new challenges will begin. Are we prepared for them?

Are we prepared for a society where the responsibility lies with us and not with the State? A country where we can choose a president, but where he could perhaps turn out to be corrupt, a liar, an authoritarian? Are we capable of realizing, in that case, that we voted to name a “father,” rather than a public servant who has to answer to us? How long will it take for us to lose our suspicions about everything that contains the word “social” or about the unions, who today are simply transmission poles for the powers-that-be to the workers? Are we ready for tolerance? Can we live together peacefully with those of other political viewpoints and ideologies who take the microphones and propose their programs? Will our inexperience, perhaps, launch us into the arms of the next populist? Are we aware that we will experience a Cuba where there most likely will be a lot of nostalgia for the Castro regime? What will we do if, instead of real change, those who are now part of the Nomenclature exchange their olive-green uniforms for the suits and ties of entrepreneurship?

How will we react to immigration? Right now we only know the phenomenon of those who leave and also those visitors who – briefly – come as tourists to our country. However, we must know that if we manage to build a prosperous country, others will come to stay. How will we receive them? What will be the effects of so many years of shortages and rationing on personal consumption? Will families put themselves deeply in debt buying everything they see on TV? How will we resolve the dilemma of State property versus privatization? Will it be possible to maintain the extensive educational and

hospital infrastructure throughout the country, while improving its quality, breaking the bonds of ideology, and paying employees dignified salaries? What will happen to the enormous governmental and official apparatus, whose costs fall on our shoulders to an extent we can barely comprehend?

As you can see, rather than certainties, I only have questions. Questions that haunt me when I speak about the future of my nation. At least some things are clear to me: I will be in Cuba, I will do everything I can to help my country and I will try – through journalism – to dispel many of these doubts or to amplify them until someone responds.

Reinaldo nods. ‘You’ve given an answer to almost all those questions.’

‘I’ll take your message to the author.’

‘Your proposal to limit the political mandates in time creates space for the potential at the base that can take on leadership’, Reinaldo continues.

Héctor is surprised. ‘Sorry, but I only notice a growing indifference.’

‘Maybe in the academic community, but not in the underbelly of society.’

‘Well then, who are you talking about?’

Cuba counts thousands of anonymous citizens. They don’t come on TV, won’t go first in parades and never sign a petition to the improvement of human rights. They’ve never participated in a political platform and the word “activist” instills them with fear. But they also suffer in silence under the pressure of the censorship and the mismanagement. However, I’m sure they know by their natural charisma and daily contact with the people better than anyone the difficulties that our country is facing. These citizens will get up from all sides when the chains of Communism will be broken. The challenge for the society is to receive the social leaders of tomorrow at that time with open arms, because they will be best placed in managing change.

‘Thanks for your contemporary version of *Fuenteovejuna*’, Reinaldo continues.

The White Revolution

‘Are you alleging to Lope de Vega’s play? That was required reading in high school, but I don’t get the connection.’

‘You remember what it’s about?’

‘Isn’t that the story of the villagers who join forces to stop abuse of power of their tyrannical leader? And doesn’t the tyrant get killed in the end?’

He nods.

‘And what do the inhabitants answer on the judges’ demand who the murderer is?’

‘Now I remember. “Fuenteovejuna, your honor”.’

‘Your professor has understood that 400-year-old lesson well. The inhabitants union made them stronger than the tyrant. And the force of your Future Plan is exactly the connection of the fragmented pieces of the civil patchwork. *Cubanos Unidos* corresponds well with the concept intended. Your Plan makes me believe that the machinations of those in power don’t affect any longer our self-awareness. Cuba will, as the village of Fuenteovejuna, get rid off their tyrannical leader.’

Reinaldo notes that a man, who sits a few rows lower, tries to bug their conversation. In reply to the question whether he still wants to change something to the Plan, the journalist doesn’t feel the need to contradict so many matured wisdoms. He dissuades Héctor from his intention to submit the full text to the opposition leaders. The proceeds will be after all disproportionate to the efforts. Reinaldo makes the assessment that an overview of the guidelines is sufficient, linked to the request for three new ideas. These will refine several components of the Plan.

‘What’s your input?’

Reinaldo reacts surprised. ‘I’m thinking of Justice. But do you already have a mascot?’

‘Not to my knowledge.’

‘I’ve an idea. Do you know the song about the cat Vinagruto?’

Héctor rushes into laughing. ‘That kiddo song?’

Reinaldo starts singing:

*Vinagruto es un gatico
que parece de algodón*

*Vinagruto is a kitten
that looks like cotton*

The secret agent doesn’t understand what’s happening out there.

‘Do you know why that song touches the soul of so many people? And that melody sticks in your head once you’ve heard it?’

Héctor laughs out loud. ‘I’m not a specialist in this field. Because of the simple tune?’

‘Melo drama and humor are the power of this ugly and thin kitten, rescued from the street. Her name is a diminutive of vinegar. That story is about rejection, redemption and transformation. Vinagruto changes something no one expects. So does your Future Plan. That kitten is crammed into a warm nest, while many Cubans are being stuck in camps or pursuing ideological mirages. Vinagruto meows at the Moon and puts her whiskers satisfied in the milk. Wouldn’t that be a beautiful and happy mascot?’

‘That’s a good story.’

‘Great wisdom sometimes comes out of a child’s mouth.’

Reinaldo panics when the connection of his mobile is broken. Nor can he send a text message to his son who’s studying philosophy at the University. The agents who were standing at the entrance are on their way up, as well as reinforcements. Reinaldo whispers that the second phase of the Operation Cleaning will take place. After bringing down the mobile connections a physical

intervention is coming up.

Both their eyes fall on the sheet on which Héctor has recorded the guidelines. He crumples this in a jiff, puts it in his mouth and produces as much saliva as possible to dissolve the ink. That's the signal for the agents to intervene. Someone grabs Héctor by his throat, so he'll spit out the paper. But he manages to swallow it by his fierce resistance. When he takes some hard shots he manages to stick out his tongue which is colored blue.

Both are abducted heavy-handed. They state during a cross-examination that they ran into each other by accident. "Since when is singing a kiddie song a felony?"

Héctor and Reinaldo are released the same night. A Twitter message by Yoani Sánchez had unleashed a wave of indignation worldwide, also on the diplomatic front.

The next day Gonzalo gets a text on his mobile from Pablo with the message "Technical malfunction" at work. That's the agreed warning signal. The young man goes anxiously to the inner courtyard with a file under his arm in order not to arouse suspicion. Both sneak into the cabin of a truck with a running engine.

'Watch out, man', Pablo warns. 'There's a fire in the hole, I see.'

'How do you know?'

'I got access to a report of the counter-espionage about your visit to Cafe Neruda last night. The photos and film images speak a ton. You couldn't only keep your eyes, but also your hands to yourself. And those feelings were mutual.'

'What's the point?'

'The counter-espionage fights a power struggle on the

razor's edge.'

'I don't know what this has to do with me?'

'Your grandfather and you are closely monitored.'

'Why?'

'To compromise the Sour Puss. But the real stake is Losaja's position.'

'What has my relationship with Azahara has to do with this?' the young man reacts still disconcerted.

'My gut has never cheated on me before. She has the wrong background. She flourishes not only in the artistic scene, but in addition she comes from a litter of the hardest opponents. Her family has five stars: the highest category.'

Gonzalo looks seemingly amazed.

'You've no way of knowing that', Pablo condones. 'What I'm about to say, sounds harsh because I feel you've met the woman of your life. But you'll have to make a clean break. This is the wrong relationship at the wrong time.'

'Are you kidding me?'

'Sorry, man. There's no such thing as sentiment at the helm of the DGI. Only power counts. The counter-espionage has significantly strengthened its position the past few years. The big chief's brother is editor of the communist-party newspaper *Granma* and he's on the board of directors of the state television.'

Gonzalo's eyes go blank.

'The revolution requires sacrifices', Pablo comforts.

'And what if I continue?'

'Never ignore a warning!'

The young man realizes the seriousness of the situation.

'Cheer up!' Pablo gives him courage.

'And what's the point of that?'

'Things are not that bad. Your destiny is still in your own hands. You just have to handle this situation with care. Then there's more possible than you would have imagined.'

'But they constantly keep an eye on me!'

'That will be the case when you walk out of your office'

later on.’

Gonzalo gets angry. ‘I thought you were my friend!’

‘You know I’d walk through fire for you. It’s just a matter of being smart.’

‘What does that actually mean?’

‘Reschedule tonight in cafe Neruda. Fall out with her and get drunk at the counter. There’s enough people to keep you company. Then your case will be classified in no time.’

Gonzalo still looks crestfallen.

‘You really like her, don’t you? But wait a little longer before squeezing her pussy.’

‘But how am I being followed? I haven’t seen anything unusual yesterday.’

‘The agents of the counter-espionage use the latest technology.’

‘How can I recognize them?’

‘They carry a subtle white collar on their lapel.’

Gonzalo looks at his watch. He has to return to his office.

‘One last question. What’s grandfather got to do with this?’

‘Isn’t that a little bit weird? A pensioner who gets outside the organization chart a managerial position as top adviser of the big boss, without anyone knowing his mission. That stings the eyes. Jealousy is a terrible disease. Losaja thinks he will strengthen his position, but this appointment holds a great danger. When something happens to your grandfather, he’ll drag Losaja with him.’

‘Granddad is a perfect example of integrity’, Gonzalo reassures him.

‘What does he do?’

The young man feels its heating up, but doesn’t budge. ‘He’s a wonderful man, but a closed vessel. I’ve only recently found out he’s an international authority in his profession. He never said one word about that.’

‘I’m interested to know what he’s doing.’

‘Why?’

‘You know Radio Bemba.’

‘Which rumors go around?’

‘According to some he’s working on a new organization chart. Others pretend that he’s preparing a purge. And someone last week said that he’s preparing a coup d’état with Alejandro Castro. The son of the president has been spotted in Losaja’s office. And yesterday ...’

‘That’s crazy!’ Gonzalo interrupts him with a smile. ‘You guys are looking at crime series too much. Grandfather is a specialist in literature and not in conspiracy theories. I talked to him about our friendship. He can change the direction of your career.’

Beaming Pablo stops the vehicle’s engine and takes his suitcase. His shirt with bright red flowers remembers Gonzalo subtly to his promise for a new visit to the Club Cabaret.

‘Sorry, comrade. I’ve completely forgotten your appointment. It was so hectic these last few weeks. But I’m going to see uncle Diego tonight. I’ll keep you informed.’

‘You’re a real friend! I’ll see you later on, right?’

‘What then?’

‘The match of the Industriales of course.’

‘I’ve lost sight of it. But I think I’ll better break up with Azahara.’

‘You are making rapid progress.’

The next day at 6 p.m. there’s an emergency meeting in the underground room. Gonzalo is the last one to rush in. He uses his ID of the DGI to leave through the back door of the movie theatre Yara. His close observation of this hot spot in the heart of Vedado, next to the Coppelia, the most famous ice cream parlor of Cuba

and the hotel Havana Libre, has shown that he's still under investigation. But the agent of the counter-espionage didn't follow him. The coast is free until 8:00 p.m.

Celia smiles when he kisses Azahara, but Héctor still is very impressed by the past events. He didn't get any sleep last night. The police interrogation has awakened once more the old demons in his head.

After consultation of the professor the "confessional procedure" will be tried out. Celia takes the night train to Trinidad for a meeting with José Conrado. She will ask him to secretly contact some confreres in Havana. This will allow him to organize the contacts in the confessional or the sacristy of one or more churches. In addition it is their intention that the priest would contact the opposition leaders in the center and the east of the country. Celia hides a copy of the Future Plan in the false bottom of her suitcase. She hopes and prays on a happy ending with a rosary shackled around her fingers.

To lead the talks in Havana everyone agrees to call upon Matha Beatriz Roque Cabello. The woman is competent, has a lot of life experience and knows the dissident groups. Knowing her temperament Héctor is sure she'll rise to the challenge.

Martha is professor of Economics at the University of Havana when she establishes in the 1990s the Independent Cuban Institute of Economists out of dissatisfaction with the government policy. After her conviction in 1997 Amnesty International granted her the status of prisoner of conscience. She later was the co-founder of the Association for the Promotion of Civil Society, but during the Black Spring Martha is sentenced to twenty years. She ends up in an isolation cell of the women's prison Manto Negro, until she's imposed to house arrest due to her health problems. And that arrest is still valid. As one of the bravest women in Cuba she got a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007.

Despite the emigration of her whole family Martha

continues her fight. She's the driving force behind the *Red Cubana de Comunicadores Comunitarios*, a network of informants that is active throughout the country. They weekly distribute information and photos about the real situation in Cuba. And Martha with her razor-sharp pen proclaims uncensored her opinion on the blog <http://redcubanacc.blogspot.be/>.

The consultation of Martha's file on Gonzalo's laptop learns that she's dropped to rank two. She's presumably no longer a danger for the DGI because of her age and fragile health. She can act freely when she would end up in a lower category. Gonzalo is hatching a plot to pull his boss out off a meeting with him by Pablo. Then he can assign Martha to the lowest rank "due to terminal illness" within a minute.

Another Achilles Heel is the role of the actors during the festivities of The White Revolution. Diego has recruited Celia part-time in the Gran Teatro. She officially helps with the productions of the Pro-Art Lírício Center and the Spanish Ballet. But she's responsible for the logistical support of the secret working group that prepares the artistic part of the celebration. Also those are led by the professor. Celia is excellently placed for making contacts by her daily presence in the theatre. The actors are prepared for their role in consultation with the man who plays the role of Alejandro. Their burden is the responsibility to hijack the boat Granma, with all first-class issuers on board, and to lead them out to international waters.

At 7:40 p.m. Gonzalo returns in a jiff to the cinema Yara. He enters through the back door again and follows then the mass to the exit. He notices the man with the white board on his lapel around the corner. Next he publicly breaks with Azahara in cafe

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Neruda and immerses himself at the counter in the endless bunch of the regulars, who have given up life and for whom a drink is the last refuge that keeps them going. It's obvious to him why the Government doesn't address the abuse of alcohol. The best way to get people stupid and calm is to constantly give them the opportunity to get drunk.

6 YOU'RE A GENIUS

Losaja dusts the vest of his military uniform off. He's ready to attend the annual commemoration of the 26th June in the Palacio de la Revolución. On that day in 1953 the attack on the Moncada military base in Santiago de Cuba led by Fidel Castro failed. The movement that prepared the rebellion against the Batista regime was later named after that date.

The boss of the DGI intends to address Alejandro Castro personally, since the silence of the heir to the throne is pressing on him. Out of his hunger for recognition and confirmation he wants to talk to him directly.

The professor discreetly grabs to the amulet of Our Lady of Cobre round his neck and takes his courage in both hands in his attempt to change, from his submissive role, Losaja's mind.

'The Colonel has to know where we are', Losaja says excited.

'I doubt whether that's a good idea, Mr. Director-General. The command is in his letter very clear.'

Losaja paces up and down. 'Don't you understand I want a feedback of my originator in a case that's of the utmost importance for the future of the country and for me?'

'I understand your impatience', the professor talks some sense into him. 'It would have been better if the future president had given us a sign of encouragement. But you know his busy agenda.'

'Well, haven't I? Does he have any idea what I'm doing for him?'

'The DGI is the basic pillar of the Republic. And their work isn't sufficiently valued.'

'Finally someone sees it that way!'

‘But don’t underestimate the resilience of the revolution’, the professor continues seemingly serious. ‘The tide is turning although our institutions are going through a difficult period. Since his election, the new president of the *Yuma’s*, Donald Trump speaks about a tougher attitude towards Cuba. Many people understand that salvation isn’t to be expected from that corner. That’s why our country needs more than ever determined and strong figures to defend the achievements of the Revolution. And you’re one of them.’

He presses a smile on his face. ‘And I’m also convinced the Colonel will play his future role with brio.’

Losaja looks surprised. ‘So why hasn’t he come out, yet? I want to hear those words out of his mouth.’

The professor shakes his head. ‘My apologies, Mr. Director-General, but it doesn’t work that way. For sixty years the Castro family have already lead our country competently. And the same will be true for the coming decades. We’re not the equals of that honorable family. So let’s switch roles for a minute.’

He hangs on a second.

‘Let us presume that you’re the Colonel. And you entrust someone with a confidential mission. Would you appreciate it if that man asks you for a token of appreciation? I fear your intervention will have the reverse effect. Isn’t the assigning of that order to you by itself not a nice token of acknowledgment? The Colonel trusts you limitless! Each intervention, no matter how small ...’

The professor takes a recess again. By using a moment of silence his words even get more power. ‘... will be interpreted as a sign of mistrust.’

The professor feels the need to create a breathing space, so Losaja can make a turn of 180 degrees. To his relief the man seems to be in doubt. That’s the first step. It’s not evident he reconsiders his opinion, because that hard-head is used to assert his will. The professor feels that another nudge in the back will be sufficient to convince him.

‘I don’t want to influence your opinion, Mr. Director-General. I’m just aiming for the best possible result as a servant on

the second row.’

‘Maybe ... you’re right.’

‘There’s a proverb that says “no news, good news”. Why would we distrust without any cause the man who’ll lead our country the next generation? And whose deputy you are going to be.’

‘I never looked at it that way. ’By the way, what can we say about our project? The working groups have been launched. And as coordinator I can confirm that excellent work is done. But as expected the practical implementation encounters obstacles. That’s normal, right? What we are doing, is shaping the dazzling novel of “the Colombian”. Writers are brilliant dreamers, but don’t ask them to implement what they’ve figured out. Then it will end up with a right mess.’

Losaja doesn’t understand the subtle reference to the personal contribution of the professor by the persuasiveness of his discourse. Those are secretly meant for the listeners in the Calle Neptuno., Now that he is certain to have bypassed that tricky obstacle, he delicately demonstrates his moral superiority to his grassroots.

‘Only the celebration in the Parliament is prepared into detail.

‘Isn’t that the bottom line?’ Losaja resists. The man pushes back unexpectedly.

‘But what are you going to say when the Colonel questions the trajectory? There are three options on the table. And the opinions are still divided over the place where the boat Granma will leave.’ ‘The preparations don’t go fast enough’, Losaja gets excited. ‘It’s always the same when you’ve to work with those wretched worms of the Navy. Not to mention those incompetent nitwits of the Police. We’d better take control ourselves.’

‘Nevertheless the truth requires some nuance. There’ve been different opinions at the last meeting. I agree. The visions of the Navy and the Police vary widely. However, on both sides I’ve noticed a great enthusiasm from the very first meeting. And that’s still there. Up to now I feel a deep desire to give our beloved

president the unique farewell gift he deserves. But the Navy and the Police are dealing each with the upcoming events from their own point of view. That's normal, right? The ambition of the Navy to put their best foot foremost raises questions within the Police who are responsible for safety. With an estimated two million attendees we've to take their concerns seriously. No one will benefit when something goes wrong.'

'I'm sick of that blah, blah, blah.'

'We can take decisive action in our next meeting now we know both positions.'

'Finally, action will be taken. What did José Martí say? *Famous men, those of much talk and few deeds, soon evaporate.*' *Action is the dignity of greatness.*'

The professor doesn't abandon the opportunity to praise his boss. 'I'm once again amazed by your knowledge and keen insight. That you quote verbatim the statements of our father of the fatherland proves that you're a great intellectual. I can only agree that Colonel Alejandro made the right choice. I don't care what anybody says.'

'Whatever one may say?'

The professor, who realizes he's been too bold, has to make a turn of 180° to discern his frank statement. 'I feel tensions in the corridors, but can't put them into words.'

'Is my position under siege? By whom? Names!' He takes out his notebook.

'No, you misunderstand me, Mr. Director-General. The rivalry between the services of the DGI is an open secret. I study the body language and the interaction between the heads of service at our meetings. Outward signs reflect their mood, such as the way to join hands, the look in one's eyes and the physical distance in conversations. Those aren't hard facts, but my way to sense temperature.'

'You never cease to amaze me', Losaja relieves a little tension. 'You're a genius.'

'Only your humble servant', the professor says while he bends. Now he just has to complement him. 'I feel honored to put my knowledge at the service of you and the Revolution.'

In contrast with his expectation Losaja still isn't persuaded.

'And what is said about the Colonel?'

He pauses for a moment, because now he's directly put in

a weird spot. 'I don't know if I dare to utter those words.'

'Wasn't our arrangement to have no secrets?'

'Obviously ...' The professor ponders his words. 'Some bad elements ...', he begins reluctantly, 'call into question the abilities of our future leader.'

'Concrete.'

'Wicked tongues claim that ghostwriters have written his book *United States – the price of power*. That's non-sense of course. Jealousie is a terrible disease.'

The professor bites his lip. He has no choice but following this line of reasoning to avoid any suspicion, although he disgusts those words. 'Consequently, we've to come down hard on those behind it. For that kind of people isolation cells have been built.'

A fat smile appears on Losaja's face. 'You're a man of my heart. We're increasingly becoming soul mates. I'm glad your vision evolves positively.'

'What do you mean?'

'Never heard of psychological insight? At our first meeting I sensed a certain reluctance on your part, yes a critical attitude. But now to my pleasant surprise we're on the same line.'

The professor nods politely.

'You're right.'

The professor holds his heart again.

'It's better to continue in silence.'

'I admire your wisdom and understanding. Because I dread to think that unwanted ears would hear your conversation with the Colonel.'

'You really think of everything!'

'Things are going well and you've let them run its course. The best proof is the perfect compliance of the code of silence. Let this be a lesson. We've to be extra vigilant and sharpen the internal controls. These will strengthen your position.'

When Losaja opens the closet and puts his gala uniform on, the professor realizes that there's an UHF microphone inside. With a reference to the clock and the traffic jams in the city center he cautiously attempts to dissuade his participation in the meeting at the Palacio de la Revolución. But the man doesn't want to hear it and commands his driver to wait at the main exit of the DGI

headquarters. In accordance with the protocol he has a place in the middle of the second row. But in his mind he already sees himself sitting next to the future president. He clicks his heels together and leaves.

The professor touches with his thumb and index finger the amulet of Our Lady of El Cobre and prays for a happy end. On his departure Manuel calls him to his office.

‘One moment, your honor. The order forms haven’t been signed yet.’

‘So, did I forget? I’m getting older.’

Manuel stands into the military posture. *‘It is not true that people stop pursuing dreams because they grow old ...’* The man shakes his head nervously. ‘It’s true that people ...’

The professor corrects him with a smile while he signs the documents. ‘The quotations of “the Colombian” aren’t easy. You started out well’, he encourages him. ‘Now the second part: *they grow old because they stop pursuing dreams.* You’ll need to practice, but I’m confident you can overcome it. And you’re right. Chasing dreams is exactly what we do.’ He gives him a path on his shoulder.

In the meantime Gonzalo, against his habit, stops working an hour earlier. There’s plenty of overtime on his timecard. He saves it to take additional furlough in the run-up to The White Revolution. He’s in a great mood. ”Cancelled”, mentions a text message by Pablo. Once again his friend is of great help.

Pablo just rides up in a white van when Gonzalo gets on his bike in the courtyard. Inside there’s a boatload of Chinese spare parts. The smile on his face betrays he’s up to something. On a paternal tone he admonishes Gonzalo to avoid sugars, alcohol or caffeine and to limit carbohydrates in his diet. Subsequently he appeals to take protein, fatty fish and zinc rich food, with a preference for nuts and seeds. The young man doesn’t understand what’s going on.

‘Tips to increase your testosterone’, Pablo pesters. ‘I see, you’re going to ride the tiger.’

When the man makes a fast getaway to avoid a blow from Gonzalo's backpack, he still calls after him: 'True mastery lies in moderation.'

'I don't have any problem', he replies. 'Don't forget your blue pill soon, because it wouldn't be the first time that the machinery of a man in his middle age starts to sputter.'

Gonzalo hurries to the Calle Neptuno. He and Azahara have the underground room to themselves since Héctor is visiting Martha Beatriz Roque and Celia works in the Gran Teatro.

Lots of material is neatly organized in the adjacent basement: pieces of rusted iron, stained glass, wood from a wreck, a part of a fishing net, rusty barbed wire, patches of posters of Fidel and Raúl and the Cuban flag. Azahara is going to use all that stuff in her assembly for The White Revolution. The young woman calls Gonzalo to order when he lifts the sheet on the top of the basic construction. Nobody is allowed to look at it as long as the work isn't finished yet.

When he, following a long kiss, opens the buttons of her shirt Azahara intervenes once again.

'First give an account. Then we'll see if you deserve a reward. I'm busy with the letters A and B.'

'I'm going to check anyway.' Gonzalo nestles himself close to his girlfriend.

But she holds off, opening her file on Pablo's computer. He notices to his surprise how everyone has a fiche with a picture on top.

'How many points do I get?'

Gonzalo shakes his head. 'Between 9.75 and 9.99 on ten. Because perfection doesn't exist.'

'I'm going to judge you as stringent', she responds. 'I've a new appreciation of the DGI', she continues pestering. 'That database contains an unlikely amount of data. I even know everyone's shoe size. But laying simple connections is beyond their capabilities. I could quickly get a promotion, but I'm not a candidate. It's sufficient that one of our group sacrifices himself. Don't you think so?'

A reaction is inevitable. Azahara skips an attack of Gonzalo when he tries to open the buttons of her blouse. 'You hardly looked at my list. You do realize how long I worked on that? More than two hundred pages, señor. The malpractices the Famous Cubans are engaged in will pale compared to the deadly sins in the films of the *Yuma's*.'

The young man realizes that he has to pull out all the superlatives to conquer his prey. 'You're not only the best, but also the most intelligent woman I've ever met', he says while scrolling in the text. 'The references to the underlying documents are included. I'm impressed.' Suddenly he scares. 'Who's that man? He resembles grandfather.'

'Your cousin. Specialized in healing. He has a country house a few kilometers of Cayo Piedra, the luxury resort of the late Fidel Castro, south of the Bay of Pigs. The man has a magnificent view of the coral islands that the *Comandante* and *Chefe* had linked with a bridge. And he was using his heliport. Reportedly, he's one of the persons who manages the billions of dollars the Castro family has channeled abroad. But I haven't found proof so far.'

Gonzalo scares. 'Last time I saw him was at the funeral of grandmother.'

'Do you know who's covering him?'

Gonzalo shrugs.

'Ever heard of Diego Chepe?'

'My uncle? Are you sure?'

Azahara nods. 'That archive contains lots of explosive material.'

'You're obsessed with it.'

'I hope to find the answer to the question that keeps me busy from our first meeting.'

'What then?'

'The link between your grandfather and my mother.'

'Honestly, I don't know the answer either.'

Gonzalo can no longer turn a blind eye to Azahara's breasts, now the top buttons of her blouse are open. However, his comment that even more parts of her body should be subjected to a thorough investigation falls on a cold stone. Azahara reminds him of the agreement to first assess his work. Gonzalo puts his USB

stick in the computer. When opening his file the young woman reports that the award for the most elegant of reports won't be granted.

'It's the content that counts not the style, isn't it? You'll never believe who's first on my list.'

'That's not so hard with the initial C. Is he president?'

The young man nods. 'It's mind-boggling how much blood sticks on his hands. He ordered hundreds of executions of soldiers from Batista's army and executed many summarily. And how many death people has he on his conscience in Angola, Somalia and Ethiopia? Raúl was also the man behind Manuel 'Redbeard' Piñeiro, the head of the American Department of the Communist Party. That service supported the revolutionary struggle of the left wing guerilla in Grenada, Nicaragua and El Salvador.'

'Not bad ...'

Gonzalo scrolls further and beams. 'Close your eyes. Now a very special one is coming up. You've to guess.'

'Do I know him?'

'Of course!'

'The first letters.'

'The C and O.'

'They don't ring a bell. And next?'

'The N and the D.' He takes a condom from his pocket. 'Ever heard of it?'

Azahara wants to take it, but Gonzalo prevents that and grabs her by her loins. There's no stopping him. What follows is an intimate love game.

Losaja steps out of his limo on to the curb of the Palacio de la Revolución. Security agents guide him to the entrance. He looks at his watch. Another seven minutes. The principal guests get a separate monitoring treatment in the hall. When it's Losaja's turn, Mariela Castro is running up with a lot of noise. Like a real gentleman he lets her go first. With a greedy gaze he admires her beauty. Raúl's daughter remains a handsome appearance although she's in her fifties. Losaja takes the opportunity to congratulate her for her excellent work at the National Center for Sex Education.

The woman brings, as always, a big smile to her face. The Interior Minister, Losaja's big boss who stands behind him, puts on a long face, because the ceremony will begin in four minutes. When Losaja steps forward, the scanner makes a beeping sound and the red lamp lights up. Lots of eyes are on him. His treat to deal with the security personnel personally is ignored when he's taken apart. Meanwhile the Minister, who effortlessly passes the control, looks down at him with a mocking smile. What a supreme humiliation!

The UHF device is discovered at the manual screening. Losaja is stunned. It defies his imagination that the head of the intelligence service himself is tapped. He experiences the ultimate humiliation when he nonetheless wants to enter the ballroom. He's being refused access because in the meanwhile the ceremony has begun.

The man leaves furiously. An ominous reminder spooks around in his head while he's waiting for his driver who's at a meeting with his colleagues in the basement. Everyone knows to whom the empty seat is on the second row belongs. And what if the president looks back? Or worse: Alejandro. How will they interpret his absence? As disloyalty to the Revolution?

On his way back Losaja phones to the professor. He absorbs the first shocks and promises to join him at his office.

The agents who stand watch on his doorstep vibrate on their legs at his arrival. Their boss is yelling and screaming and smashes one object after the other to the ground. Only with great efforts the professor calms him down, after which he cleans up the battlefield. When he's putting the family photo back on his desk, Losaja rips it out of his hands. Then, he burst into tears.

'How long has this been going on? And who's really behind it?'

He's again overcome with anger. All his superiors, opponents and rivals pass in review.

'Is my mobile also tapped? And my laptop hacked? Are there also listening devices in my apartment?'

“I’ll skin the monster who’s responsible for this alive.” He deliriously repeats over and over again.

After some careful massage by the professor Losaja agrees to proceed systematically. Following the detection of the listening devices, they have to examine who has placed them. He lashes out at the Minister of the Interior when his name comes up, because of the way he was laughing at him. ‘He knows more’, Losaja rages.

The professor proposes to involve Pablo, the head of the Technical Service. When he doesn’t answer his mobile, the boss of the DGI once more engages in a tantrum. When the man calls back he wants to seal his fate.

‘Where are you, wretched worm?’

‘On ... a family visit.’

To his surprise Losaja hears the sensual background music he recognizes from the Club Cabaret. ‘Come to my office immediately’, he screams. ‘I’m being tapped. That’s the scandal of the century. And bring your detection material.’

‘Can it wait until tomorrow?’

‘Are you deaf?’

Pablo, who’s just nestled in the arms of Lolita, has no alternative but to interrupt his visit early. His heart bleeds when his favorite sexpot tries to change his mind. But he really has no choice. He puts his clothes on and leaves through the back door. Once on the street he bangs his head. He has forgotten his cap and therefore is filmed on his way out. Pablo sees the dramatic consequences. He may forget any promotion when that information leaks. And what if his wife finds it out?

There’s only one option: Gonzalo has to help him. In the meantime he drives like a zombie to the headquarters of the DGI and retrieves his detection case.

Azahara and Gonzalo are still reminiscing when he routinely takes the headphones. He can hardly believe his ears. The tirade of Losaja is still going on. The young man realizes that the listening devices have been discovered. He listens to the recordings

of the UHF device and immediately switches off all appliances. In this way the transmitter can't be traced. Azahara puts him with both feet on the ground again. Nothing irreparable has happened. Only the information flow will go with more difficulties.

Pablo enters the office with a heart full of fear.

'It's taken a long time', Losaja curses. 'And how are you dressed?' The shirt with the flowers is like waving a red rag to a bull. 'Where's your professional pride?'

'I was at a party ...'

A new wave of blames is coming up, when the professor takes the floor.

'I'm glad to meet the man, about whom I've heard so many good things, in real life.'

Pablo doesn't know very well what's happening. The professor summarizes the events and with a hand gesture he pleads for calmness every time his boss wants to intervene. Losaja blows off steam by the confidence and comfort the professor radiates.

By the use of his thermal imaging camera and inspection camera Pablo pulls out several listening devices, to the dismay of Losaja. There's one behind the painting, one under the coffee table and a chair and two under his desk. The adrenaline flows also through the body of the professor. Not only he but also other people have placed devices.

All these are of GDR-making. And in the closet Pablo finds UHF devices in his gala uniform and costume. The control of Losaja's fixed-line telephone, mobile and laptop is negative. Nor anything was found in Manuel's office and Losaja's penthouse on the 15th floor. An agent accompanies Pablo to Losaja's car. A listening device has also been hidden over there. The professor senses by Pablo's gaze that he knows more.

The professor takes the case with the found listening devices in hand. 'Now we know the extent of the eavesdropping scandal, we've to find the perpetrators.'

'I'll crack the bones of those who did this.'

'We live in a constitutional state, Mr. Director-General. Judges will punish them.'

‘How long have these devices been here?’

‘Those were made at the end of the 1980’s in the GDR. The same type of apparatus was used by the KGB to intercept the communications in the U.S. ambassador’s residence in Moscow. So they can be here for 35 years. I’ll test if these are still operational.’

The professor picks up a device. ‘Do they work without the limitations of wires or batteries?’

‘This is high-tech equipment *avant la lettre*. This type of functioning device can remain operational up to seven years’, Pablo says. ‘When I started twenty years ago, I worked on the Department that was recharging those devices. Our Soviet friends and their allies were at that time a generation ahead of the *Yuma*’s.’

‘The good old days’, Losaja murmurs.

‘However, since the pact with China the Recharging Department has been closed down.’

‘What are you waiting for?’ Losaja barks.

The head of Technical Department seems to be paralyzed.

‘Test them, wretched worm!’

‘I think we still have a mobile measuring device in the basement.’

The professor tries to appease his boss in anticipation of Pablo’s return. ‘I don’t understand the spineless treatment of the main responsible for our security. Our president has abolished the death penalty, but perhaps it would be better to implement it again.’

‘I’m glad to find out that you think so too. You’re a man of my heart.’

On entering with his mobile apparatus the professor gives Pablo a device. Losaja drifts once more into a fit of rage since the fingerprints of the perpetrators will become unrecognizable. He only calms down when the professor reminds him that he also took them in his hands.

Pablo states that four out of five devices still work. The DGI chief announces a screening of the senior officials of Desequip because all devices are transported over there. There can be no doubt on the origin of the UHF devices. Only the Counter-Espionage uses Ultra High Frequency Technology.

The professor looks at his watch. 'It's 8:00 p.m. Tomorrow morning we'll put our heads together and then take action. The night will bring peace and insight.'

'Well, I assume my presence is no longer required', Pablo carefully sounds out.

But the professor won't let him go because of the role that awaits him in the further planning. 'This is a technical matter. We'll need your advice.'

He is a master in applying the carrot-and-stick policy, because he right away sticks a feather in Pablo's cap. 'Fortunately we've one of the world's leading experts in our midst.'

Losaja nods. His anger made place for meekness and a visit to the Club Cabaret has set his mind.

The professor and Pablo who're waiting in the hallway for the elevator, both send a text message. They just stare ahead. But in both cases Gonzalo is the recipient. Pablo sends "Home run Industriales". And the professor cites "the Colombian": *A person doesn't die when he should, but when he can.* This is the agreed sign to meet in the underground room when doom threatens.

Héctor has communicated the good news to Azahara and Gonzalo. Martha Beatriz Roque is willing to cooperate. The young man jumps up when he receives both messages. The command of his grandfather has already been carried out, but the alarm signal of his friend does not augur. He jumps on his bike and rushes to the training ground of the Industriales.

Hundreds of loyal supporters accurately follow the training session. Gonzalo goes to the top of the bleachers where Pablo bursts into tears.

'Sorry, man. But you're the only one I can confide in.'

After Pablo's confession Gonzalo shakes his head. 'And that for such a clever man.'

'It will become my death sentence', Pablo looks crestfallen.

'I'll ask uncle Diego if those images are linked to other networks.'

'You're a real friend.'

'That's my duty.'

‘Yes, a real friend’, he repeats. ‘I’ve just returned from a meeting at the office of Losaja with your grandfather. What a nice man! I almost fainted by the praise he attributed to me. You strongly resemble your grandfather. The same words are also coming out of your mouth.’

‘I see the positive side of people, because the atmosphere in our society is already depressing enough. But what were you and grandfather doing with Losaja?’ Gonzalo asks seemingly puzzled.

‘Do you know what I’ve found in his desk?’ Pablo’s voice changes.

Gonzalo shrugs, but can’t hide a blush on his cheeks.

‘Listening devices of the same type you’ve taken to Desequip and the UHF devices I’ve transferred to you.’

Now Gonzalo doesn’t know how to react.

‘Has the Sour Puss already received his present?’

The young man looks at the ground.

‘Sorry, man, but I’m not naive. Did you place these devices on Losaja’s desk?’

Gonzalo shakes his head.

‘What’s going on?’

‘I indeed have something to hide.’ He looks Pablo straight in the eye and decides to strike back. ‘But who doesn’t?’

Because Pablo also frights, he repeats: ‘Who doesn’t? I propose from now on we’ve no more secrets from each other. And what we’re telling each other is just between you and me. And whatever may happen: our lips remain sealed. Deal?’

‘I’d love to’, Pablo smiles sneaky. ‘But I’m telling everything to my cat and my dog. Is that allowed?’

Both seal their agreement with a high five.

‘Do you work on behalf of the Damas de Blanco? Your flame is actually family of Laura Pollàn.’

Pablo falls from one surprise to another when Gonzalo reveals the whole story.

‘Is that all true?’

He nods. ‘Are you up to cooperate with our plan?’ he asks point-blank.

Anger is Pablo’s first response. ‘That you don’t do’, he reacts negatively. ‘And you call this friendship? From the beginning I felt that something wasn’t right, but I never went into that case out of respect for you.’

'I had no choice', Gonzalo apologises. 'This couldn't possibly be done when I had put my cards on the table from the start. I always walked through fire for you. And I'll continue to do so. But you've become a real friend. I mean it. No matter what happens, I don't want to lose you as a friend.'

Pablo is lost in thoughts. 'I know that this regime can't hold up of course. And your Plan is well prepared.'

'Why shouldn't we become allies?'

Pablo hesitates.

'I'm sure we're sharing the same dream.'

'I've a lot of respect for you and your grandfather. But an evaluation of the current state of events makes clear to me that the risks are enormous and the objective pursued difficult to achieve.'

'We'd think above all of the future. Do you have kids?'

That argument clutches his throat.

'We'll survive, but what really counts is our children's future.'

'If you look at it that way ... maybe you're right ...'

'I'm certainly right.'

Gonzalo puts another argument on the table, now he's sure his friend is going to change his mind. 'We've only one goal: the happiness of all Cubans.'

'That's what attracts me in your Plan', Pablo stutters. 'Thanks for your deeper insight.' He gives him a hug.

Gonzalo is touched, but mostly relieved. 'Welcome to our club!'

Pablo gets emotional. 'You want me to be honest with you? I got something else to tell you. Your bag with devices brought me on the same idea when I was approached by the Counter-Espionage. I've put devices in Losaja's office and car at the request of their boss.'

'What's your relationship with the Counter-Espionage?'

'All life is, is giving and a taking. And it's vital to get the best out of it. I've got a business proposal. Their boss wants Losaja's job. It's better to have him as a friend than as an enemy.'

'Where do they listen to the conversations in Losaja's office?'

'In an obscure basement on the Calle Linea.'

'Splendid!' Gonzalo beams. 'What a godsend! The hunt down of that Tapping Service keeps not only our network out of

sight, but eliminates at the same time the head of the Counter-Espionage. This will get you a promotion!

‘Do you think so?’

‘You know the advantages of a top spot.’

‘When that event in the Club Cabaret doesn’t get in the way.’

‘Don’t worry. Also Losaja is a regular over there.’

‘I know. And I’ve more explosive information. About the bank accounts abroad by the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister. And Losaja’s family.’

‘What are you saying?’

‘His father has been murdered three days before his retirement because he knew too much.’

After a short meeting the next day a raid takes place at the Counter-Espionage. The members of the Tapping Service are arrested and at the Headquarters their laptops are seized. In general there’s a ban on using the phone so no one can inform their boss. On his arrival the boss of the CE smells danger and takes a flight. Three cars go in pursuit with blaring sirens. On the way to Regla his car misses a turn and goes off the road, bumps into a tree and burns out. For the passengers all help arrives too late.

An emergency meeting of the DGI approves the new organization chart the professor has developed. The new chief of Counter-Espionage, who’s at the same time head of the Technical Department, comes directly under the authority of Losaja. And Pablo is put forward as the only candidate. What’s left is the approval by the Minister of Home Affairs. The man is a military and exactly from that angle a bit more of a struggle is expected because of the oversized position of power of Losaja. But a “favorable wind” delivers a copy of a secret dossier at the minister’s desk the day before the meeting, with evidence of the hundreds of millions of dollars he has transferred to accounts in Switzerland and Venezuela. The man is, under a false name, also the owner of a factory in Australia that exports food to Cuba.

Consequently the ratification of the Pablo’s appointment is a formality.

Meanwhile the preparation of the celebration falls into a definite form. Two grandstands will be placed along the route for the foreign guests: one on the Plaza de la Revolución, where a large parade will pass by, and the second at the height of the new pier next to the terminals for the cruise ships and the ferry boats. The Granma will leave over there. Every week the actors rehearse in the military port. Furthermore the locations for the fireworks are established. And the professor approves the test booklet of *The White Revolution* and orders a print out of a million copies.

Losaja want to brief Alejandro about the current state of affairs. Since the professor realizes that grumbling won't change is mind, he puts his ultimate trump card on the table: the secret family file from the archives of the Counter-Espionage.

'Something must be said, Mr. Director-General', the professor applies carefully.

'What then?'

'You rightly insist to never leave anything to chance.'

'What are you leading up to?' Losaja asks. He smells the danger.

'Our friend Pablo gave me this file this morning.' He hesitates for a moment. 'It is my duty to hand it over to you.'

'But what is so special about it?'

'It concerns your family.'

'I beg your pardon!' he cries out.

At once he grabs the file from the professors' hands. The man reads in detail how his father has been eliminated in a staged car accident. His eye falls on documents proving his involvement in the transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars of Soviet support into the accounts of the Castro family.

Losaja is boiling with fury. He realizes that the administrators, with Fidel on point, have erected a facade after his father's death. Immediately the false look on Raúl's face at his cremation of his father comes clear into his mind.

One report is signed by "the Jesuit", according to a later

added annotation “the Jesuit” is the code name for Raúl Castro. Losaja realizes that the president himself had given the command to eliminate his father. He’s overcome by a mix of indignant outrage, discouragement, revenge and above all a secret desire to go to the Club Cabaret. With trembling hands he takes the family photo with the picture of his father in the background in his hands.

‘Now I realize what the word *sometimes* during Alejandro’s visit means’, he rants.

The professor tries to appease him. ‘Let’s honor on this painful moment the remembrance of your father. Revenge is definitely not ...’

‘You’re a genius!’ Losaja interrupts. He embraces the professor. ‘You’ve given me a brilliant idea! How can I ever thank you?’

The professor doesn’t know what’s happening.

‘That’s it! The hour of revenge has come. My father’s death will be revenged.’

‘What do you mean?’ stutters the professor.

‘We’re secretly going to give that celebration a different direction’, he says firmly.

‘Now you’re confusing me.’

‘The big bosses of the Ground Forces and the Air Force are personal friends. And that clown of the Navy is an opportunist. The security forces will take power!’ The man keeps unfolding like a flower. ‘During the celebration the Castro family and the top of the regime are on the boat Granma. Right?’

‘That’s the aim.’

‘Then it is enough to hostage that boat to seize power. My father has served our nation his whole life. Now it is time that his son will lead Cuba’, he beams. ‘You’ll be my right hand because you’re the only one I trust in this hornet’s nest.’

From his ability to read people the professor has enough experience not to contradict him. ‘It would be my great honor’, he says squeezing a smile on his face. ‘I like working with competent people.’

Losaja opens his wallet and takes out a yellowed photo. Tears roll down his cheeks. ‘Father’, he murmurs. ‘I finally know the truth, but the hour of revenge is upon us. Justice will be done.’

I'll make sure the Castro family will undergo the same fate as you have. Our family will at last benefit the rewards of a lifetime commitment to the ideals of the Revolution. My first decision as the new president shall be the creation of a memorial at your honor on the Plaza de la Revolución next to the statue of José Martí.'

The professor sizes up the situation instantly. He'll get *carte blanche* in the preparation of the celebration, now Losaja is going to put all his time and energy in the preparation of the coup d'état. But at the same time the conspirators of the Calle Neptuno will be facing an additional challenge: to prevent this attempted coup with the help of Pablo, Losaja's right hand.

Instead of informing Alejandro personally a meeting with the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister takes place. The previous day a file with incriminating documents about his share in the fraud in the holding Gaesa also ended up on the desk of the latter.

The plan of the celebration is approved without any comment and the necessary money has been included in the budget. The Prime Minister will personally inform the party leaders and Alejandro Castro.

Now the professor and Pablo unexpectedly hold key positions the underground room in the Calle Neptuno fulfills another role. Matha Beatriz Roque regularly reports on her 'Confessional Conversations' and Celia monthly travels to Trinidad. She picks up the data of José Conrado, following his meetings with the main opposition leaders from the Centre and the East of the country in the sacristy of his St. Anna Church and the sanctuary of Our Lady of El Cobre near Santiago de Cuba. Martha and Héctor process the new ideas into the Future Plan.

But the biggest task is the processing of the data from the Black Lists. The introduction of the data, according to a fixed format, is led by Azahara. The database already contains thousands of pages. These are periodically stored on two external hard drives Martha is saving at different locations, in case the underground room where discovered. Azahara burns all written notes after their processing. In the little time available she continues working on her

statue for The White Revolution.

Martha also makes the bags to store the revolvers and Celia sews them in the costumes of the actors. Finally Pablo systematically embezzles pistols and ammunition. He keeps these in a secret archive at his office.

Through Gonzalo Martha demands, also in name of José Conrado, an appointment with the professor. The rendezvous will take place in the sacristy of the Saint Rita Church on the Quinta Avenida, following a meeting in the Gran Teatro.

When the professor goes to the toilet, he runs into Celia in the hallway. They meet face to face for the first time. The professor in an automatic reflex creates distance again, but Celia's spontaneous smile melts the ice. They fall in each other's arms, but there's only little time. The professor has no other choice than to return as soon as possible to the conference room, in order not to raise suspicion with those who keep an eye on him.

During the meeting the professor can hardly turn his eyes away from Celia, and vice versa. On his way out he opens during the handshake his index and middle finger, as he did when he was serving in the army. Thereby a note drops in her palm. Celia secretly puts it in her pocket. She's expected at 4 p.m. in the sacristy of the Saint Rita Church.

The professor commands his driver to drive around along the Quinta Avenida and to halt at Saint Rita Church. He asks to be left alone and gives the man a nice tip. A cordial meeting takes place with Martha in the sacristy.

'Why did you ask me to come urgently?'

'I've a question in the name of all our interlocutors.'

'What then?'

'There are a lot of questions about the involvement of foreign experts. Everyone wants to keep the overall control into Cuban hands.'

'I've no problem with that. However, I know no one with the knowledge and the moral authority who is equal to this task.'

'And yet, this person still exists.'

'Do I know him?'

'I think so.'

'Who then?'

'You!.'

'That's impossible', he reacts surprised. 'I've no ambition. I'm finally going to retire when The White Revolution is brought to a successful end. Unless our plan fails. Then I'll go to the isolation cell until I'll die. And I'm okay with that. But my input will in any case stop at the end of February. I can't stand this much longer physically nor mentally.'

'Someone calls you the Mabida of the Caribbean.'

'I don't see any resemblance to Nelson Mandela', he responds amazed. 'I never saw an isolation cell from the inside except of a small period during my military service.'

'Yet for decades you live mentally in imprisonment and in your mind a similar process has taken place. You've turned the bitterness into positive energy. Your Plan for a non-violent revolution is not motivated by self-interest, but based on an authentic pursuit of happiness for the whole Cuban population. You embody the desire for truth, justice, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation. The opposition leaders insist on you taking the lead during the transitional period.'

'Well, how can that be? I've never met a single one of them.'

'But you opened their eyes.'

'I'm a thinker, not a doer', the professor holds off again. 'Every day I experience how hard it is to realize the dream, I've created. And now I'm talking about a celebration, not about leading the country. I'm not cut out for this.'

But Martha hasn't kept one's end up. 'Do you know how long Mandela stayed in power?'

'I can't remember back that far.'

'One term. He didn't want to cling onto it with all his might, only facilitate the transition towards the new regime.'

The professor finally agrees under three conditions. He wants to have everybody's support for his candidacy and that no vote on his person will take place. Consequently that his office is limited in time and that the Future Plan will be the guiding principle of his policy.

'I'm sure everyone will agree', Martha gloats.

'There's also a fourth condition', the professor suddenly changes his mind.

The woman scares.

'The project *Cubanos Unidos* is based on moral leadership.'

'I know.'

'As a servant I want to give my best powers, so all inhabitants will be able to lead a decent life. I can't reconcile with my conscience to get even one peso, while millions of Cubans in the lower society only barely survive.'

'You've a big bright beautiful spirit. Congratulations, Mr. president', Martha says moved.

'We're far from achieving that. Let's hope and pray.'

When Martha leaves, Celia is kneeling at the statue of Our Lady of Cobre in the left aisle. Some candles are burning. The professor first takes a look at his driver and sees that he's taking a nap. Now the coast is clear. In turn Celia enters the sacristy. They'll have lots to talk about, but they don't find the words.

'Are you my father?' she stutters at last.

The professor bursts into tears. 'As students in literature we dreamt of becoming writers ourselves and to change the world. We didn't think about a relationship or getting married. The night before my departure to the army Paula and I made love. And you're the beautiful fruit of our loins.'

'What happened to mum?'

'Only later on after fulfilling my military service I could reconstruct the pieces of that puzzle.' The professor starts to sob again. 'They've forced her to suicide. The DGI obliged her friends in the arts world, who played host for your mother and yourself, to abandon you both. If not they would get arrested. Your mother didn't have anybody in Havana to go to. And she wasn't welcome any more with her family in Manzanilla, unless she would renunciate you. Back in Havana she lived on the street. One day you were taken by a nurse, while agents dragged your mother to the Malecón. There was a lot of wind and the waves came in over de seawall. She was almost obliged to jump in the sea and then she

was smashed on the rocks.'

They put their heads on each other's shoulders.

'I've read the poems you've written to Aunt Laura', Celia breaks the silence. 'You're talking about me all the time.'

'Of course.' The professor still is overcome by emotions. 'We couldn't see, hear or feel each other. But I've loved you my whole life. But now you're in front of me, I'm paralyzed with fear to touch you.'

'Take me in your arms, please, take me!'

The professor vibrates on his legs. 'This regime taught me to suppress my feelings. Communism has made a cold fish of me. Until your spontaneous smile has broken that chain. Only now I realize how much I made you psychologically suffer too. Come here!' He grabs Celia. 'My daughter. I'm never going to let you go'

They're in a warm embrace, when someone knocks on the door. The driver! The professor has forgotten about him. Celia is hiding in the closet when he steps out seemingly quiet.

'Where've you been?'

'I like to withdraw in silence. Why?'

'I was planning to call Losaja because you seemed to be nowhere inside.'

'Such a bad conscience?'

'But what are you doing here?' The man looks around. 'And all alone.'

'Being silent. Meditate and reflect in silence.'

'That drives me crazy.'

'You don't know what you're missing.'

'Did you cry then? What happened?'

'My wife died three years ago.'

7 CUBANOS UNIDOS

Saturday February 24, 2018. From day break thousands of workers are busy to establish triumphal arches at the crossroads and to decorate houses in the traffic-free center of Havana. Neglected facades along the route are getting a coat of paint and the whole city baths in a sea of white. There are white carpets in and around the Parliament, at the Plaza de la Revolución and in the port where the boat Granma is docked. All boats in the harbor are decorated with flags and ribbons. Stages for the TV crews are raised on the important points along the way. They'll broadcast the event live. 39 foreign television crews have a stage side by side with a view on the harbor and the Granma.

On safety nothing has been left to chance. The DGI is responsible in and around the Parliament. And the Avispas Negras – Black Wasps are in charge of the sites where a large mass is to be expected: the Plaza de la Revolución, the port and the Malecón. That heavily armed elite unit has claimed every other man in the squad. Even the foreign mercenaries from Russia, Vietnam, North Korea, China and Israel. Their headquarters is housed in the high-secured ministry of Defense. Hundreds of cameras closely monitor the route. And two helicopters are standing by in the courtyard ready to intervene if necessary. That unit is assisted by the Red Berets of the military police and a battalion of the counter-espionage.

The hundreds of thousands of Cubans who are pouring in from the Center and the East of the country stay at schools, factories and army barracks in the periphery. The transport takes place with army buses from the central railway station and the bus

terminals. The participants know their picnic can only contain bread and home-made soft drinks. Meat products or perishable foods are prohibited. In the dormitories military bunk beds are placed and impromptu soup kitchens are preparing supper.

A 75,000-strong volunteer brigade is channeling the public stream. The members wear a white hat and a white t-shirt with the slogan *Hasta siempre Presidente* under the depicting of Raúl Castro. Each Committee in the Defense of the Revolution has his own place along the route and at the Malecón. Signs with their names are alongside the roads. The CDR Presidents write down the persons present on name lists.

The *cuentapropistas* or restaurant businesses of the self-employed entrepreneurs are closed and since Thursday there's an alcohol ban. The refrigerators in the shops and bars are locked and equipped with warning signs. The threat of a hefty fine for who gets caught on the sale of beer or rum, doesn't prevent the trading of homemade drinks and beer cans on the Black Market and in private homes at exorbitant prices. The going price for two beers is 25 pesos. Agents turn a blind eye in exchange for free drinks.

At the DGI headquarters Losaja accompanied by the professor and Pablo, meets with the Police Chief of Havana and the Commanders-in-Chief of the Air Force, the Navy and the Army. First order of business is the distribution of power. In exchange for the Presidency Losaja waives his share of the military holding Gaesa. Though he gets the former country house of Fidel Castro in Cavo Piedra. The portfolio of Gaesa will be divided on the basis of an assessment of the professor. The Police Chief gets the patrimony of properties in downtown Havana and the Commanders-in-Chief each one third of the tourism industry.

Operation Barbaroja – Red Beard is the name of the attempted coup d'état. This refers to the nickname of Losaja's father. During the power point presentation of the professor the conspirators enjoy their Cuba Libre, which Pablo has prepared with a masterly

hand. The participants assemble according to the plan in the DGI headquarters at noon. At 1:30 p.m. at the time the personalities, apart from the conspirators, are boarding the Granma phase 1 enters into force. The Secret Service takes control of the building of radio and TV and of Etesca, the stately telecom conglomerate regulating telephony and internet. The 300 vehicles and 2,000 men of the other units are going to control the strategic points, including the international airport, the Central Train Station, the Station Cristina and the bus terminals. Armored vehicles of the army are already hidden on these places for support.

In phase 2 six boats of the Navy leave the port to escort the president and his entourage. But they're going to lead the Granma to the international waters. Next the handcuffed Castro family and the other dignitaries are being flown per helicopter to the heavily guarded El Pitirre prison. There they'll reside into protective custody until their trial.

In phase 3 the generals announce the coup d'état on radio and TV. And in the Parliament the swearing-in of the new president will take place. He announces the State of Emergency and institutes a curfew. The public and army buses bring the visitors back to their sleeping places, from which they'll leave to their homes. The different receptions on the squares of the city and the fireworks are at least suspended for security reasons.

'Any questions?' Losaja's face is shining.

'It's going to get filmed then, isn't it?' asks the Police Chief of Havana. 'We will have to prove the family Castro is eliminated.'

'There are cameramen on board and a technician who'll transmit the images.'

The boss of the Navy raises his hand. 'I'm dry as a bone. Give me another Cuba Libre to toast on our plan'

He gets the full support of his colleagues. Only the chief of the Army has some doubts. 'What if additional troops are needed? The closest spare units are stationed at thirty kilometers.'

‘We can’t reverse the decision to mobilize the greatest possible crowds. One can only receive the temporary doubling of the population by using the entire infrastructure of public services. Hundreds of employees are yet working for months in channeling the population flows. The funeral of the *Comandante* and *Chefe* was a good dress rehearsal. Or do you expect a raid of the *Yuma*’s?’

‘Trump would like to, but that’s politically unthinkable. But a possible reaction from inside? Many are inclined to the Castro family.’

‘That’s equally inconceivable’, Losaja replies. ‘People are coming because they have to. Those who’re not on the participants list, risk losing their job next Monday. People only like the president and his family because that’s instilled for decades in their minds. They do so, but don’t carry them in their hearts. Equanimity is the best description of the state of mind of 99 percent of the participants. They don’t step, but stroll. They’re hooting and hollering and drag the signs with the slogans they’ve to show along the route on the ground. No one believes the hollow slogans *Raul, friend, the country is with you*, and *I am Raul* and *Raul doesn’t go away*. For most people this is a free trip to the capital. Don’t flatter yourself. What the eye doesn’t see the heart doesn’t grieve for. No one will shed a single tear when the Castro’s disappear from the scene. Our elite troops stand ready in a double occupancy when something should happen.’

‘No pessimism!’ the police Chief of Havana agrees. ‘Till now there’s no indication that our plan is leaked. Are we yet sufficient aware that the future of our country will look totally different in 24 hours?’

‘Could we hear the speeches once more?’ the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy asks. ‘Cause these’ll go around the world.’

Losaja looks at the professor.

‘Our friend Randy Alonso of *Mesa Redonda* will make, as agreed, the announcement and introduces the honorable generals. One at a time they will read a passage from a common declaration.

The White Revolution

Sixty years after the revolution the united Cuban armed forces seize power. The Castro family can no longer lead the country after the past decades of stagnation. She will be brought to justice because she has abused her dominant position. The new administration will improve the well-being of the population based on the ideals of the revolution.

Subsequently will be directly switched to the Parliament where Losaja takes the oath. The professor clears his throat.

Venerable inhabitants of our beloved Cuba, Comrades.

Sixty years ago the Revolution has put an end to the corrupt regime of Batista. A young generation of brave men seized power. They were inspired by high-flown ideals. She purged the country and gave shape to a society where everyone is equal. She installed a world-class healthcare and educational system.

But every Revolution must reinvent herself because the sacred fire extinguished with the years. And the Castro family was, despite her merits, tempted by the honey of power.

Today the armed forces take the helm, inspired by the same idealism of 1959. Our first concern is the restoration of order and the national security. In order to achieve this, a State of Emergency and a strict curfew is issued. The main objective of the new government is an increase of the prosperity and well-being of the population. More freedom and free elections are coming up with respect for the achievements of the Revolution. The armed forces will accept the results and I will resign as president.

I ask you, Comrades, to support the new regime eagerly. Cubanos Unidos. Together we're building a glorious future of our beloved homeland. So let me echo the inspiring words of our father of the fatherland José Martí: Juntarse: ésta es la palabra del mundo – Unite is the most important word in the world.

Lastly, I think on this historic day in the history of our country back to my father. He has faithfully served the Revolution throughout his life. Also I will take that role the next years as your humble servant.

Losaja beams while his audience applauds.

‘We’ve changed the last sentence’, the professor explains. ‘This personal touch and the highlighting of the service to the people is meant to strengthen the positive perception among the population. Anyway, the first impression is of the utmost importance. What do you think?’

‘Wonderful’, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Troops agrees. ‘I don’t see how anyone can be opposed to that. It’s brilliant to create expectations without giving an interpretation. I’ll bet even all members of the opposition will applaud!’

‘That speech will make a deep impression on the people’, the Chief of the Navy agrees. ‘You’re right. In a few months, nobody will talk about the Castro’s any more. Now there are no statues of them, we don’t have to clean up that mess.’

‘That passage on the elections is brilliant’, intervenes the Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Troops. ‘Once that announcement is done, it’s sufficient to postpone the date over and over again. We’ll hold that carrot right under the nose of all asses who’re thinking that free elections are coming up under the guise that the preparations aren’t ready yet. And we’ll implement in case of difficulties once more the state of emergency.’

‘What do you guys think of a Cuba Libre on the forthcoming victory?’ Pablo triumphs. Everyone wholly agrees.

‘Tomorrow Cuba will be free. Finally freed from the Castro’s’, Losaja gloats.

Meanwhile, a consultation takes place in the underground room. The planned coup d’état will be prevented by two sabotage actions. The turning off of the electricity in the DGI headquarters by Pablo will isolate the coup leaders and the elite troops. And Gonzalo takes full responsibility for the sabotage of the naval ships in the port. These WILL prevent the entering of the Granma by the Navy. To Gonzalo’s relief the intensity of the surveillance on

the corvette, the frigate, the three Russian-made torpedo boats and a North Korean submarine diminishes as the evening wears on. The divers ask, overcome by fear, till three times an increase of payment. They only make a deal when Gonzalo hands the last savings of his grandfather. The divers go into the water at 11:00 p.m. on a non-illuminated place at the Ferry Terminal, packed with ropes, iron wire and screwdrivers. The torpedo boats are blocked by securing a rope around the screw and the axis. But the toughest job is sabotaging the screws of the corvette and the frigate. Gonzalo breathes a sigh of relief when three hours later the divers crawl exhausted back ashore.

Celia and Martha work like crazy in the underground room in the production of six hundred Vinagrito's, the mascot of the Revolution. Those puppets will give their companions access to the Parliament. Azahara draws with a black marker the contours of a cat on each copy. In her mind she thinks about her work of art on The White Revolution she wants to finish at all costs. Héctor rehearses with the actor who's playing the double of Leopoldo Cintra Frias, the minister of Defense. And Pablo and Gonzalo transport with a white van of the Technical Service the revolvers and ammunition to the Gran Teatro. After dress rehearsals those are divided among the actors.

Pablo also looks for a solution for an additional obstacle they've ignored. Since the storming of the radio building during the failed FEU murder attack on president Batista on March 13, 1957, a cell within the Ministry of Home Affairs manages all broadcasts on radio and TV.

At half past three in the morning when Gonzalo arrives in the underground room the women finalize the puppets. And Héctor has controlled one last time the text of the Future Plan and the Black Lists. Those data are stored on a USB stick containing the two new websites Gonzalo has designed.

Against her will Celia agrees that the young man stays the

night in the Calle Neptuno. The condition is that he will be sleeping on the floor mat in Azahara's room. But he's already snoring in bed when the young lady returns in her sleep dress from the bathroom. She then decides to sleep on the settee in the living room.

Sunday February 25, 2018, 08:00 a.m. In the city districts a blast of trumpets announces the festivities under a radiant sun. Subsequently sixty canon shots are fired on the Castillo de la Punta. The superlatives in the news broadcasts can barely conceal the fact that the celebration starts on a sad note. Lots of world leaders have cancelled their attendance at the last minute. Among them former US-president Barrack Obama and the European president Donald Tusk. Only four presidents in office are present: Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, Evo Morales of Bolivia, Daniel Ortega from Nicaragua and Denis Sassou Nguesso of Congo-Brazzaville. Dilma Rousseff and Luiz Inancio Lula da Silva, the former presidents of Brazil are also present, as well as the former Argentinian footballer Diego Maradona, an old friend of the Castro family.

From 9:00 a.m. the foreign diplomats and the invitees enter the in white decorated hall of the Capitolio Nacional. One minute before ten a.m. the Castro family comes in under a standing ovation. The last in line is the wide wielding outgoing president in his white military uniform.

President Evo Morales from Bolivia begins with an ode to the Cuban Revolution and its exemplary role for the American continent. Subsequently Alejandro Castro takes the floor.

To say goodbye is what always hurts the most. However, I'm as a child of the Revolution so proud to follow the footsteps of my glorious father. He has developed Cuba into a socialist country that remains a beacon of hope for all the oppressed peoples all over the world. To achieve that goal he had to fight with a great determination and with an unwavering commitment against an

The White Revolution

enemy that was a thousand times more powerful. The example he has given, is a living proof that who's infused with the sacred fire of the Revolution can overcome every obstacle. Father ...

Alejandro can't restrain his tears.

I'd like to lead the Cuban people to a glorious future with you as my shining beacon, my fixed security and my inspirational guide. I swear you that I'll defend the country and socialism until the end.

These words, which touch Raúl, are answered by a minute long standing ovation.

The 88-year-old singer Omara Portuondo of the Buena Vista Social Club brings a moving tribute to Salvador Allende and the ode *Hasta Siempre* in honor of late Che Guevara.

Raúl Castro takes the floor as the last speaker. Overcome by emotions he slowly climbs the pulpit.

Last year we commemorated the centenary of the Communist Revolution with dignity. And today in the first place we rejoice that the blessings of the Revolution have reached Cuba sixty years ago. It's therefore appropriate to bring a tribute to the pioneers Marx and Lenin. They've given Communism an irreplaceable place in the history of mankind. My thoughts go today to the men and women who, following the example of José Martí, have given their lives for their homeland and for the Revolution. And to all those who still give their best efforts to the implementation of our lofty ideals for the benefit of the entire population. It is therefore not my person who should be at the center of the attention. I've spent my whole life serving. That's why I've decided never to use my name and face: neither to institutions, squares, parks, streets or other public sites, nor to memorial monuments, statues or similar forms of tribute.

Finally, I'm very pleased to state that our life's work will be continued. The new generation that will take office from tomorrow, will add a new beautiful page to the Golden Book of Cuban history.

Ángel, the oldest grandson of Raúl, hands the first printed copy of the sixty-paged novella *The White Revolution*. At the same time the book is handed out to the people on more than a thousand distribution points. Everyone gets the command to wave eagerly with it when the president and his entourage pass by, following the example of Mao's Red Book in China.

With a red running face, dilated pupils, goose bumps and his cheeks stretched tight Raúl enjoys the flood of applause and accolades that bestow on him. Even so the screaming and the slogans of hundreds of thousands throats are chanting when he, together with Alejandro and his daughter Mariela, and surrounded by bodyguards, is driving in the open white limousine along the Avenida Simon Bolivar and the Avenida Salvador Allende to the grandstand on the Plaza de la Revolución. He enjoys one last time his position of power and the facade the regime is holding up by its entire means.

A large photo of Raúl and Fidel Castro at the time of the Revolution and an immense arrangement of white flowers on the steps of the José Martí monument, are flanked by four rows of soldiers in their gala uniform.

When he takes place on the grandstand as the last person Raúl realizes that he has the power to let people come from a thousand kilometers to Havana to chant his name and to worship him. That feeling compensates the loneliness that carries his dominance. He never walked in to the crowd spontaneously; he never patted people on the shoulder or shook their hands. Essentially he despises the mass because they frighten him. When he looks down on that sea of people, he knows that they're standing there because they fear him and the regime, not because they love him.

Gun shots wake up the president from his idle dream and give the green light for a festive parade with 200,000 participants. Those reflect the hierarchy of the country. In the first ranks the

party leaders from high to low pass by, followed by the parliamentarians, different groups of the judiciary and representatives of the 27 ministries in alphabetical order.

The mass organizations make their appearance under loud applause. The Women Bond supports a high portrait of late Vilma Espin, the legendary founder of the FMC and the wife of the president. The central trade union CTC impresses by the size of its delegation and the discipline of their participants. Next in line is the Union of Young Communists. The UJC moves up behind the banner *Somos el futuro del país – We're the future of the country*. And tens of thousands of chairmen of the Committees to Defend the Revolution proudly wear the name of their district. In between the marshal music of fanfares increases the party mood of the participants and the spectators. Two trucks are carrying huge copies of the first and most recent copy of the party newspaper Granma, preceded by the editorial board. The employees of the news agency *Hablemos Press* and the literary publishing house *Casa de las Americas*, who took care of the release of the novella *The White Revolution*, march in their track. Then the youth clubs, the Students' Union and the artist's union Uneac follow.

In the air the colors of the Cuban Flag appear, during a demonstration of a formation MIG jet plains. The three blue courses refer to the seas around Cuba and the three military districts of colonial Cuba: Central, Occidental and Oriental. Two white bands stand for the purity of the patriotic cause and the White Revolution. Red symbolizes the blood shed in the struggle for independence. The White Star is called *La Estrella Solitaria*, the Lone Star, and represents independence and freedom. Last but not least stands the triangle for equality, strength and constancy. That's the sign for the apotheosis: the passage of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias, the dearest unit of the president. Endless rows of men in line of the Ground Troops, the Navy and the Air Force follow one after another. The new Russian MI-17 helicopters are the showpieces. Colonel-General Vladimir Shamanov and his host of advisors are welcomed as heroes. The Russians lead, after their departure in 1991, once again the Cuban soldiers. That's the answer of the Government on the stringent policy of the American president Donald Trump.

The organization is on schedule. At 12:30 a.m. the second part of the triumph of the president and his entourage follows. The

white limousines carve their way along the Calle Arangure and through a dense sea of people to the port. The Castro family and the most important guests step on the Granma under the musical guidance of the fanfare of the Navy. The actors, dressed up as fairies, like those captured by the imagination in the novella ensure a sketchy and festive welcome. Losaja waits to go on board and discreetly makes a fast getaway. The Chief of the Police of Havana and the Commanders-in-Chief of the Ground Troops, the Navy and the Air Force follow his example. After the departure of the Granma the coup perpetrators rush to the DGI headquarters. Losaja gloats when he takes the floor. He instills courage to all those involved with the coup and gives Pablo a sign to take control of the buildings of Etesca and the radio and TV. A separate unit ransoms in the Ministry of Interior the unit who has a final say on the broadcasts on radio and television.

Once on the street Pablo informs two henchmen inside. They cause a blast in the electricity cabin. A loud bang is followed by a fire. That is quickly extinguished, but as a result the most secured building of Cuba is cut off from the outside world. No single door, elevator, port or phone still works and the air conditioning falls out. The putchists find themselves as rats in the fall because for security reasons no window can be opened. And the huge fence with barbed wire on the courtyard makes it impossible to escape.

Losaja is seething. He calls Pablo, but his right-hand man doesn't answer his mobile. In panic the DGI-boss storms to the top floor. The fire ladder is sabotaged and he comprehends to his dismay how men of the counter-espionage obstruct with concrete blocks and barbed wire the access at the corner of Calle Linea and Calle A. He can't believe his ears. Does Pablo get entrenched with twenty heavily armed colleagues and two armored vehicles of the Ground Troops?

The generals of the Navy in the port state to their bewilderment that the three torpedo boats that have to guide the Granma, can't leave. A marine who is ordered into the water jumps in with long teeth and reports that the screws are sabotaged. The commanders of the Corvette and the frigate get the command to leave, in anticipation of the arrival of technicians. The first boat is

turning around in circles to the great joy of the bystanders, while the screw of the frigate can't change direction. Losaja nearly gets a heart attack when he finds out that the boats are sabotaged. The Commander-in-Chief of the Navy calls on other boats, but realizes that this will take hours.

Spirits are high on the Granma when leaving the port. No one pays attention to the captain who is forced, with a revolver in his back, to set course for Key West in Florida. Raúl reads under the watchful eye of Alejandro and Mariela for his grandson the opening sentences of the novel.

On the day Raúl Modesto Castro Ruiz was watching the sunset with his grandson leaning over the rail of the Granma, he saw how everything was being submerged in the bewitching white light of the revolution. Proudly standing upright, his neck and head formed a glowing ivory tower that invariably radiated power and – as the intensity of the white light increased – he was blinding the bystanders with its brilliance. A multitude of white fairies on the stem, stern and in the mainmast was making waving gestures to give him high praise.

The daredevil antics of the actors provide young and old with great joy. The cameraman on board shoots charming images. By that unexpected spectacle the boat already navigates on the high seas when Alejandro smells a rat. At that moment the fairies take out their firearms. When Alejandro and Bolivian president Evo Morales try to disarm one of them, his colleagues come to rescue him. The firing of two bullets above their heads makes them clear it's for real. Both are required to lie flat on their belly and are then captivated with both hands on their back. The cameraman is obligated to film the arrestees and his technician sends the recordings to the state television.

The six MIG jet plains of the Air Force who're shaving right about the boat, are powerless. And the actors triumph moments later: they're entering the international waters. The Granma continues his way to the American coast at full speed. An international arrest warrant will be issued on the basis of their file

that is transferred that same day to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

Meanwhile a DGI brigade under the leadership of Gonzalo controls the stately telecom conglomerate Etesca in the Beijing building at Playa La Havana. The telephone and internet traffic are from now on freely accessible by the elimination of the filters. The websites www.cubanounidos.cu and www.revolucionblanca.cu with the text of the Future Plan are online. Those contain a link to the website www.listanegra.cu with an overview of committed misdeeds in alphabetical order.

The leaders of the opposition gather around the Teatro Nacional, in front of Parliament. The professor is anxiously holding up in a corner of the cafe. He is all nerves now everything proceeds as planned and reads his speech one last time. Celia doesn't leave his side. At the distribution of the Vinagrito puppets, which provide access to the Parliament, Martha Beatriz Roque, Yoani Sánchez and Reinaldo Escobar ensure that no one gets two copies because the demand is greater than the supply.

The agents of the DGI only let the holders of a puppet inside to incomprehension of the tens of thousands bystanders. A fight takes place and the agents grab to their baton when some try to get as yet a puppet.

The professor impatiently waits on Gonzalo who slices his way through the sea of people in large part on foot from the headquarters of Estesca. Upon arrival to his disillusionment he doesn't see Azahara. When he calls her in panic she just walks in.

'Where were you?'

'Something important.'

'What then?'

'I'll tell you later. There's no time to lose.'

'On who are we awaiting here?' Gonzalo bites.

‘Enough!’ the professor intervenes acrimonious. ‘Otherwise I won’t go.’

‘Sorry, Grandpa.’ His eyes still spit fire in Azahara’s direction.

A wave of indignation is coming up when Celia, Gonzalo, Azahara and the professor are allowed to enter the Parliament. They too get strip-searched.

Losaja realizes, when he neither can’t reach the professor, he also has a hand in the sabotage and vows to skin him alive. But with his supporters a melancholic pessimism dominates; now the gunshots in the direction of the exit are answered by a machine gun. The Commanders-in-Chief take off their vest as a sign of defeat. They realize that many years of solitary confinement are waiting.

Only the Chief of the Police of Havana and Losaja continue to find a way out. They smell their chance when someone comes up with a jackhammer. Agents receive the order to drill a hole in the wall at the back of the parking. Dozens of honking vehicles cause a hell of a noise to avoid suspicion.

Agents of the DGI let, following a telephone call of Pablo, Héctor and his companions enter the building of the state radio and TV. Laura’s widower is accompanied by the 62-year-old Ana Luisa Rubio, he happened to meet on the street the day before. Cuba’s most popular television and radio actress of the 1980s and 1990s lost her job because of her ties with the opposition. When the actor, who takes the role as alter ego of the minister of Defense Frias, suddenly is paralyzed by fear Ana Louisa emboldens him with her charm. The last one in the row is singer Carlos Varela, with his sunglasses, black hat and guitar.

Some ex-colleagues give Ana Louisa a warm welcome and kiss her. In the corridors and the studios agents keep an eye on the

personnel. The Director commands the presenters of the live broadcast to give neutral comment. Ana Luisa Rubio takes the place of presenter Randy Alonso of the *Mesa Redonda* program, who's been handcuffed because of his bad reputation.

On the signal of the editor-in-chief the tune of *Mesa Redonda* echoes.

'Good afternoon.'

The anchorwoman looks with a broad smile in the camera. 'Cuba is experiencing a historical day on the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Revolution and the celebration of the final goodbyes of President Raúl Castro. Amidst the festivities an attempted military coup d'état has been crushed by The White Revolution, an initiative of independent citizens that took control of the government. I declare in their name that Cuba is from now on a free country.'

Tears are fading away her makeup, but the woman unperturbedly continues as an experienced warhorse. 'All the limitations of the internet and the telephone traffic have been suspended and our country will be governed on the basis of a Future Plan that is established with the cooperation of most of the opposition leaders. One can read the texts on the websites www.cubanosunidos.cu and www.revolucionblanca.cu. Those internet addresses will be displayed on your screen right now if all goes well. You'll find those links also on the home pages of all websites of the Government. The Castro family and the authority figures of the former regime have been captured and will be transferred to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. We're expecting pictures of the boat Granma any moment now to prove this statement.'

The anchorwoman breathes a sigh of relief while she looks at her papers. I already told you that the attempted coup was thwarted. Those was masterminded by a number of army Commanders-in-Chief and headed by Mr. Losaja, the head of the

Intelligence Service.

The coup perpetrators stay in the DGI-headquarters at Calle Linea where they're cut off from the outside world. They also will be arrested and brought to justice. We'll bring you more news later in this program. But first, we're listening to a communication from General Leopoldo Cintra Frias.'

The actor imitates the tics of his character and his way of talking.

My fellow countrymen. As the minister of Defense who's responsible for the safety I call upon you. The White Revolution has today put an end to the communist regime. That power exchange has expired without any violence. The FAR supports The White Revolution. All troops will stay in their barracks, but are going to take their responsibility to each incident. Any support for the old regime will be viewed as high treason. I ask all the visitors in the capital to practice caution. The army will help everyone to return home. Thank you.

'Thanks, Mr. Secretary', Ana Luisa responds. The actor next to her is satisfied that he has finished the job.

'Ladies and gentlemen, we'll come back to you in a second. But first, we're going to listen to some music by Carlos Varela. His music was never played publicly because of the censorship, which has now been lifted.'

The camera focuses on his guitar and next the man comes into the picture.

'This song is about the facade of the window-dressing that has been swallowed up in the Caribbean Sea and about the truth that triumphs at last.'

*Una palabra no dice nada
A word doesn't say anything
Y al mismo tiempo lo esconde todo*

Koenraad DE WOLF

And at the same time it hides everything
Igual que el viento que esconde el agua
Just like the wind that hides the water
Como las flores que esconde el lodo.
Like the flowers that hide the mud.

Una mirada no dice nada
A look doesn't say anything
Y al mismo tiempo lo dice todo ...
And at the same time it says everything ...

Una verdad no dice nada
A truth doesn't say anything
Y al mismo tiempo lo esconde todo ...
And at the same time it hides everything ...

Si un día me faltas no sere nada
If one day you need me, I'll be nothing
Y al mismo tiempo lo sere todo
And at the same time I'll be everything
Porque en tus ojos estan mis alas
Because in your eyes are my wings
Y esta la orilla donde me abogo,
And the shore where I drown

Ana Luisa takes the floor again. ‘Thanks Carlos Varela. The control room reports that we’ve received the images of the captured former leaders. I suggest ...’

Suddenly Héctor starts waving wildly behind the camera. He doesn’t want it to happen.

Ana Luisa improvises immediately: ‘There’s still a small technical failure. We’re going to solve this as soon as possible. In the meantime we’re listening again to Carlos Varela. *Cambia – Change* reads the applicable title.’

The White Revolution

The singer, who doesn't know either what's happening,
starts singing:

Te hace mal

You feel sad

La desilusión, la noche, el día.

The disappointment, the night and the day

Te hace mal no reír

You feel sad not to laugh

Y te hace mal que otros se rían.

And you feel sad that others laugh to themselves

Te hace mal

You feel sad

Los diarios, la televisión,

The newspapers, the television

Las viejas profecías.

The old prophecies

Te hace mal

You feel sad

La ciudad que no fue

That the city wasn't

Como el sueño que una vez tenías.

Like the dream you once had.

Cambia

Change

Cambia de color, de gurú, de chamán

Change of color, guru and shaman

Cambia el norte, cambia el sur

Change the north, change the south

Y hasta cambia el mar

And change even the sea

Y verás que va cambiando todo lo demás

*And you will see that everything else is going to
change*

Héctor and Ana Luisa rush to the control room.

‘The real Frias is on the Granma! Our plan will be utterly ruined when he’s coming up on the screen.’

‘I hadn’t thought of that’, she confesses.

The technicians remove the images of the real minister of Defense when viewing the tape. Ana Luisa hurries to the studio again.

‘*Cambia*. That desire of most Cubans has become a reality today. Thanks, Carlos Varela. And now you’ll see the pictures of the arrest of the Castro family.’

The relief is abundant now the proof has been furnished that Cuba is freed of the old demons. Ana Luisa announces the direct switchover to the Parliament for the inauguration of the new president. The quotes *The FAR supports The White Revolution* and *Any support for the old regime will be viewed as high treason*, and the images of the arrestees are repeated in the meantime on the music *Cambia* of Varela.

Ana Luisa and Hector fall in each other’s arms. Also the alter ego of minister of Defense Frias is elated. He strips himself of his disguise to the dismay of the personnel.

‘A lie is sometimes necessary to serve the good cause’, Héctor is beaming.

8 OUR CHILD WILL GROW UP IN A FREE CUBA

Martha arises resolutely when she gets a sign from the control room in the radio- and television building.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Parliament of Havana. My name is Martha Beatriz Roque and next to me stands José Conrado Rodríguez. That I’m talking to you right now is for me a big surprise.’

‘Also for me’, the priest smiles.

‘The past few months Padre José and myself have sounded out the leaders of the opposition about the Future Plan of professor José Esmiral da Chepe. But the conducting of confidential talks in secret isn’t self-evident.’

‘Wasn’t’, José Conrado interrupts.

‘A number of appointments couldn’t take place at the last minute. Others were interrupted or it turned out that our interlocutor had already been arrested. Nevertheless over the past months we’ve spoken to some hundred people of all political ideologies.’

‘Except from the Communist Party’, the priest adds sketching. ‘And the DGI was also unaware. I want to thank the Secret Service for turning a blind eye.’

But Martha can’t laugh. ‘It was a terrible period. Day and night we lived under high voltage. I have been temporary arrested twice. But fortunately they didn’t find incriminating documents, only some lists they couldn’t make heads or tails. However, our enquires were well worth the effort because that way a broad support for the Future Plan grew. One can read those texts on the internet sites www.cubanosunidos.cu and

www.revolucionblanca.cu.’

‘We’ve hoped, prayed and dreamed’, José Conrado continues. ‘It was for me. ..’ He looks at Martha. ‘It was for us a privilege to participate in the future of our country.’

‘The foundation, ladies and gentlemen, on which the new Cuba is taking shape, is the merit of one man: professor Chepe.’

The man gets a standing ovation.

‘Everyone we’ve ask for information, has expressed the desire that the professor will become our new president ad interim’, Martha continues. ‘We’re not going to vote ...’

The woman is interrupted once more by applause from the enthusiastic crowd. The professor who’s been affected, is standing and humbly bends his head.

‘The professor, ladies and gentlemen’, José Conrado says, ‘has accepted the offer.’

Again a wave of applause follows.

‘Mr. President.’ Only with great difficulty Martha outvotes the cheering. ‘I’m willing to give you the floor.’

The professor slowly climbs the stage with trembling legs. Celia supports him. He embraces Martha and José Conrado. It takes several minutes before he’s reeling from the emotions and it becomes quiet in the room.

Gonzalo sits on the first row next to his beloved Azahara with a Vinagrato mascot on her lap. Beside him Reinaldo Escobar has put two puppets in the pockets of his shirt.

‘Where have you been?’ Gonzalo asks Azahara.

‘There’s good news and great news’, she’s beaming. ‘Where do I start?’

‘The good news.’

‘I got a brilliant flash of genius. My statue is completed. The key was a stack of white t-shirts with the portrait of grand

Aunt Laura.’

‘You’ve changed something to those spiral shapes?’

Azahara responds surprised. ‘Of course not.’ She raises her voice above the noise in the room. ‘Therein lays a great power. The iron bars and barbed wire at the bottom refer to the camps and on the t-shirts, soaked in tar and red paint, white spots sporadically appear. Higher up those become even more white. Next to the glass tiles in the national colors are photos of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, Walker Villar Mendoza and Oswaldo Payá. And in between patches of a poem by Pedro Luis Boitel, the cover of *Nuestra America* of José Martí and his quote *Juntarse: ésta es la palabra del mundo*. Inside radiates the lamp from the underground room, a bright white light towards the ceiling. It’s the most beautiful work I’ve ever made.’

‘I’m curious, but what’s in your backpack?’

‘The white cloth that hung over the work. We’ll hang this on a stick. We’re celebrating The White Revolution, aren’t we?’

‘And now the great news.’

But his words are drowned out by the professor who commences his speech. ‘My fellow compatriots ...’

Finally, the room gets quiet.

‘I’ll tell you in a minute’, Azahara gloats.

Gonzalo grabs her hand and kisses it.

My dear friends.

I’ve accepted the presidency on the demand of all of you. I’ve never aspired this, unlike others who even wanted to ruin the nation in order to become president.

To live in a free country. That has been my obsession since forty years. Laura Pollàn, the most generous woman I’ve ever met, reminded me six years ago on her deathbed to Dom Hélder Câmara’s words we had learned at the University “change the world, start with yourself”. This phrase shaped our worldview, but faded systematically by the communist brainwashing. Since Laura’s death I’ve been working on the dream of a free Cuba around an

invented story, written in the style of “the Colombian” about an imaginary White revolution.

Over the past sixteen months we’ve succeeded in fulfilling this dream. That peaceful Revolution could only become a reality by the inclusion of a double role. I was indeed the advisor of the chief of the Secret Service. I’m not proud about that, but this was the only way to throw off the communist yoke without bloodshed, and to prevent the attempted coup d’état that would have plunged our country into a catastrophe.

The old Cuba is a thing of the past. A Truth Commission will do justice. But our first aim is to look towards the future. Today we’re facing the challenge to give shape to that Future Plan side by side.

The attendees are shaken by some gun shots, but the professor continues unperturbed.

Through the achievement of that ambitious plan Cuba will become a beacon of hope for all people. From tomorrow morning ...

As paralyzed the professor sees how Losaja rushes into the conference room. As the only one he has succeeded to escape from the DGI headquarters and invaded the Parliament after shooting down some agents.’

‘Traitor, miserable worm!’

Seething he storms to the pulpit. A wave of panic goes through the room. Losaja manages to put his revolver against the sleep of the professor even before anyone could intervene.

‘To seize power by yourself was your only goal’, he screams.

He grabs him by the collar and drags him down. But in the meantime a dozen of agents keep their boss at gunpoint.

On his arrival Pablo immediately takes his responsibility.

‘Put your gun down! Your game is over. Hands in the air

and lie down on the ground.'

He commands his men to increase the pressure.

Pablo repeats while more agents are still coming in: 'Put your gun down!'

When one of the agents tries to grasp the boss of the DGI Losaja shoots the professor, who in panic turns his head away, down. The bullet drills into the basement of the rostrum, which is smeared with patches of blood and splashing brains. Next Losaja, who's snatched, shoots himself through his head. Also this bullet drills in the rostrum.

Now the chaos is complete. People are screaming and crying.

Celia throws herself on the professor weeping. 'Father, father ...'

Azahara looks full of disgust to the mangled face of the professor. She takes the white sheet out of her backpack and covers his body. The sheet turns red immediately.

She falls into the arms of Gonzalo. 'The great news is that I'm pregnant.'

The young man who can hardly believe his ears, cries of joy and sorrow.

'When it's a boy, we'll name him José, like grandfather and Martí', he says with a trembling voice. 'And when it's a girl, we'll call her Laura, like your grand aunt.'

She nods while with shaking hands he points to the rostrum. 'Those bullets will remind everyone of the blood that has flowed to make Cuba a free country. A country where our child will grow up!'

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Belgian historian and publicist Koenraad De Wolf wrote many books and articles on various facets of history and art history, including *Dissident for life. Alexander Ogorodnikov and the Struggle for Religious Freedom in Russia* (2013). Later he wrote the historical novels *Blue Eyes*, on the last survivor of the medical experiments of the nazi's, *All men become brothers* on the Vietnamese dissident Nguyen Van Ly and *The Lotus Revolution* on the Vietnamese dissident Le Quoc Quan.

By writing about dissidents De Wolf became one himself. From his dissatisfaction with how things are in our society, he ended up in philosophical waters. His thoughts culminated in a new philosophical model: *The pendulating model. Religion as a key to a warmer society* (2016). His youngest manifesto, *The Oasis Plan – Lever for a more balanced society*, deals with the influence of interest groups and lobbies (2017).

You can find more information on the website www.koenraaddewolf.be.