José Rizal

Noli Me Tangere
(Touch Me Not)

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CHAPTER I
A GATHERING

Toward the end of October, Don Santiago de los Santos, who was generally known as Captain Tiago, gave a dinner party that, despite its having been announced only that afternoon, which was not his usual practice, was the topic of every conversation in Binondo and neighboring areas, and even as far as Intramuros. In those days Captain Tiago was considered the most liberal of men, and it was known that the doors of his house, like those of his country, were closed to no one but tradesmen or perhaps a new or daring idea.

The news surged like a jolt of electricity among the parasites, spongers, and freeloaders that God, in his infinite goodness, has so lovingly multiplied in Manila. Some went looking for bootblack, and others in search of collar-buttons and cravats, but everyone, of course, spent time deciding on the best way to greet the master of the house with just the right amount of familiarity to make him believe in a past friendship, or, if necessary, how exactly to make excuses for not having come by sooner.

The dinner was to be given in a house on Analoague Street, and since we no longer remember its number, we will describe it in such a way that it can still be recognized, if earthquakes haven’t destroyed it. We don’t believe the owner would have torn it down, because usually this sort of work is reserved for God or nature, which has, it appears, many projects of this type under contract with our government. It is quite a large structure, of a style similar to many others in the country, located near a section that overlooks a branch of the Pasig often called the Binondo Creek, which plays, like many rivers in Manila, the multiple roles of bathhouse, sewer, laundry, fishing hole, thoroughfare, and even
drinking water, if that serves the interests of the Chinese waterseller. It is important to note that this vital district artery, where traffic is so bustling and bewildering, over a length of almost a kilometer is served by just one wooden bridge, which for half the year is under repair on one end and for the remainder closed to traffic on the other, so that in the hot months horses take advantage of this permanent status quo to jump from it into the water, to the great surprise of the daydreaming individual as he dozes . . . or philosophizes on the century’s progress.

The house in question is somewhat squat, its lines fairly uneven. Whether the architect who built it could not see very well or this resulted from earthquakes or typhoons no one can say for sure. A wide, partly carpeted staircase with green balusters leads from the tiled doorway and vestibule to the main floor, flanked by Chinese porcelain flowerpots and vases of various colors and fantastic scenes, sitting on pedestals.

Since no butlers or maids request invitation cards, or even inquire about them, let us go upstairs, my reader, my friend or foe, if you find the strains of the orchestra or the lights or the great clinking of the glasses and plates intriguing, and you wish to see a gathering in the Pearl of the Orient. If it were up to me, I would spare you a description of the house, but it is too important. We mortals are, in general, like tortoises: we value and classify ourselves according to our shells; but the people of the Philippines are like tortoises in other ways as well. If we go upstairs, we will suddenly find ourselves in a broad expanse called the caída (I am not sure why), which tonight will serve both as a dining and music room. In the middle, a long table, abundantly and luxuriously appointed, seems to wink sweet promise at the freeloader while it threatens the simple dalaga\footnote{12} with two deadly hours in the company of strangers whose language and conversation often take on a very odd character. In contrast to these worldly concerns is the assortment of paintings on the wall, which represents such religious scenes as purgatory, hell, the last judgment, the death of the righteous, and the death of the sinner. On the end wall, imprisoned in an elegant, splendid frame in a Renaissance style that Arévalo\footnote{13} might have carved, is a curious canvas of grand dimension in which two old women are seen . . . The inscription reads: “Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, who is venerated in An-

tipolo, visits the pious and famous Capitana Inés during her illness, disguised as a beggar.” The composition, which shows little taste or artistry, is, on the other hand, excessively realistic: the use of certain yellows and blues on her face makes the sick woman seem like a corpse in a state of putrefaction; the drinking glasses and other objects, the trappings of a long illness, are reproduced in such detail that one can even make out their contents. In contemplating these paintings, which whet the appetite and inspire bucolic thoughts, one might think that the perversive owner of the house was well aware of the character of most of those who were to sit at his table. And to further illuminate his thinking he has hung from the ceiling beautiful Chinese lamps, empty birdcages, frosted-glass balls in red, green, and blue, withered hanging plants, dried, inflated fish called botetes,\footnote{15} and other objects, surrounding it all on the side that overlooks the creek with fanciful half-Chinese, half-European wooden arches, which allow us to glimpse trellises and arbors on the terrace, dimly lit by multicolored paper lanterns.

Over there in the room are the dinner guests, among colossal mirrors and brilliant chandeliers; over there, on a pine platform, is a magnificent grand piano worth a fortune, even more precious this evening because no one is playing it. Over there is a large oil portrait of a handsome man in a frock coat. He is stiff, straight, and as symmetrical as the tasseled mace he holds in his stiff, ring-covered fingers. The portrait seems to say, “So, look how well dressed and dignified I am!”

The furniture is elegant, if uncomfortable and not suited to the climate; the owner of the house would never put his guests’ health before luxury. “Dysentery is terrible, but you are sitting in European chairs, which you don’t get to do every day!” He would tell them.

The room is almost full, the men separated from the women like in Catholic churches and synagogues. The men’s group is composed of a few young ladies, Filipinas and Spaniards: they open their mouths to stifle a yawn, but then immediately cover them with their fans; they barely whisper a few words, and any ventured conversation dies in monosyllables, like the nocturnal sounds of mice and lizards one hears in a house. Perhaps the various Our Ladies hanging on the walls have obliged them to be
quiet and maintain a religious modesty, or is it that these women are different from most others?

The only person to welcome these ladies was an old woman, a cousin of Captain Tiago, who had an open, friendly face and who spoke Castilian rather badly. Her notion of courtesy and sophistication was limited to offering the Spanish women a tray of cigarettes and buyos and extending her hand to be kissed, just as a friar might do. The poor old woman became bored and, taking advantage of the noise made by a plate breaking, quickly left the room muttering:

“Jesus! Just you wait, you good-for-nothing . . .”

She never returned.

The men were noisier. A few cadets were engaged in a lively conversation in a corner, though quietly. From time to time they would look up at various people in the room, point at them, and laugh among themselves, though they tried to hide their laughter. Nearby, two foreigners dressed in white, their hands clasped behind their backs, strolled from one end of the room to the other without saying a word, taking large steps like bored passengers aboard a ship. Much of the interest and certainly the most animation came from a group composed of two friars, a soldier, and two laymen seated around a small table laid with bottles of wine and English biscuits.

The soldier was an old lieutenant, tall and severe; he looked like a Duke of Alba abandoned in the ranks of the Civil Guard; he spoke little, and brusquely even then. One of the friars, a young Dominican, handsome, graceful, and as bright as his gold-rimmed glasses, was prematurely serious. He was Binondo’s parish priest, who in years past was a professor in San Juan de Letrán. He had a reputation for being a consummate casuist, so much so that when the Sons of Guzmán dared argue subtleties with lay brothers, even the agile debater Benedicto de Luna could not draw them in or catch them out: the subtle arguments of Fray Sibyla left them like the fisherman who tried to catch an eel on a string. The Dominican spoke little and seemed to weigh his words carefully.

In contrast, the other was a Franciscan who spoke a great deal and gesticulated even more. Though his hair was beginning to gray, his constitution seemed to have remained robust. Regular features, a disquieting mien, a square jaw, and a Herculean frame made him look like a Roman patrician in disguise. We are reminded unfortunately of one of the three monks in Heine’s The Gods in Exile who crossed a Tyrolean lake at midnight on the day of the autumnal equinox, each time leaving an ice-cold silver coin in the terrified boatman’s hand. Unlike the monks, however, Fray Dámaso was not mysterious; he was lively, and if his voice had the quality of someone who has never held his tongue, who thinks of himself as holy and what he says memorable, his gay, open laughter erased that disagreeable impression. One could even excuse the sight of bare feet and hairy legs that would have made the fortune of a Mendieta in the fairs at Quiapo.

The only distinguishing characteristic of one of the civilians, a short man with a black beard, was his nose, which, judging by its dimensions, should never have been his; the other, a young blond man, seemed to have only recently arrived in the country. The Franciscan was engaged in lively conversation with him.

“You’ll see,” he was saying, “after a few months here you’ll understand what I’m talking about. It is one thing to govern in Madrid, and another to be in the Philippines.”

“But—”

“Take me, for example,” Fray Dámaso continued, raising his voice to keep the young man from getting a word in, “I have had twenty-three years of rice and bananas, and I can speak with authority. Don’t give me your theories or rhetoric. I know the indio. You have to understand that when I arrived in this country I was posted to a small town. Though it was small, its people were extraordinarily hardworking farmers. To this day I cannot understand Tagalog very well, but still I heard confession from the women there, and we were able to make ourselves understood. They came to love me so much that three years later, when I was transferred to the curacy of a larger town, which had become vacant because of the death of the indio priest, everyone cried, they showered me with gifts, they saw me off with music . . .”

“But that only shows—”

“Just a minute, just a minute, not so fast! My successor stayed less time, and when he left he had more people see him off, more tears, and more music, even though he had beaten them more than I had and had almost doubled the parish taxes.”

“If you will allow me—”
"Even more so, I was in the town of San Diego for twenty years. I left there only a few months ago..." At this point he seemed to become disgusted. "Twenty years is more than enough to know a town, and no one can convince me otherwise. San Diego had six thousand souls, and I knew all the townspeople as if I myself had given birth to them and I myself had nursed them. I knew on which foot this one limped, which shoe was too tight for that one, who was courting which young woman, which sins this one had committed and with whom, who was the real father of that child, and so on, since I heard everyone's confession and they certainly knew better than to ignore that responsibility. Ask our host, Santiago, if I am wrong. He has a great deal of property there, which is where we became friends. You will see what the indio is like; when I left there only a few old women and a few tertiary brothers saw me off, after I had been there for twenty years!"

"But I don't know what this has to do with the end of the tobacco monopoly," replied the blond man, taking advantage of a pause when the Franciscan drank a glass of sherry.

Fray Dámaso was so surprised he nearly dropped his glass. He stared at the young man for a moment.

"What? What?” he exclaimed histrionically. "It's as clear as day and you can't see it? You are a child of God, and yet you can't see that all this is palpable proof that the ministerial reforms are irrational?"

The blond man was stunned. The lieutenant frowned even more deeply. The little man shook his head either in agreement with Fray Dámaso or in disagreement. The Dominican had to be satisfied with virtually turning his back on all of them.

In the end, looking at the friar with curiosity, all the young man could say with any seriousness was, "Do you believe..."

"Do I believe? As I believe in the Gospel! Indios are incredibly lazy!"

"Ah, excuse me for interrupting," said the young man, lowering his voice and bringing his chair a little closer. "You have used a very interesting word. Are these natives truly indolent by nature, or is it, as a foreign traveler has said, that we make excuses for our own indolence, our backwardness, and our colonial system by calling them indolent? It has been said of other colonies whose inhabitants are of the same race..."
The Dominican went on, even more indifference in his voice.
"It must be painful to leave a town where you have been for twenty years and you know as well as you know your own habit. For my part, at least, I was very sorry to leave Camilign, and I was only there a few months... but my superiors did it for the community's own good... and for my own."

For the first time that evening Fray Dámaso seemed preoccupied. Suddenly he smashed the arm of the chair with his fist and, breathing heavily, exclaimed:
"Either there is religion or there isn't, and that's that, either priests are free or they aren't! The country is being lost... it is lost!"

And with that he punched the arm of the chair a second time.

The whole room was surprised, and turned toward the group; the Dominican lifted his head to peer at him from under his glasses. The two foreigners who were strolling back and forth stopped for a moment, looked at each other, grinned slightly, baring their incisors, and then quickly resumed their stroll.

"He's in a bad mood because they haven't treated him with the proper respect," the young blond man whispered into Señor Laruja's ear.

"What do you mean, your reverence, what's the matter?" the Dominican and the lieutenant asked, with different tones of voice.

"That's why there are so many calamities! The governors support the heretics against God's own ministers!" the Franciscan continued, raising his powerful fists.

"What do you mean?" asked the frowning lieutenant again, who rose halfway out of his chair.

"What do you mean?" Dámaso repeated, raising his voice even higher and facing the lieutenant. "I am telling you what I mean! I mean that when a priest tosses the body of a heretic out of his cemetery, no one, not even the king himself, has the right to interfere, and has even less right to impose punishment. And a general, a little general whose very name connotes calamity..." 31

"Father, His Excellency is Vice Royal Patron!" shouted the soldier while rising from his seat.

"Some Excellency, some Vice Royal Patron!" answered the Franciscan, getting up as well. "In any other time they would have kicked him down the stairs, as the religious orders once did with that impious Governor Bustamante. Those were times of faith!"

"I warn you that I will not permit... His Excellency represents His Majesty the King!"

"King or rook or nobody! To us there is no other king than the rightful—"

"Stop!" yelled the lieutenant menacingly, as if he were addressing his soldiers. "Either you retract what you have just said or tomorrow morning I will report it to His Excellency."

"Why not do it right now, go ahead!" Fray Dámaso replied sarcastically, coming toward him, his fists clenched. "Do you for a moment think that because I wear a habit that I lack...? Go ahead, I'll even lend you my carriage!"

The situation was taking a comical turn. Fortunately the Dominican intervened.

"Gentlemen!" he said with authority and with that nasal voice so sweet to a friar's ears. "There is no need to confuse matters or seek offense where none exists. In Father Dámaso's words we must make distinctions between those of the man and those of the priest. Those that proceed from the latter, as they are, per se, can never be offensive, because they are born from absolute truth. In those of the man one must make a further subdistinction: those that he says ab irato, those that he says ex ore but not in corde, and those in corde. The last of these are the only offensive ones and even that depends: if they are premeditated in mente, or result per accidens in the heat of the discussion, if there is—" 33

"Well, for accidens and for me I know his motives, Father Sibyla," interrupted the soldier, who found himself mixed up in so many distinctions that he was afraid he himself would not emerge from the conversation blameless. "I know the motives and the ones you are going to distinguish, your reverence. While Father Dámaso was away in San Diego, the coadjutor buried the body of a very distinguished person, a very distinguished person. I have had many dealings with him and have been a guest in his home. So what if he never went to confession. So what? I don't go to confession either. But to claim that he committed suicide is a lie, a slur. A man like him, with a son in whom he has placed all his hopes and affections, a man with faith in God, who understands his re-
sponsibilities to society, an honorable and just man, does not commit suicide. This is what I say, and I will say nothing else about what I think, and I thank you, your reverence."

Turning his back on the Franciscan, he went on:

"Then this priest returned to the town and, after mistreating the poor coadjutor, had the body exhumed and taken out of the cemetery in order to bury it who knows where. The townspeople of San Diego were too cowardly to protest, and the truth is that very few of them knew about it: the dead man had no family, and his only son was in Europe. But His Excellency knew about it and because he is an upstanding man, he requested such a punishment... and Father Dámaso was transferred to a more appropriate town. That's it. Now go ahead and make your distinctions."

With that, he left the group.

"I am sorry that without knowing it I touched upon such a delicate matter," said Father Sibyla. "But in the end if something has been gained by the changing of towns..."

"Gained? And what is lost when one is transferred? And the papers... and what is misplaced?" Fray Dámaso stammered, unable to contain his anger.

The gathering slowly returned to its earlier tranquility.

In the meantime, a few other people had arrived, among them an old, lame Spanish man with a sweet, inoffensive look, who was supported under one arm by an old Philippine woman. Her face was made up and her hair had been curled, and she wore European-style clothes.

The group greeted them warmly. Doctor de Espadaña and his wife La Doctora Doña Victorina sat among our friends. A few reporters and shopkeepers greeted one another and roamed about from one side to the other without knowing what to do.

"Can you tell me, Señor Laruja, what is the master of the house like?" asked the young blond man. "I haven't been introduced to him yet."

"They say he has gone out. I haven't seen him yet either."

"There is no need for introductions here," Fray Dámaso interjected. "Santiago is a good sort."

"Very even-tempered and calm. Certainly not the sort of man who would, say, invent gunpowder, for instance," added Laruja.

"Señor Laruja!" exclaimed Doña Victorina with a mild re-

approach. "How could he invent gunpowder if, according to what they say, it was invented by the Chinese centuries ago?"

"The Chinese? Are you daft?" exclaimed Fray Dámaso. "A Franciscan invented it, one of my order, some Fray Savalls or something like that, in the... seventh century!"

"A Franciscan! Well, then he must have been a missionary in China, this Father Savalls," replied the señora, who was not willing to let go of her notions.

"Schwartz, you mean, madam," put in Fray Sibyla, without looking at her.

"I have no idea. Fray Dámaso said Savalls. I'm only repeating what he said!"

"All right. Savalls or Chevas, who cares? Change one letter and he's no longer Chinese," the Franciscan replied, now in a bad mood.

"And in the fourteenth century, not the seventh," corrected the Dominican in such a way as to take the other man down a notch.

"Well, one century more or less still doesn't make him a Dominican!"

"Please, don't make his reverence angry!" said Father Sibyla with a smile. "Maybe he did invent it. At least it saved his brothers from having to do it."

"So, Father Sibyla, you say that it was the fourteenth century?" Doña Victorina said with great interest. "Before or after the birth of Christ?"

Happily for the man who had been asked that question, two people then entered the room.
CHAPTER 2
CRISÓSTOMO IBARRA

It wasn’t beautiful, handsomely dressed young women who commanded everyone’s attention (even that of Fray Sibyla). It wasn’t His Excellency the Captain General and his adjutants who drew the lieutenant out of his reverie and made him come forward a few steps, or that stopped Fray Dámaso in his tracks as if petrified, it was merely the original of the portrait of the man in tails leading by the hand a young man dressed in deep mourning.

“Good evening, gentlemen! Good evening, Father,” was the first thing Captain Tiago said, kissing the hands of the priests, who forgot to give him their blessing.

The Dominican had removed his glasses in order to get a look at the young man who had just arrived, and a pale, gaping Father Dámaso.

“I have the great pleasure of introducing to you Don Crisóstomo Ibarra, the son of my late friend,” Captain Tiago continued. “The gentleman has just arrived from Europe and I went to welcome him.”

At the sound of the name, a few cries could be heard. The lieutenant forgot to greet his host. Instead, he approached the young man—who by then was exchanging the customary greetings with the whole group—and examined him from head to toe. There seemed nothing particularly striking about him in that room, except for his black suit. Nevertheless, his commanding height, his features, and his movements gave off that scent of healthy youth in which both the body and the soul have been equally cultivated. One could see in his frank and lively expression, through a handsome brown color, a few traces of Spanish blood, and a bit of pink in his cheeks, perhaps the remnants of time spent in a colder climate.

“Why, for heaven’s sake,” he exclaimed with happy surprise, “it’s my village priest! Father Dámaso, a close friend of my father’s!”

Everyone looked toward the Franciscan, who did not move. “Excuse me, but perhaps I have made a mistake,” added Ibarra, somewhat confused.

“You are not mistaken,” was all he was finally able to answer, his voice altered. “But your father was never a close friend of mine.”

Ibarra slowly withdrew the hand he had extended and looked at him with astonishment. Then he turned and found himself face-to-face with the severe figure of the lieutenant, who had been watching him all the while.

“Young man, are you Don Rafael Ibarra’s son?”

The young man bowed.

Father Dámaso sat partway down on the chair and fixed his gaze on the lieutenant.

“Welcome home! May you be happier here than your father was!” exclaimed the soldier in a trembling voice. “I knew him and worked with him and may I say he was one of the most upstanding and honorable men in all the Philippines.”

“Sir!” answered Ibarra, clearly moved. “The elegy you have just given my father dispels any doubts I may have had about his fate, which I, his son, still do not know.”

The old man’s eyes filled with tears. He turned around and hurried away.

The young man found himself alone in the center of the room. The owner of the house had disappeared and there was no one to introduce him to the young ladies, many of whom were looking at him with great interest. After vacillating for a few seconds, he went toward them with a simple, natural grace.

“If you will allow me,” he said, “I hope we can leap over the rules of strict etiquette. I have not been in my home country for seven years, and now that I am back, I cannot refrain from greeting its most beautiful attribute, its women.”

Since no one dared reply, the young man was obliged to retire. He went toward a group of gentlemen who, upon seeing him approach, formed a semicircle.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “in Germany there is a custom: when a newcomer comes to a gathering and cannot find anyone to introduce him, he says his name and introduces himself, and they re-
spond in kind. Allow me to do this, not in order to introduce foreign customs here, since our customs are certainly just as beautiful as theirs, but because I find myself in need of doing so. I have paid tribute to the heavens and to my homeland's women; now I would like to pay tribute to its citizens, my compatriots. Gentlemen, my name is Juan Crisóstomo Ibarra y Magsalain!"

They said their names, which were more or less insignificant, and more or less unknown.

"And my name is A...!" said a young man dryly, with a slight bow.

"Do I have the honor of speaking with the poet whose work has helped sustain my enthusiasm for my homeland? I've been told you're no longer writing, but no one has been able to tell me why..."

"Why? Because one does not invoke inspiration in order to humiliate oneself and to lie. One fellow has been brought up on charges for having included a certain figure of speech in his verse. I may be a poet, but I am not crazy."

"And may I ask what figure of speech it was?"

"He said that the son of a lion is also a lion. He was almost exiled."

The strange young man then left the group.

A young man with a pleasant disposition came toward him, almost running. He was attired in the native dress of the country, with shiny buttons on his bib. He approached Ibarra and extended his hand saying:

"Señor Ibarra, I wanted so much to meet you. Captain Tiago is a friend of mine and I knew your good father... My name is Captain Tinong, I live in Tondo, where you have a house. I hope you will honor me with a visit. Please come have dinner with us tomorrow."

Ibarra found such amiability enchanting. Captain Tinong smiled and rubbed his hands together.

"Thank you," he answered with affection, "but I am leaving for San Diego tomorrow..."

"What a shame! Then perhaps when you return."

"Dinner is served," announced a waiter from the Café La Campana.

The people began to file in, though the women needed a great deal of prodding, especially the Philippine women.

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CHAPTER 3

DINNER

Jele jele bago quiere

Fray Sibyla seemed content. He wandered about serenely, his thin lips pressed firmly together, though they had not yet begun to show their disdain. He even deigned to speak to the cripple, Doctor de Espadaña, who replied in monosyllables because he had a bit of a stutter. The Franciscan was in a frightful mood. He kicked aside the chairs in his way and even elbowed aside a cadet. The lieutenant had a serious look about him; everyone else chatted animatedly and gushed over the magnificence of the table. Doña Victo- rina, however, had crinkled up her nose. Suddenly she wheeled about, as angry as a trodden snake: the lieutenant had stepped on her train.

"Don't you have eyes?" she said.

"Yes, ma'am, better ones than you, but I couldn't take them off your curls," the ungalant soldier replied, and then walked away.

Instinctively, or perhaps out of habit, the two priests went toward the head of the table. As one might have guessed, the same thing occurred that occurs between rivals for a bishop's chair. First they exaggerate the merits and superiority of their opponent. Then they express just the opposite, and finally they moan and groan when they don't get it.

"After you." Father Dámaso.

"After you." Father Sibyla.

"Our host's oldest friend... the late mistress's confessor... your age, your integrity, your position..."

"Let's not say 'very' old. On the other hand, you are the parish priest," hissed Father Dámaso, without letting go of the chair, however.

"Since these are your orders, I will obey," Father Sibyla said finally, getting ready to sit down.
"I did not order you to do anything," the Franciscan protested, "I did not order you to do anything!"

Father Sibyla, ignoring these protests, had already begun to sit down when his eyes met those of the lieutenant. The highest-ranking officer is somewhat lower on the social scale than the lay brother who prepares meals at the parish house. *Cedant arma togae*, said Cicero in the Senate; *cedant arma cottae*, say the friars in the Philippines. But Father Sibyla was a cultured person, so he offered:

"Lieutenant, here we are in the world, not in the church. Here the seat is yours."

To judge by the tone of his voice, however, even in the world the seat belonged to him. The lieutenant, either not wanting to be bothered or to avoid having to sit between two friars, curtly declined.

Neither of the two remaining candidates had remembered their host. Ibarra saw him watching events unfold and smiling.

"Don Santiago, are you not joining us?"

But all the seats were occupied. Lucullus would not eat in the house of Lucullus.45

"Stay there, don’t get up!" Captain Santiago said, putting his hands on the young man’s shoulder. This party is meant to give thanks to the Virgin for your arrival. Hey, there! Bring in the tinola. I ordered tinola specially for you, since it has been so long since you have had any."

A steaming tureen was brought in. The Dominican, after murmuring the Benedictine,46 to which no one knew the proper response, began to dish out the contents. Owing to carelessness or some other reason, Father Dámaso ended up with a plate in which a naked chicken neck and a tough wing floated among a plateful of squash and broth. Meanwhile everyone else was eating legs and breasts, and Ibarra had the great luck to have been given the giblets. The Franciscan took in the whole scene, mashed the squash, sipped a bit of broth, dropped his spoon, which made a loud noise, and brusquely pushed his plate away. The Dominican was distracted by his conversation with the young blond man.

"How long have you been away?" Laruja asked Ibarra.

"Almost seven years."

"Well, you must have forgotten a great deal!"

"On the contrary. And even though it seems to have forgotten me, home has always been on my mind."

"What do you mean?" the blond man asked.

"I mean that for a year I have had no news from here, so much so that now I feel like a stranger. I still don’t know how or when my father died!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the lieutenant.

"And where were you that no one sent you a telegram?" asked Doña Victorina. "When we were married, we sent a telegram to the Península."47

"I spent the past two years in northern Europe, madam, in Germany and Russian Poland."

Doctor Espadaña, who until then had not dared open his mouth, thought it appropriate to do so now.

"Wuh-wuh . . . once in Spain I knew a Pole from Wa-wa-Warsaw, named Stadnitzki, if I remember correctly. You didn’t come across him by any chance, did you?" he asked timidly, about to blush.

"It’s possible," Ibarra replied amiably, "but I don’t recall at the moment."

"But you couldn’t possibly muh-muh . . . mix him up with anyone else," replied the doctor, who had perked up, "he was as blond as gold and spoke terrible Spanish."

"That’s an excellent description but, unfortunately, the only time I spoke even a word of Spanish was in a few consulates."

"Then how did you get by?" asked Doña Victorina, with admiration in her voice.

"I used the local language, madam."

"Do you speak English, as well?" the Dominican asked. He had been to Hong Kong, where he mastered Pidgin-English, the adulteration of the language of Shakespeare by the children of the Celestial Empire.48

"I spent a year in England among people who only spoke English."

"And what was your favorite country in Europe?" the young blond man asked.

"After Spain, which I consider my second home, any country in free Europe."

"You have traveled a great deal . . . what made the greatest impression on you?" Laruja asked.
Ibarra stopped to think.
"Greatest impression in what sense?"
"For example... the life of the people... social life, political life, religious life, life in general, life in its essence, life as a whole..."
Ibarra mulled this over.
"Frankly, the surprising thing about these peoples, when you set aside everyone's national pride... before visiting a country, I tried to study its history, its Exodus, so to speak, and in the end I found they all followed a common course. In every instance I noted that a people's prosperity or misery lay in direct proportion to its freedoms or its inhibitions and, along the same lines, of the sacrifice or selfishness of its ancestors."
"That's it?" the Franciscan asked with a mocking laugh. Since the beginning of dinner he had not said a word; perhaps he had been distracted by the food. "It doesn't seem worth it to waste all that money just to find out such an insignificant thing. Any schoolboy knows that."
Ibarra did not know what to say. Everyone else was shocked. They looked from one to another, afraid there would be a scene. "Dinner is coming to an end and I think you have had your fill, your reverence," the young man was going to say, but he reined himself in, saying only the following:
"Ladies and gentlemen, do not be too concerned about the familiarity with which our old curate treats me. This is how he treated me when I was a boy, and though many years have passed they add up to little for him. I thank him for bringing back to me the days when he visited our house and often honored my father's table with his presence."
The Dominican looked furtively at the Franciscan, who was now trembling. Ibarra went on, rising to his feet:
"If you will permit me, I will now take my leave. I have just arrived and I am leaving tomorrow morning so there are a great many things to take care of. The bulk of the dinner is over, I have had a little wine, and brandy is not my drink. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Spain and the Philippines!"
He drained the glass, which until then he had not touched. The old lieutenant followed suit, but without saying a word.
"Don't go!" Captain Tiago whispered to him. "María Clara will be here in a minute. I sent Isabel to fetch her. Your village's new parish priest will be coming. He is a saint."
"I'll come by tomorrow before I leave. Tonight I have a very important call to make."
He left. In the meantime, the Franciscan had recovered. "Did you see that?" the young blond man said, gesturing with a dessert knife. "That's pride for you. They can't stand to be set to rights by the priest. And yet they still consider themselves decent people. That's the bad side of sending young people to Europe. The government should not allow it."
"And the lieutenant," said Doña Victorina, seconding the Franciscan. "He didn't stop frowning the whole night. A good thing he left. At his age still a lieutenant."
The lady would not forget his insolent allusion to her curls and his stepping on the folds of her skirt.
That night, among the things the young blond man would write was the next chapter in his Colonial Studies: "How a neck and wing in a friar's plate of tinola can spoil the happiness of a celebration." Among his observations were the following: "In the Philippines the person of least use is the one who gives the dinner or the party. The host could be tossed out into the street and everything would still proceed swimmingly." "In the current state of things, not allowing them to leave the country—or even teaching them to read—would actually be doing them a favor..."
Ibarra could not decide what to do. The night wind, which was already rather cool that time of year, seemed to lift the light cloud from his head. He took off his hat and breathed deeply.

Coaches passed like lightning, rented carriages at a deathly slow pace; people of various nationalities strolled by. Walking at the uneven pace generally associated with distracted or idle people, the young man headed toward La Plaza de Binondo, looking around as if he were searching for something. The same streets, the same white and blue houses, with walls either white-washed or painted in fresco style and made to look like granite. The church tower was still crowned by the clock with its translucent dial; the same Chinese shops with their dirty curtains and iron rods, one of which he had bent one night, the way Manila’s more mischievous boys did. It was still bent.

“Things move so slowly,” he murmured and went along Calle de la Sacristía.

The sherbet vendors were shouting, “Sherrberrt!” Huepes still shed their light onto the booths run by the Chinese and women, which sold foodstuffs and fruit.

“It’s wonderful!” he exclaimed. “That’s the same Chinese man from seven years ago, and the same old woman! You could say I dreamed about this every night of my seven years in Europe. My God, this paving stone is still broken, the same as when I left!”

It was true. The flat stone that formed the corner of Calle San Jacinto and Sacristia was still loose.

While he contemplated such wonderful urban stability in a country of instability, someone laid a hand lightly on his shoulder. He looked up to find the old lieutenant watching him, and almost smiling, without the hard expression or the harsh eyebrows that were his identifying characteristic.

“Young man, you should be careful, and learn from your father’s experience,” he said.

“Excuse me, but it seems you had a great deal of respect for my father. Perhaps you can tell me what happened to him?” Ibarra asked, looking at him.

“You mean you don’t know?” the soldier asked.

“I asked Don Santiago, but he refused to talk about it until tomorrow. Do you know by any chance?”

“Oh course I do, everyone does. He died in jail.”

The young man took a step back and eyed the lieutenant up and down.

“In jail? Who died in jail?” he asked.

“Why, your father! He was a prisoner!” the soldier replied, somewhat surprised.

“My father . . . in jail . . . a prisoner in jail? What are you saying? Do you know who my father was? Are you . . . ?” asked the young man, grabbing the soldier’s arm.

“I don’t believe I am mistaken: Don Rafael Ibarra.”

“Yes, Don Rafael Ibarra,” the young man repeated weakly.

“But I thought you knew,” murmured the soldier, his voice full of compassion upon seeing the turmoil in Ibarra’s soul, “I assumed you knew . . . but you must be brave. In the Philippines you are not considered to be honorable unless you have been to jail.”

“I have to believe you are not toying with me,” offered Ibarra in a weak voice, after a few moments of silence. “Can you tell me why he was in jail?”

The old man stopped to think.

“It seems odd to me that you have not been told about your family’s affairs.”

“His last letter arrived a year ago. He told me not to worry if he didn’t write, since he would be very busy. He told me to keep studying . . . and he gave me his blessing.”

“Then he wrote that letter just before he died. It is coming up on a year since he was buried in his village.”

“Why was my father imprisoned?”
"For a very honorable reason. But walk with me, I have to go to my barracks. I'll tell you about it on the way. Take my arm."

For a while they walked along in silence. The old man seemed to be mulling something over and asking for inspiration from his goatee, which he stroked.

"As you well know," he began by saying, "your father was the richest man in the province, and even though many people loved and respected him, others hated and envied him. Unfortunately, the Spaniards who come to the Philippines are not always the ones who should. I say this as much about one of your grandparents as about your father's enemies. Frequent changes, lack of morale in high places, favoritism, and the inexpensiveness and brief length of the voyage are all to blame. The worst parts of the Peninsula come here, and if a good one does arrive, the country quickly corrupts him. Well, between the priests and the Spanish your father had many enemies."

He paused briefly.

"A few months after you left, the unpleasantness with Father Dámaso began, though I cannot figure out why. Father Dámaso accused him of not going to confession. Before that he didn't go to confession either, but they were still friends, as you well remember. In addition, Don Rafael was an honest man, more just than many men who go to confession. He held himself up to a rigorous moral standard and when the unpleasantness began he often said to me: 'Señor Guevara, do you think God pardons a crime, a murder, for example, solely because one tells it to a priest, who is, in the end, a man, and who has the duty to keep it to himself, and who is afraid of burning in hell, which is an act of attrition, who is a coward, and certainly without shame? I have another conception of God,' he would say, 'to me one does not correct one wrong by committing another. Nor is one pardoned by useless weeping, or by giving alms to the church.' He gave me this example: 'If I kill the head of a family, if I make a woman into a destitute widow and happy children into helpless orphans, will I have satisfied eternal justice if I let them hang me, or confide my secret to someone who has to keep it to himself, or give alms to the priests, who need it the least, or buy myself a papal pardon, or weep night and day? And what about the widow and children? My conscience tells me I should replace as much as possible the person I have murdered and dedicate myself completely and for my whole life to the welfare of the family whose misfortune I have created. And even then, even then, who will replace the love of a husband and father?' This was your father's reasoning. He always acted out of such moral stringency, and one could say that he never offended anyone. On the contrary, through his own good works, he tried to erase certain injustices that he said your grandparents had committed. But getting back to the unpleasantness with the priest. It took on an evil character. Father Dámaso made veiled allusions to him from the pulpit and it was a miracle he didn't mention him by name. Since with a character like his anything is possible. Sooner or later it had to end badly."

The lieutenant again paused briefly.

"In those days there wandered throughout the province an ex-artilleryman who had been thrown out of the ranks for being loud and stupid. Though the man had to make a living, they wouldn't let him do any physical labor, which would hurt the army's prestige, so someone or other got him a job collecting vehicle taxes. The unhappy fellow had no education whatsoever and the indios got wind of it pretty quickly. A Spaniard who cannot read or write is quite a phenomenon here. They made fun of the poor fellow, who paid with mortification for the taxes he collected after he came to the realization that he was the butt of their jokes, and it made an already rude and gross personality even more bitter. They would intentionally write backwards. He would make a great show of reading it, and when he would reach a blank space, he would sign it with a sort of scrawl that in the end gave him a semblance of dignity. The indios paid up, but they made fun of him. He swallowed his pride and mace his collections, but his spirits were such that he respected no one. He had exchanged strong words with your father.

"It happened one day that, while he was going over and over a piece of paper that he had been given in a shop, trying to get it right-side up, a schoolboy began to gesture to his friends, laugh, and point at him. The man heard the laughter and saw the joke making the rounds of the serious faces of those present. He lost his patience, whirled around, and began chasing the boys, who were running around shouting, 'Bá, be, bi, bo, bu.' Blind with anger, unable to catch up with them, he throws his stick,
which smashes one of them in the head and knocks him down. He runs over to him and stomps on him. None of those who had been making fun of him had the courage to intervene. Unfortunately, at that moment your father was passing by. Indignant, he runs over to the collector, grabs him by the arm, and reproaches him in no uncertain terms. He, who by that time could see only red, raises his hand, but your father didn’t give him a chance, and with the typical strength of the grandson of a Basque... some say he hit him, others that he only pushed him. In any event the man stumbled a few steps away and fell, hitting his head on a rock. Don Rafael calmly picks him up and takes him to the courthouse. Blood was spurting out of the ex-artilleryman’s mouth. He never regained consciousness and he died a few minutes later. As is usually the case, justice intervened, your father was imprisoned, and all his enemies emerged from hiding. Slanders rained down on him. They accused him of heresy and subversion. To be a heretic anywhere is a great disgrace, especially at that time, when the mayor made a great show of his religious devotion and prayed in the church with his servants and said the rosary in a great loud voice, perhaps so that everyone could hear him and pray with him. But to be a subversive is worse than being a heretic and killing three tax collectors who know how to read, write, and sign their names. Everyone deserted him. His papers and books were confiscated. They accused him of subscribing to the Overseas Mail, of reading the Madrid newspapers, of having sent you to German Switzerland, of having been in possession of letters and a portrait of a condemned priest, and who knows what else! They found accusations in everything, even of his wearing a peninsula-style shirt. If he had been anyone other than your father, he would have been set free almost immediately, especially since a doctor had attributed the death of the unfortunate tax collector to a blockage. But because of his wealth, his confidence in justice, and his hatred of anything that was not legal or just, they ruined him. I myself, in spite of the repugnance I feel in asking for mercy for anyone, went to the Captain General, a predecessor to the one we have now. I maintained that no one could be a subversive who took in any Spaniard at all and gave him a roof over his head and food to eat, and in whose veins the generous blood of Spain still flowed. But I ran into a brick wall. I swore on my poverty and my honor as a soldier, and I only succeeded in getting a poor reception, an even worse dismissal, and the nickname of ‘crackpot.’

The old man stopped to take a breath and, seeing the silence of his companion, who was not even looking at him, went on.

“I went through the appeals process on your father’s behalf. I hired the well-known Filipino attorney, the young A., but he refused to take the case. ‘I would just lose,’ he told me. ‘And my defense would only give them a reason to bring new charges against me. Try Señor M., who is a fiery speaker, articulate, from the Peninsula, and who enjoys a great deal of prestige.’ I followed this advice and this famous lawyer took on the case, which he argued with skill and brilliance. But your father’s enemies were legion, and some... clandestine and unknown. There was a great deal of false testimony, and slander that anywhere else would have been dismissed with an ironic or sarcastic phrase was now given weight and substance. If the lawyer was able to bring out contradictions in the testimony itself, other accusations rose immediately thereafter. They accused him of having illegally acquired several properties, and they requested indemnities for damages and loss. They said he kept up relations with tulisanés so that his fields and animals would be protected. In the end, they entangled the affair to such an extent that at the end of a year no one could even understand it. The governor had to leave his post. Another one came who had a reputation for being upstanding, but he was here only a few months and the one who succeeded him had too great a love for horses.

“The suffering, the unpleasantness, the discomfort of prison or the pain of seeing so much cruelty undermined his iron constitution, and he fell ill with a disease that only the grave can cure. And just when he was about to be exonerated, when he was to be absolved of the accusation of enemy of the state and of the murder of the tax collector, he died in jail, with no one at his side. I arrived just in time to see him pass away.”

The old man became quiet. Ibarra said nothing. By that time they had arrived at the barracks door. The soldier stopped, and taking him by the hand, said to him:
“Ask Captain Tiago for any details, my young friend. And now, good night. I need to find out if there is any news.”

With great emotion, Ibarra squeezed the bony hand. Then he silently watched him walk away, until he disappeared.

He slowly turned and saw a coach pass by. He signaled to the coachman.

“Fonda de Lala,”57 he said in a barely audible voice.

“This guy must have just come from the clink,” the coachman thought to himself, and he whipped his horses.

Ibarra went up to his room, which looked out over the river. He dropped into an armchair, and stared into the yawning space in front of him, through the open window.

The house opposite, on the other side of the river, was brightly lit, and from its upper floors the lively tunes of stringed instruments reached across to him. If the young man had been less preoccupied, and more curious, he might have tried to see, with the help of binoculars, what was going on in that atmosphere of light. He would have admired one of those fantastic visions, those magic apparitions one sometimes sees in the great theaters of Europe, in which the deafening melodies of an orchestra are made to appear among a deluge of light, a torrent of oriental diamonds and gold surrounded by a diaphanous mist, from which a deity, a sylph comes forward, her feet barely touching the floor, encircled and accompanied by a luminous cloud. In her wake flowers shoot forth, a dance bursts out, harmonies awaken, and choirs of devils, nymphs, satyrs, spirits, country maidens, angels, and shepherds dance, shake tambourines, gesticulate wildly, and lay tribute at the goddess’s feet. Ibarra would have seen a young, extraordinarily beautiful woman, slender, dressed in the picturesque costume of the daughters of the Philippines, amid a semicircle composed of all types of people, who vigorously gestured and moved about. There were Chinese, Spaniards, Filipinos, soldiers, priests, old women, young men, and others. To one side of this beautiful woman stood Father Dámaso. He was smiling, as if blessed. Father Sibyla, that same Father Sibyla, directed a few words toward her, and Doña Victorina was adjusting a string of pearls and precious stones in the young woman’s magnificent coiffure, which
created a stunningly gorgeous prism of colors. She was white, perhaps too white. Her eyes, which were almost always cast down, when she raised them testified to the purest of souls, and when she smiled, revealing her small, white teeth, one might be tempted to say that a rose is merely a plant, and ivory just an elephant’s tusk. Among the transparent lace around her white and sculpted neck fluttered, as the Tagalogs say, the sparkling eyes of a necklace made up of precious stones. Only one man seemed not to feel the influence of her luminosity, one might say: it was a young Franciscan, a thin, scrawny, pale youth, who contemplated her from afar, unmoving, like a statue, almost without breathing.

But Ibarra saw none of this: his eyes saw something else. They saw four bare and grimy walls enclosing a small space. On one of them, toward the top, was a grate, on the dirty and disgusting floor a mat, on the mat an old man in agony. The old man, who breathed with difficulty, looked all about him and uttered his name, weeping. He was alone, though from time to time one could hear the sounds of a chain or moaning through the wall, and then, from far away, a lively party, almost a bacchanal. A young man laughed and shouted, spilling his wine onto flowers, to the applause and intoxication of the others. The old man had his father’s features, the young man resembled him, and the name he uttered while he wept was his.

This was what the unhappy man saw before him. The lights in the house opposite went out, the music and the noise ended, but still Ibarra could hear the anguished cries of his father, searching for his son at his final hour.

Silence had blown its empty wind over Manila and everything seemed to sleep in the arms of nothingness. A cock’s crow alternated with the tower clock and the melancholy warnings of bored night watchmen. A sliver of moon began to rise. Everything seemed to be at rest. Even Ibarra slept, either exhausted from his sad thoughts or from his journey.

But the young Franciscan, whom we saw a little while ago still and silent amid the liveliness of the great room, did not sleep. He waited. With his elbow on the windowsill of his cell, his pale, drawn face resting on the palm of his hand, he stared silently at a star shining far off in the dark sky. The star grew dimmer and dimmer, and then disappeared; the moon lost the waning moon’s radiance, but still the friar did not stir from his place. He just stared at the far-off horizon, slowly dissolving in the morning mist, toward the fields of Bagumbayan, toward the still-sleeping sea.