
Opening Extract from...

The Man Who Loved Dogs

Written by Leonard Padura

Translated from the Spanish by Anna Kushner

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Thirty years later, still, for Lucía

This happened when only the dead were smiling
Glad to have found their resting place at last . . .

—ANNA AKHMATOVA, *Requiem*

Life . . . is wider than history.

—GREGORIO MARAÑON,
Tiberio: Historia de un resentimiento

London, August 22, 1940 (TASS)—London radio has today announced: "In a Mexico City hospital, Leon Trotsky died as a result of a fractured skull sustained in an attack perpetrated the previous day by a person in his innermost circle."

LEANDRO SÁNCHEZ SALAZAR: Wasn't he suspicious?
DETAINEE: No.
L.S.S.: Didn't you think that he was a defenseless old man and that you were acting with cowardice?
D: I wasn't thinking anything.
L.S.S.: You were walking over from where he fed the rabbits, what were you talking about?
D: I don't remember if I was talking or not.
L.S.S.: He didn't see when you took out the ice axe?
D: No.
L.S.S.: Immediately after you stabbed him, what did the gentleman do?
D: He jumped as if he had gone mad, he screamed like a madman, the sound of that scream is something I will remember for the rest of my life.
L.S.S.: Tell me what he did, let's see.
D: A . . . a . . . a . . . ah . . . ! But he was very loud.

(From Mexico City's chief of secret police Colonel Leandro Sánchez Salazar's interrogation of Jacques Mornard Vandendreschs, or Frank Jacson, the presumed killer of Leon Trotsky, the night of Friday, August 23, and the early hours of Saturday, August 24, 1940.)

PART ONE

1

Havana, 2004

"Rest in peace" were the pastor's last words.

If that well-worn phrase, so shamelessly dramatic in the mouth of that figure, had ever held any meaning, it was at that exact moment, as the grave diggers nonchalantly lowered Ana's coffin into the open grave. The certainty that life can be the worst hell, and that the remains of fear and pain were disappearing forever with that descent, overcame me with paltry relief. I wondered if I wasn't in some way envious of my wife's final passage toward silence, since being dead, totally and truly dead, for some can be the closest thing to a blessing from that God with whom Ana tried to involve me, without much success, in the last years of her difficult life.

As soon as the grave diggers finished moving over the stone and placed the wreaths of flowers our friends had brought on the grave, I turned and walked away, resolved to escape the hands patting my shoulder and the habitual expressions of condolence that we always feel obliged to offer. Because at that moment every other word in the world is superfluous: only the pastor's well-worn formula had meaning and I didn't want to lose it. *Rest* and *peace*: what Ana had finally attained and what I also asked for.

When I sat down inside the Pontiac to await Daniel's arrival, I knew that I was about to pass out, and I was sure that if my friend didn't remove me from the cemetery, I would have been unable to find the way back to my life. The September sun was burning the top of the car, but I didn't feel up to moving to any other place. With what little strength I had left, I closed my eyes to control the vertigo of loss and fatigue while I felt the acidic sweat running down over my eyelids and cheeks, springing from my armpits, neck, arms. It was soaking my back scorched by the vinyl seat until it turned into a warm current that flowed down my legs in search of the cistern of my shoes. I wondered if that foul sweat and my deep exhaustion were not the prelude to my molecular disintegration, or at least the heart attack that would kill me in the next few minutes. It seemed to me that either could be an easy, even desirable solution, although frankly unfair: I didn't have the right to force my friends to bear two funerals in three days.

"Are you ill, Iván?" Dany's question, through the window, surprised me. "Holy shit, look at how much you're sweating . . ."

"I want to leave . . . But I don't know how, dammit . . ."

"We're leaving, my friend, don't worry. Wait a minute, let me give a few pesos to the grave diggers," he said, my friend's words transmitting a patent sense of life and reality that seemed strange to me, decidedly remote.

Once again I closed my eyes and remained motionless, sweating, until the car was set in motion. Only once the air coming through the window began to calm me down did I dare to raise my eyelids. Before leaving the cemetery, I was able to see the last row of tombs and mausoleums, eaten away by the sun, weather, and oblivion, as dead as their inhabitants, and—with or without any reason for doing so at that moment—I again asked myself why, amid so many possibilities, some faraway scientists had chosen my name specifically to baptize the ninth tropical storm of that season.

Although at this point in my life I've learned—or rather have been taught, and not in a very nice way—not to believe in chance, the coincidences were too many that led the meteorologists to decide, many months ahead of time, that they would call that storm "Ivan"—a masculine name starting with the ninth letter of the alphabet, in Spanish, that had never been used before for that purpose. The fetus of what would become Ivan was spawned by the meeting of ominous clouds in the vicinity of Cape

Verde, but it wasn't until a few days later, already baptized and converted into a hurricane with all of its properties, that it would rear its head in the Caribbean to place us in its ravenous sight . . . You'll see why I think that I have reasons enough to believe that only twisted fate could have determined that that particular cyclone, one of history's fiercest, would carry my name, just when another hurricane was closing in on my existence.

Even though it had been quite a long time—perhaps too long—since Ana and I had known that her end was decreed, the many years during which we dragged her illnesses had accustomed us to living with them. But the news that her osteoporosis—probably caused by the vitamin-deficient polyneuritis unleashed in the most difficult years of the crisis in the 1990s—had developed into bone cancer, had made us face the evidence of an end that was near, and given me the macabre proof that only a perverse fate could be responsible for burdening my wife specifically with that illness.

From the beginning of the year, Ana's decline had accelerated, although it was in the middle of July, three months after the definitive diagnosis, that her final agony began. Although Gisela, Ana's sister, came frequently to help me, I practically had to stop working to take care of my wife; and if we survived those months, it was thanks to the support of friends like Dany, Anselmo, or Frank the doctor, who frequently came through our small apartment in the neighborhood of Lawton to drop off some supplies drawn from the wretched harvests that, for their own subsistence, they managed to obtain in the most devious ways. More than once, Dany offered to come help me with Ana, but I rejected his overtures, since pain and misery are among the few things that, when shared, always multiply.

The scene we lived between the cracked walls of our apartment was as depressing as can be imagined, although the worst thing, under the circumstances, was the strange power with which Ana's broken body clung to life, even against its owner's will.

In the early days of September, when Hurricane Ivan, having reached its full potential, had just crossed the Atlantic and was nearing the island of Grenada, Ana had an unexpected period of lucidity and an unforeseen relief to her pain. As it had been her decision not to go to the hospital, a neighboring nurse and our friend Frank had taken over the task of providing her with intravenous fluids and the dose of morphine that kept

her in a startling lethargy. Upon seeing that reaction, Frank warned me that this was the denouement and recommended that I give the patient only those foods that she asked for, not insisting on the intravenous fluids and, as long as she wasn't complaining of pain, stopping all drugs to thus give her some final days of intelligence. Then, as if her life had returned to normal, an Ana with various broken bones and very open eyes became interested again in the world around her. With the television and radio on, she fixed her attention in an obsessive way on the path of the hurricane that had initiated its deathly dance devastating the island of Grenada, where it had left more than twenty dead. On many occasions throughout those days, my wife lectured me on the hurricane's characteristics, one of the strongest in meteorological history, and attributed its elevated powers to the climate change the planet was undergoing, a mutation of nature that could do away with the human species if the necessary measures were not taken, she told me, completely convinced. That my dying wife was thinking of everyone else's future only added to the pain I was already suffering.

While the storm neared Jamaica with the obvious intention of later penetrating eastern Cuba, Ana developed a sort of meteorological excitement capable of keeping her on constant alert, a tension she escaped only when sleep conquered her for two or three hours. All of her expectations were related to Ivan's doings, with the number of dead it left in its path—one in Trinidad, five in Venezuela, another in Colombia, five more in Dominica, fifteen in Jamaica, she added, counting on her crooked fingers—and, above all, the calculations of what it would destroy if it penetrated Cuba through any of the points marked as possible trajectories deduced by the specialists. Ana experienced a kind of cosmic communication at the point of the symbiotic confluence of two bodies that know they are destined to consume themselves in the span of a few days, and I began to speculate whether the illness and the drugs had not made her crazy. I also thought that if the hurricane didn't come through soon and Ana didn't calm down, I would be the one who ended up going crazy.

The most critical period—for Ana and, logically, for each of the island's inhabitants—occurred when Ivan, with sustained winds of approximately 150 miles per hour, began to pass over the seas to the south of Cuba. The hurricane was moving with a lazy arrogance, as if it were perversely choosing the point at which it would inevitably turn north

and break the country in two, leaving an enormous wake of ruins and death. With bated breath and her senses clinging to the radio and the color television that a neighbor had lent us, a Bible near one hand and our dog Truco beneath the other, Ana cried, laughed, cursed, and prayed with a strength that was not her own. For more than forty-eight hours she remained in that state, watching Ivan's careful approach as if her thoughts and prayers were indispensable to keeping the hurricane as far away as possible from the island, blocking it in that almost incredible westward path from which it couldn't resolve to deviate to the north and flatten the country, as all historic, atmospheric, and planetary logic predicted.

The night of September 12, when information from satellites and radars and the unanimous opinion of meteorologists around the world were certain that Ivan would chart a course for the north and that with its battering gusts, gigantic waves, and rain squalls, it would rejoice in the final destruction of Havana, Ana asked me to remove from the wall of our room the dark, corroded wooden cross that twenty-seven years before the sea had given me—the driftwood cross—and place it at the foot of the bed. Then she begged me to make her a very hot hot chocolate and some toast with butter. If what was supposed to happen happened, that would be her last supper, because the battered ceiling of our apartment would not withstand the force of the hurricane, and she, it goes without saying, refused to move from there. After drinking the hot chocolate and nibbling a piece of toast, Ana asked me to lay the driftwood cross next to her and began to pray with her eyes fixed on the ceiling and on the wooden beams guaranteeing its balance and, perhaps, with her imagination devoted to playing out the images of the apocalypse lying in wait for the city.

The morning of September 14, the meteorologists announced a miracle: Ivan had turned toward the north at last, but it had done so so far to the west of the designated zone that it barely brushed the westernmost point of the island without causing any major damage. Apparently the hurricane had felt remorse for the many calamities piling up, and had steered away from us, convinced that its passing through our country would have been an excess of bad fate. Worn out by so much praying, with her stomach ravaged by lack of food, but satisfied by what she considered to be a personal victory, Ana fell asleep after hearing confirmation of that cosmic whim, and in the grimace that had become habitual

on her lips there was something very much like a smile. Ana's breathing, strained for so many days, was relaxed again and, along with her fingers caressing Truco's wiry hair, was the only sign in the next two days that she was still alive.

On September 16, practically at nightfall, while the hurricane started to disintegrate on U.S. soil and to lose the already diminished force of its winds, Ana stopped caressing our dog and, a few minutes later, stopped breathing. She was at last resting, I'd like to think, in eternal peace.

In due time you will understand why this story, which is not the story of my life (although it also is), begins as it does. And although you still don't know who I am or have any idea what I'm going to tell you, perhaps you will have understood something: Ana was a very important person to me. So much so that, to a large degree, it is because of her that this story exists—in black and white, I mean.

Ana crossed my path at one of those all so frequent times during which I was teetering on the edge of a precipice. The glorious Soviet Union had started its death rattle, and the lightning bolts of the crisis that would devastate the whole country in the 1990s were beginning to come down on us. It was predictable that one of the first consequences of the national debacle had been the closing, due to a lack of paper, ink, and electricity, of the veterinary medicine magazine where for ages I had worked as a proofreader. Just like dozens of press workers, from typesetters to editors, I had ended up in an artisans' workshop where we were supposed to devote ourselves, for an indefinite period of time, to making macramé crafts and polished seed decorations that, everyone knew, no one would be able to or dare to buy. Three days into this new and useless destiny, without even having the decency to quit, I fled from that honeycomb of enraged and frustrated bees and, thanks to my friends the veterinarians whose texts I have reviewed so many times or even rewritten, I was able to start working shortly after as a sort of ubiquitous helper in the likewise poverty-stricken clinic of the University of Havana's School of Veterinary Medicine.

Sometimes I am so overly suspicious that I come to wonder if that whole series of global, national, and personal decisions (they were even talking about "the end of history," just when we had begun to have an idea about what the history of the twentieth century was) had as its only

objective that I be the one who received, at the end of a rainy afternoon, the desperate and dripping young woman who, carrying a shaggy poodle in her arms, appeared at the clinic and begged me to save her dog, which was afflicted with an intestinal blockage. Since it was after four o'clock and the doctors had already left, I explained to the girl (she and the dog were trembling from the cold and, observing them, I felt my voice falter) that we couldn't do anything. Then I saw her break into tears: her dog was dying, she said to me; the two veterinarians who had seen him didn't have anesthesia to operate on him; and since there weren't any buses in the city, she had come walking in the rain with her dog in her arms, and I *had* to do something, for the love of God. Something? I still ask myself how it's possible that I dared to, or if in reality I was already wanting to dare to; but after explaining to the girl that I was not a veterinarian and asking her to write her petition on a piece of paper and sign it, thus freeing me of all responsibility, the dying Tato became my first surgical patient. If the God invoked by the girl had ever decided to protect a dog, it had to be that afternoon, since the operation—about which I had read so much and seen carried out more than once—was a success in practice.

Depending on how you look at it, Ana was the woman that I most needed or who was least advisable for me at that moment: fifteen years younger than me, too undemanding in the way of material things, horrible and wasteful as a cook, a passionate dog lover, and gifted with a strange sense of reality that made her go from the most eccentric ideas to the firmest and most rational decisions. From the beginning of our relationship she had the ability to make me feel like I had been looking for her for many, many years. That's why I didn't find it strange when, a few weeks into the calm and very satisfactory sexual relationship that began the first day I went to the house where Ana lived with a friend to give Tato an IV, the girl threw her belongings into two backpacks and, with her ration book, a box of books, and her nearly recovered poodle, moved into my damp and already peeling apartment in Lawton.

Besieged by hunger, blackouts, the devaluation of our salaries, and a transportation standstill—amid many other evils—Ana and I lived through a period of ecstasy. Our respective scrawniness, accentuated by the long trips we made on the Chinese bicycles that our workplaces had sold us, turned us into almost ethereal beings, a new species of mutants capable, nonetheless, of dedicating our remaining energies to making

love, to talking for hours, and to reading like fiends—for Ana, poetry; for me, a return to novels after a long time without them. But they were also unreal years, lived in a dark and sluggish country, always hot, that was falling apart day by day without quite falling into the troglodytic primitiveness that threatened us. And they were years in which not even the most devastating scarcity was able to stamp out the joy that living together brought Ana and me, like the shipwrecked who tie themselves to one another to either jointly save themselves or perish together.

Apart from the hunger and the material shortcomings of all kinds that besieged us—although between us we considered them outside us and inevitable, and thus foreign to us—the only sadly personal episodes we experienced at that time were the revelation of the vitamin-deficient polyneuritis that Ana began to suffer from and, later on, the death of Tato at the age of sixteen. The loss of the poodle affected my wife so much that, a couple of weeks later, I tried to alleviate the situation by picking up a stray pup infected with mange, whom Ana immediately started to call "Truco" due to his ability to hide, and whom she fed with rations taken from our paltry survivors' diet.

Ana and I had achieved a level of such rapport that, one night, under a blackout, with ill-contained hunger, unease, and heat (how was it possible that it was always so damned hot and that even the moon seemed to shed less light than before?)—as if I were just carrying out a natural need—I began to tell her the story of the meetings that, fourteen years before, I had had with that character whom I had always called, from the very day I met him, "the man who loved dogs." Until that night on which, almost without prologue and as an outburst, I decided to tell Ana that story, I had never revealed to anyone the subject of my conversations with that man and, less still, my delayed, repressed, and often forgotten desire to write the story he had confided in me. So that she would have a better idea of how I'd been affected by the proximity to that figure and the dreadful story of hate, betrayal, and death that he'd given me, I even gave her some notes to read that many years before, from the ignorance I wallowed in at the time, and almost against my own will, I had not been able to keep myself from writing. She had barely finished reading them when Ana stared at me until the weight of her black eyes—those eyes that would always look like the most living thing of her body—began to berate me and she finally said, with appalling conviction, that she didn't understand how it was possible that I, especially I, had not written a book

about that story that God had put in my path. And looking into her eyes—those same eyes now being eaten by worms—I gave her the answer that had slipped away from me so many times, but the only one that, because it was Ana, I could give her:

"Fear kept me from writing it."

2

The icy mist swallowed the outline of the last huts, and the caravan again plunged into that distressing whiteness, so limitless, without anything to rest your gaze on. It was at that moment that Lev Davidovich was able to understand why the inhabitants of that rough corner of the world have insisted, since the dawn of time, on worshipping stones.

The six days that the police and the exiles had spent traveling from Alma-Ata to Frunze, through Kyrgyzstan's icy steppe, enveloped by an absolute whiteness in which any notion of time and distance was lost, had served to reveal the futility of all human pride and the exact dimension of its cosmic insignificance in the face of the essential power of the eternal. The waves of snow coming down from the sky, in which all trace of the sun had vanished and that threatened to devour everything that dared to challenge its devastating persistence, proved to be an indomitable force which no man could stand up to; it was then that the apparition of a tree, the outline of the mountain, the frozen gully of a river, or a simple rock in the middle of the steppe, turned into something so noteworthy as to become an object of veneration. The natives of those remote deserts have glorified stones, because they assure in their capacity for resistance, that there is a force, enclosed forever inside of them, like the

fruit of an eternal will. A few months earlier, while already in the midst of his deportation, Lev Davidovich had read that the sage known as Ibn Battuta, and farther east by the name of Shams ad-Dina, was the one who revealed to his people that the act of kissing a sacred stone results in a comforting spiritual pleasure, since upon doing so the lips experience a sweetness so deep that it leads to the desire to keep kissing it until the end of time. For that reason, wherever there is a sacred stone, it is forbidden to wage battles or kill enemies, as the pureness of hope must be preserved. The visceral wisdom inspiring that doctrine seemed so lucid that Lev Davidovich asked himself if the revolution really had any right to disrupt an ancestral order, perfect in its own way and impossible for a European mind affected by rational and cultural prejudices to gauge. But the political activists sent from Moscow were already in those lands, focused on turning the nomadic tribes into collective farm workers, their mountain goats into state livestock, and in showing Turkmens, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyzstanis that their atavistic custom of worshipping stones or trees in the steppe was a deplorable anti-Marxist attitude that they should renounce in the name of progress of a humanity capable of understanding that, at the end of the day, a stone is only a stone and that you don't feel anything besides simple physical contact when cold and exhaustion have eaten up all human will, and in the middle of frozen desert, a man armed with only his faith finds a piece of stone and takes it to his lips.

A week before, Lev Davidovich had seen how they wrested away from him the last few stones that still allowed him to orient himself on the turbulent political map of his country. He would later write that that morning he'd awoken petrified and overwhelmed by a bad premonition. Convinced that he was not just shaking because of the cold, he had tried to control his spasms and had managed to make out the tattered chair-turned-night-table in the shadows. He had felt around until he found his glasses, the shakes making him fail twice at placing the metallic stems over his ears. In the milky light of the winter dawn, he had finally managed to spy on the wall the almanac adorned with the image of some statues of young people from the Leninist Komsomol that had been sent to him from Moscow a few days before without his knowing who sent it, since the envelope and the possible letter from the sender had disappeared, like all of his

correspondence in recent months. Only at that moment, as the numbered evidence of the calendar and the rough wall it hung from brought him back to his reality, did he have the certainty that he had woken up with that anxiety due to having lost the notion of where he was and when he was waking. For that reason he felt a palpable relief upon discovering that it was January 20, 1929, and he was in Alma-Ata, lying on a squeaking cot, and that at his side was his wife, Natalia Sedova.

Taking care not to move the straw mattress, he sat up. He immediately felt the pressure of Maya's snout on his knees: his dog greeted him, and he rubbed her ears, in which he found warmth and a comforting sense of reality. Dressed in a rawhide cloak and a scarf around his neck, he emptied his bladder in the toilet and moved to the room that was simultaneously kitchen and dining room, already lit by two gas lamps and heated by the stove on which rested the samovar, prepared by his personal jailer. In the mornings he had always preferred coffee, but he had already resigned himself to accept what was assigned to him by Alma-Ata's miserly bureaucrats and its secret police guards. Seated at the table close by the stove, he began taking a few sips of that strong tea, too green for his liking, from a china cup while he caressed Maya's head, without suspecting that he would soon receive the most perfidious confirmation that his life and even his death had ceased to belong to him.

Exactly one year before, he had been confined to Alma-Ata, at the limit of Asian Russia, closer to the Chinese border than to the last station of any Russian railway. In reality, ever since he, his wife, and their son Liova had stepped out of the snow-covered truck in which they had covered the final stretch of their road to a malicious deportation, Lev Davidovich had begun to wait for death. He was convinced that if by a miracle he survived malaria and dysentery, the order to eliminate him was going to come sooner or later ("If he dies so far away, by the time people find out about it, he will already be well buried," his enemies thought, without a doubt). But while they waited for that to happen, his adversaries had decided to make the most of their time and devoted themselves to annihilating him from history and memory, which had also become the party's property. The publication of his books, just when he had reached the twenty-first volume, had been halted, and an operation was being carried out to remove copies from bookstores and libraries; at the same time, his name, slandered at first and then discredited, began to be erased from historical accounts, tributes, newspaper articles, even from photographs,

until they made him feel how he was turning into an absolute nothing, a black hole in the memory of the people. For that reason, Lev Davidovich thought that if anything had saved his life until then, it was fear of the schism that the decision to eliminate him could cause, if there was indeed something still capable of altering the consciousness of a country deformed by fear, slogans, and lies. But one year of enforced silence, accumulating low blows without any chance to reciprocate, seeing how the remains of the opposition he had led were dismantled, convinced him that his disappearance was becoming more necessary every day for the macabre decline toward despotism of the great proletarian revolution.

That year of 1928 had been, he didn't even doubt it, the worst of his life, even though he had lived through many other terrible times confined in Czarist jails or wandering penniless and with little hope through half of Europe. But during each disheartening circumstance, he had been sustained by the conviction that all sacrifices were necessary when aspiring to the greater good of the revolution. Why should he fight now, if the revolution had already been in power for ten years? The answer was becoming clearer to him every day: to remove it from the perverse abyss of a reaction that was intent on killing human civilization's greatest ideals. But how? That was still the great question, and the possible responses crossed his mind, in a chaos of contradictions with the capacity to paralyze him in the midst of his strange struggle as a marginalized Communist against other Communists who had stolen the revolution.

With censored and even falsified information he had followed the miserable start of a process of ideological destabilization, of the confusion of political positions that had been undefined until recently, through which Stalin and his minions stripped him of his words and ideas, by the malevolent procedure of appropriating the same programs through which he had been harassed to the point of being thrown out of the party.

At that moment of deep thought, he heard the door to the house open with a creak of frozen wood and saw the soldier Dreitser enter, dragging in a cloud of cold air. The new head of the GPU watch group tended to demonstrate his power by entering the house without deigning to knock at that door which had been stripped of locks. Covered by a hat with ear flaps and a leather cloak, the policeman had begun to shake off the snow without daring to look at him, because he knew that he was the bearer of an order that only one man in the entire territory of the Soviet Union was capable of devising and, furthermore, of carrying out.

Three weeks earlier, Dreitser had arrived as a sort of black messenger from the Kremlin, bearing new restrictions and the ultimatum that if Trotsky didn't halt his oppositionist campaign amid the colonies of deportees, he would be completely isolated from political life. What campaign, since it had been months since he could send or receive correspondence? And what new isolation was he being threatened with if not death? To make his control more evident, the agent had decreed a prohibition on Lev Davidovich and his son Lev Sedov going out to hunt, knowing that with those snowfalls it was impossible to hunt. Nevertheless, he confiscated shotguns and cartridges in order to demonstrate his will and his power.

When he managed to free himself of the snow layered on his coat, Dreitser approached the samovar to serve himself tea. By the motion of the wind, Lev Davidovich had deduced that it must be less than thirty degrees below zero outside and that the empire of interminable snow, with the exception of some redeeming stones, was the only thing that existed on that damned steppe. Following his first sip of tea, Dreitser had at last spoken and, with his Siberian bear accent, told him that he had a letter that came from Moscow. It wasn't difficult for him to imagine that a letter capable of passing postal control could only bring the worst news, and this was confirmed by the fact that for the first time Dreitser had addressed him without calling him "*Comrade* Trotsky," the last title he'd kept in his turbulent decline from the heights of power to the solitude of banishment.

Ever since receiving the news of the death of his daughter Nina from tuberculosis in July, Lev Davidovich had lived with the fear that other family misfortunes would occur, a by-product of regular life or, as he feared more with each passing day, of hate. Zina, his other daughter from his first marriage, had had a nervous breakdown, and her husband Plato Volkov was, like other oppositionists, already in a work camp in the Arctic Circle. Fortunately, his son Liova was with them, and the young Seriozha, the *Homo apoliticus* of the family, remained a stranger to partisan struggles.

Natalia Sedova's voice, saying good morning while simultaneously cursing the cold, reached him at that moment. He waited for her to enter, met with joy by Maya, and felt his heart shrink: Would he be capable of transmitting fatal news to Natasha about the fate of her beloved Seriozha? With a mug in her hands she had sat down in the chair and he watched her. *She's still a beautiful woman*, he thought, according to what he would

write later. Then he told her that they had correspondence from Moscow and the woman also became tense.

Dreitser had left his mug next to the stove to rummage in his pockets in search of his pack of unbearable Turkmeni cigarettes and, as if taking advantage of the act, stuck his hand in the interior compartment of his cloak, from which he removed the yellow envelope. For a second it seemed that he had the intention of opening it, but he chose to place the packet on the table. Trying to hide his anxiety, Lev Davidovich looked at Natalia, then at the stampless envelope where his name was imprinted, and threw the cold tea in the corner. He handed the mug to Dreitser, who was forced to take it and return to the samovar to refill it. Although he had always had a flair for the theatrical, he understood that he was wasting his histrionics before that reduced audience, and without waiting for the tea he opened the envelope. It contained one sheet, typewritten, with the GPU seal and was undated. After replacing his glasses, he spent less than one minute reading it but remained silent, this time without any dramatic gestures: surprise at the incredible had left him speechless. Citizen Lev Davidovich Trotsky should leave the country within a period of twenty-four hours. His expulsion, without a specific destination, had been decided by virtue of the recently created Article 58/10, useful for everything, although in his case, according to the letter, he was accused of "carrying out counterrevolutionary campaigns in order to organize a clandestine party hostile to the Soviets . . ." Still silent, he passed the note to his wife.

Natalia Sedova, her hands atop the rough wooden table, looked at him, petrified by the severity of the decision that, rather than condemning them to freeze to death in some corner of the country, forced them to take the road to an exile that appeared like a dark cloud. Twenty-three years of a life together, sharing pains and successes, failures and glories, allowed Lev Davidovich to read the woman's thoughts through her blue eyes. Exiled**,** the leader who had moved the country's consciousness in 1905, who had made the uprising of October 1917 a triumph and had created an army in the midst of chaos and saved the revolution in those years of imperialist invasions and civil war? Banished for disagreements over political and economic strategy? she had thought. If it were not so pathetic, that order would have been risible.

As he stood up, he sarcastically asked Dreitser if he had any idea when and where the first congress of his "clandestine party" would take place,

but the messenger limited himself to demanding that he confirm the receipt of the communication. In the margin of the order, Lev Davidovich wrote, "The GPU's decree, criminal in substance and illegal in form, has been communicated to me on the date of January 20, 1929." He signed it quickly and pegged the page with a dirty knife. Then he looked at his wife, who was still in shock, and asked her to wake Liova. They would barely have time to gather their papers and books. He walked to the bedroom, followed by Maya, as if impelled by haste, although in reality, Lev Davidovich had fled for fear that the police and his wife would see him cry over the impotence caused by humiliation and lies.

They ate their breakfast in silence and, as always, Lev Davidovich gave Maya some pieces of the soft part of the bread smeared with the rancid butter they were given. Later, Natalia Sedova would confess to him that at that moment, she had seen in his eyes, for the first time since they met, the dark flash of resignation, a frame of mind so removed from his attitude of a year before when, upon trying to deport him from Moscow, it had taken four men to drag him to the train station as he continued to scream and curse the faces of the Grave Diggers of the Revolution.

Followed by his dog, Lev Davidovich returned to the bedroom, where he had already begun to prepare the boxes in which he would place those papers that were all that remained of his belongings, but that were worth as much as or more to him than his life: essays, proclamations, military reports, and peace treaties that changed the fate of the world, but above all, hundreds, thousands of letters signed by Lenin, Plekhanov, Rosa Luxemburg, and so many other Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, revolutionary Socialists among whom he had lived and fought ever since, while still an adolescent, founding the romantic South Russian Workers' Union, with the outlandish idea of overthrowing the Czar.

The certainty of defeat pressed on his chest, as if a horse's hoof were crushing him and asphyxiating him. So he picked up his boot covers and his felt galoshes and took them to the dining room, where Liova was organizing files, and began to put his shoes on, to the young man's surprise, who asked him what he had in mind. Without answering him, he took the scarves hanging behind the door and, followed by his dog, went out into the wind, the snow, and the grayness of the morning. The storm, unleashed two days earlier, did not seem to have any intention of abating; and upon entering it, he felt how his body and his soul sank in the ice, while the air hurt the skin on his face. He took a few steps toward the

street from which he could make out the foothills of the Tien Shan mountains, and it was as if he had hugged the white cloud until he melted into it. He whistled, demanding Maya's presence, and was relieved when the dog approached him. Resting his hand on the animal's head, he noticed how the snow began to cover him. If he remained there ten or fifteen minutes, he would turn into a frozen mass and his heart would stop, despite the coats. It could be a good solution, he thought. But if my henchmen won't kill me yet, he told himself, I won't do their work for them. Guided by Maya, he walked the few feet back to the cabin: Lev Davidovich knew that as long as he had life left in him, he still had bullets to shoot as well.

Natalia Sedova, Lev Sedov, and Lev Davidovich had sat down to drink one last tea as they waited for the police escort that would conduct them into exile. In the bedroom, the boxes of papers were ready, following a first sorting out in which they had put aside dozens of books that were considered dispensable. Early in the morning, one of the police picked up the discarded books and had barely taken them out of the cabin when he set fire to them after pouring gasoline on them.

Dreitser arrived around eleven. As usual, he entered without knocking and told them the trip would be postponed. Natalia Sedova, ever concerned with practical matters, asked him why he thought the storm would abate the following day. The head of the guards explained that he had just received the weather report but, above all, he knew because he could smell it in the air. It was then that Dreitser, once again in need of projecting his power, said that Maya the dog could not travel with them.

The Exile's reaction was so violent that it surprised the policeman: Maya was part of his family and was going with him or no one was going. Dreitser reminded him that he wasn't in any position to issue orders or threats, and Lev Davidovich agreed, but he reminded him that he could still do something crazy that would end the guard's career and send him back to Siberia—not to his hometown, but to one of those work camps that his boss in the GPU directed. When he observed the immediate effect of his words, Lev Davidovich understood that that man was under great pressure and decided to finish this game without showing any more cards: How was it possible that a Siberian could ask him to abandon a Russian wolfhound? And he lamented that Dreitser had never seen Maya hunt foxes in the frozen tundra. The policeman, slipping out the door,

tried to demonstrate that he still had power: they could take the animal, but they would be responsible for cleaning up her shit.

Dreitser's Siberian sense of smell would be as wrong as the meteorologists' predictions, and the storm under which they left Alma-Ata, far from abating, grew as the bus moved through the steppe. In the afternoon (he knew it was afternoon only because the clocks indicated so), when they reached the village of Koshmanbet, he confirmed that they had spent seven hours to cover twenty miles of flat road under the ice.

The following day, heading over the frozen track, the bus managed to reach the mountain post of Kurdai, but the attempt to use a tractor to move the seven-car caravan in which they would all travel from that point on was useless and inhumane: seven members of the police escort froze to death along with a notable number of horses. Then Dreitser opted for the sleighs on which they would glide for two more days, until Pishpek was in sight, on flat roads again, where they got into cars.

Frunze, with its mosques and aroma of goat fat escaping from the chimneys, seemed like a saving oasis to the deporters and the deported alike. For the first time since leaving Alma-Ata, they were able to bathe and sleep in beds, and be relieved of the foul-smelling coats whose weight practically prevented them from walking. Confirming that in misery every detail is a luxury, Lev Davidovich even had the opportunity to taste a fragrant Turkish coffee, which he drank until he felt his heart speed up.

That night, before they went to bed, the soldier Igor Dreitser sat down to drink coffee with the Trotskys and inform them that his mission at the head of the guards ended there. Many weeks of cohabitation with the sour-faced Siberian had turned him into a habitual presence, so at the moment of his departure Lev Davidovich wished him good luck and reminded him that it didn't matter who the party secretary was. It was all the same if it was Lenin, Stalin, Zinoviev, or him . . . Men like Dreitser worked for the country, not for a leader. After listening to him, Dreitser shook his hand and, surprisingly, told him that, despite the circumstances, it had been an honor for him to know him; but what truly intrigued him was when the agent, practically in a whisper, informed him that, although the order specified that they burn all of the deportee's papers, he had decided only to burn a few books. Lev Davidovich had barely managed to process that strange information when he felt the Siberian pressure of Dreitser's hand on his fingers as the soldier turned around and went out into the darkness and snow.

With the changing of the police team, at the head of which an agent named Bulanov was placed, the deportees held the hope of piercing the veil and finding out the fates assigned to them. However, Bulanov could only inform them that they would take a special train in the Frunze depot, without the order specifying toward where. So much mystery, thought Lev Davidovich, could only be the product of the fear of the improbable but nonetheless dreaded reactions of his decimated followers in Moscow. He also wondered if that entire operation was nothing but an orchestrated pantomime to create confusion and control opinions, a preferred technique of Stalin's, who on various occasions throughout that year had made rumors circulate about his imminent exile, which, though later denied with greater or less emphasis, had served to spread the idea and pave the way for the sentence that the people would only have news of after the fact.

Only during the months prior to the expulsion, while suffering a political defeat that managed to tie his hands, had Lev Davidovich begun to appreciate, seriously and with horror, the magnitude of Stalin's manipulative abilities. Incapable of appreciating the Georgian ex-seminarian's genius for intrigue, his shamelessness in lying and putting together shady deals, Lev Davidovich understood too late that he had underestimated his intelligence, and that Stalin, educated in the catacombs of the clandestine struggle, had learned all the forms of subterranean demolition. He now applied them, for his personal benefit, in search of the same ends for which the Bolshevik Party had used them before: to achieve power. The way in which he disarmed and displaced Lev Davidovich while using the vanity and fears of men who never seemed to have fears or vanities before, the calculated turns of his forces from one extreme to another of the political spectrum, had been a masterwork of manipulation that, to crown the Georgian's victory, had benefited from the unpredictable blindness and pride of his rival.

Beyond orchestrating his expulsion from the party, and now from the country, Stalin's great victory had been to turn Trotsky's voice into the incarnation of the internal enemy of the revolution, of the nation's stability, of the Leninist legacy, and had crushed him with the wall of propaganda that Lev Davidovich himself had contributed to creating, and against which, due to inviolable principles, he could not oppose if it meant risking the permanence of that system. The struggle on which he had to focus from that moment on would be one against men, against a

faction, never against the Idea. But how to fight against them if those men had appropriated the Idea and presented themselves to the country and the world like the very incarnation of the proletarian revolution? It was a question he would continue to ponder after his deportation.

The railroad odyssey of their pilgrimage began as soon as they left Frunze. The snow imposed a slow rhythm on the old English locomotive, which pulled four cars. Throughout his years at the head of the Red Army, when he had to cover the geography of a country deep in civil war, Lev Davidovich came to know almost the entire network of the nation's railways. On that special train he had traveled, by his calculations, enough miles to go around the world five and a half times. Because of that, after leaving Frunze, he was able to deduce that they were crossing the Asiatic south of the Soviet Union and that his destination could be none other than the Black Sea, one of the ports of which would serve to get him out of the country. To where? Two days later, after a quick stay at a station lost in the steppe, Bulanov arrived with the news that ended their wait: a telegram sent from Moscow informed him that the Turkish government had agreed to receive him as a guest, on a visa for health problems. Upon hearing the news, the deportee's anxiety felt as frozen solid as if he were traveling naked on top of the train: of all the destinations he had imagined for his exile, Kemal Pasha Ataturk's Turkey had not figured among the realistic possibilities, unless they wanted to put him on the gallows and decorate his neck with a well-oiled piece of rope, given that, since the triumph of the October Revolution, this neighbor to the south had become one of the bases for the White Russian exiles most aggressively against the Soviet regime, and placing him in that country was like dropping a rabbit in a dog pen. That is why he yelled at Bulanov that he didn't want to go to Turkey: he could accept being banished from the country the Kremlin had stolen, but the rest of the world did not belong to it and neither did his fate.

When they stopped in legendary Samarkand, Lev Davidovich saw Bulanov and two officers descend from the command headquarters car and disappear into the mosque-like building that served as a station; perhaps they were following through on the deportee's demands and Moscow would arrange for another visa. On that day the anxious wait for the results of those consultations began, and when it became clear that

the process would be delayed, they made the train move forward for over an hour before stopping it on a disused branch line in the middle of the frozen desert. It was then that Natalia Sedova asked Bulanov, while they waited for Moscow's response, to telegraph her son, Sergei Sedov, and Anya, Liova's wife, so that they could get together with them for a few days before leaving the country.

Lev Davidovich would never know if the twelve days during which they remained stranded in that spot in the middle of nowhere were due to the delays in the diplomatic consultations or if it was only because of the most devastating snowstorm he'd ever seen, capable of lowering the thermometers to forty degrees below zero. Covered with all of the coats, hats, and blankets at their disposal, they received Seriozha and Anya, who traveled without the children, who were still too little to be exposed to those temperatures. Beneath the occasional gaze of one of the guards, the family enjoyed eight days of pleasant small talk, fierce games of chess, and reading out loud while Lev Davidovich personally took charge of preparing the coffee brought by Sergei. Despite the skepticism of his audience, every time the guards left them alone, Lev Davidovich's compact optimism was unleashed and he initiated talk of plans to continue the struggle and make his return. At night, when everyone else was sleeping, the deportee curled up into a corner of the car and, listening to the staccato breathing due to the cold epidemic that had run through the convoy, he made the most of his insomnia to write letters of protest directed to the Bolshevik Central Committee and oppositionist struggle programs that, in the end, he decided to keep to himself so as not to compromise Seriozha with any papers that very well could lead him to jail.

The cold was so intense that the locomotive had to turn on its motors from time to time and cover a mile or two just to keep its engines from seizing up. Prevented from going outside by the snow's intensity (Lev Davidovich didn't want to lower himself to asking for permission to see Samarkand, the mythical city that centuries before had reigned over all of Central Asia), they awaited the newspapers only to confirm that the news was always disheartening, since every day there were reports of new detentions of anti-Soviet counterrevolutionaries, as they had baptized the members of the opposition. The powerlessness, boredom, the pain in his joints, the difficult digestion of canned food, drove Lev Davidovich to the edge of desperation.

On the twelfth day, Bulanov offered a summary of the responses:

Germany was not interested in giving him a visa, not even for health reasons; Austria made excuses; Norway demanded countless documents; France brandished a judicial order from 1916 by which he was not allowed to enter the country. England didn't even deign to respond. Only Turkey reiterated its disposition to accept him . . . Lev Davidovich was certain that, because of who he was and for having done what he had, for him the world had turned into a planet to which he lacked a visa.

As they headed toward Odessa, the former commissar of war had time to make a new account of the actions, convictions, and greater and lesser mistakes of his life, and he thought that, even though they had forced him to turn into a pariah, he did not regret what he had done and felt ready to pay the price for his actions and dreams. He was even more firm in those convictions when the train passed through Odessa and he recalled those years that now seemed tremendously remote, when he had entered the city's university and understood that his future lay not in mathematics but rather in the struggle against a tyrannical system; thus had begun his endless career as a revolutionary. In Odessa he had introduced the recently founded South Russian Workers' Union to other clandestine groups, without having a clear idea of their political influence; there he had suffered his first imprisonment, had read Darwin and banished from his young Jewish man's mind, already too heterodox, the idea of the existence of any supreme being; there he had been judged and sentenced for the first time, and the punishment had also been exile. That time the Czarist henchmen had sent him to Siberia for four years, while now his former comrades in arms were deporting him outside of his own country, perhaps for the rest of his days. And there, in Odessa, he met the affable jailer who supplied him with paper and ink. This was the man whose resounding name he had chosen when, having fled Siberia, some comrades gave him a blank passport so that he could embark on his first exile and, in the space reserved for the name, Trotsky wrote the jailer's last name, which had accompanied him ever since.

After going around the city by the coast, the train stopped at a branch line that went all the way to the port's quays. The spectacle that unfolded before the travelers was moving: through the blizzard beating at the windows, they contemplated the extraordinary panorama of the frozen bay, the ships planted in the ice, their spars broken.

Bulanov and some other Cheka agents left the train and boarded a steamship called the *Kalinin*, while other agents introduced themselves

in the car to announce that Sergei Sedov and Anya should leave, since the deportees would soon be embarking. The farewell, at the end of so many days of cohabitation within the walls of the train car, was more devastating than they had imagined. Natalia cried while caressing the face of her little Seriozha, and Liova and Anya hugged as if wanting to transmit through their skin the feeling of abandonment into which they were being thrown by that separation without any foreseeable end. To protect himself, he bid farewell briefly, but as he looked into Seriozha's eyes, he had the premonition that it was the last time he would see that young man, so healthy and handsome, who had enough intelligence to spurn politics. He hugged him strongly and kissed him on the lips, to take with him some of his warmth and being. Then he withdrew to a corner, followed by Maya, and struggled to drive out of his mind the words Piatakov said to him, at the end of that dismal Central Committee meeting in 1926, when Stalin, with Bukharin's support, had achieved his expulsion from the Politburo and Lev Davidovich would accuse him in front of the comrades of having turned into the Grave Digger of the Revolution. As he was leaving, the redheaded Piatakov had said to him, with that habit of his of speaking into one's ear, "Why? Why have you done it? . . . He will never forgive you this offense. He will make you pay for it until the third or fourth generation." He asked himself: Was it possible that Stalin's political hate would end up extending to these children who represented not just the best of the revolution but of his life? Would his cruelty one day reach Seriozha who had taught the young Svetlana Stalina how to read and count? And he had to answer himself that hate is an unstoppable illness as he stroked his dog's head and observed for the last time—he felt it deep down inside—the city where thirty years before he had wed himself to the revolution forever.