

From MY EXCELLENCY

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Translated from the Spanish by
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THE CHARACTERS. In the order in which they speak:

Tonia, a supporter of Buenaventura.

Concepción, another supporter, then a girlfriend of Don Ramón.

Mariana, another supporter.

Juan, the bodyguard and old friend of Buenaventura.

Borracho,* another supporter.

Peñita, another supporter, then opponent.

Tortillita, another supporter.

First Man, another supporter.

Second Man, another supporter.

Third Man, another supporter.

Blind Man (later, Administrator of the Homes for the Aged), another supporter.

Bugler (later, Director of the Conservatory of Music), another supporter.

Carmela, the daughter of Buenaventura.

Jaime, the secretary and protégé of Buenaventura.

Buenaventura Padilla, candidate for President of the Chamber of Deputies, then President.

Guard, assigned to Buenaventura.

Colmenero, a journalist.

Don Ramón Torres, a gangster multimillionaire and nemesis of Buenaventura.

Wounded Man, another supporter of Buenaventura.

George, the son of Don Ramón.

Gang Leader, a thug who works for Don Ramón.

Tirado, a policeman.

Bellboy, at hotel where banquet honoring Buenaventura is held.

* Drunk, in Spanish.—J.C.

TIME AND PLACE. The present. An imaginary country, where evidently the President of the Chamber of Deputies exercises important government functions; surely otherwise Buenaventura Padilla had better have been President of the Council of Ministers, with the sole omission of the gavel and a phrase or two in the third act. The workers are encouraged to corrupt the language according to their own taste. [. . .]

FIRST ACT. Before the curtain goes up shouts are heard, trumpet blasts, tramping and running, vivas for the Workers Party and for Buenaventura Padilla, and cries of “We will win this election.” A quick curtain, the scene represents a small office (or is it merely a living room of certain pretensions?) of the Labor Party Club, on the second floor, dawn of Election Day. Everything denotes simplicity and extreme poverty. Fastened to the dark and dirty walls, photos of labor workers clipped from reviews. Perhaps a placard, bearing the legend VOTE THIS WAY and the insignia of the party (a pair of crossed brooms) marked with a cross to show how it should be done. Perhaps someone has scrawled on the wall, letter by letter, WE WANT SOCIAL JUSTICE. Several chairs, one of them broken down, crammed with paper-covered books and old periodicals. At the left, a window overlooking the street. Near it a bench and beside it a rough table with an old typewriter. At the right, a door which opens into other rooms, to the lower floor, and the street in the rear. At the back, center, a door which opens on a passageway, through which turning to the left and descending a stair, one comes to the main entrance of the building, while turning to the right one arrives at the room where Buenaventura Padilla directs the electoral campaign of his party. It is a pity that though the door at the back is open at the moment, you can see only the hallway and not Buenaventura Padilla, seated at his desk, giving orders, surrounded by eager henchmen. We have to content ourselves with witnessing those of his friends and helpers who coming or leaving cross hurriedly through. But one can hear, sometimes clear, sometimes confused, according to the excitement of the moment, the noise of his followers and now and again pointlessly a trumpet blast, like those heard formerly. Likewise we shall not be able to see the main entrance to the building, before which a lively crowd has stationed itself all through the night, occasionally obstructing traffic and which has captured the entire interest of Concepción and Tonia, who are looking out of the window at the left. Concepción, a timid and modest young girl, is sitting on a bench with her arms on the windowsill, and Tonia, a plain sort of woman, standing behind her. The only other person at present in the room is Juan, an old laborer of about fifty years of age, who believes himself a

wild man, but who in reality is a good-natured enough fellow. Juan, who is tired and annoyed, is about to remove the table to some other part of the room, but can't make up his mind where. The First Man enters like a streak of lightning, through the door at the right and exits again at the back, right. Evidently he is bringing a message for Buenaventura Padilla, and it seems that he has also received instructions from him, for in a moment he returns on the run at the back, right, with Tortillita, and both leave by the door right.

TONIA.—(*To Concepción, motioning toward the window.*) Look, they're trying to start something. Did you see that auto that went by? They're trying to stir up our people.

CONCEPCIÓN.—Yes, yes, that's the truth. Tell Don Buena those people are trying to make trouble for us. (*Juan, hearing this, puts the table down and goes to the window.*) Quick! Go and tell him. (*Tonia goes out, rear, to the right.*) I think I'll go home.

MARIANA.—(*Another woman of the people, entering rear, from the right.*) Juan, I have not been able to get Ernesto's shoes yet.

CONCEPCIÓN.—(*Interrupting.*) Mariana, look how ugly things are getting out there. I think I'll go home.

MARIANA.—Oh, Virgin of Perpetual Help! If Ernesto were only here! (*Juan with a gesture of disillusion at what is taking place below and of disgust at the attitude of the women, returns to his table.*)

CONCEPCIÓN.—(*To Juan.*) This is beginning to look bad. It looks as if there's going to be a riot. I think I'd better go home.

JUAN.—There won't be anything of the kind! Those roughnecks are a bunch of cowards. Now let me alone. All of you get out of this room. (*He despairs at seeing Borracho.*)

BORRACHO.—(*Entering rear from the left, in the passageway.*) Long live Don Buenaventura Padilla! (*Shouting.*) Tonia! Tonia!... Where are you, Tonia? Long live Don Buenaventura Padilla! (*He goes out, rear, to the right.*)

PEÑITA.—(*Followed by the Second Man, enters rear from the right, running to the window.*) What's going on?

CONCEPCIÓN.—They're stirring our people up from an automobile. I think I'll...

PEÑITA.—(*Making sure at the window.*) But they're gone already. No need to be frightened by such a small thing. They're gone already...

TORTILLITA.—(*Enters running from the right with the First Man.*) Here come our

electors from Cibuco. They're in the backstreet.

FIRST MAN.—Yes, yes, they're there. They're about four hundred of them.

JUAN.—We'll have to father them in Manco Benito's shop. Tell Ventura. *(From the rear, right, enter the First, Second, and Third Man, Tortillita, Peñita, and Concepción, saying:)*

FIRST MAN.—Hail Mary, this is going to be good!

TORTILLITA.—We'll win because we'll win!

SECOND MAN.—Long live Don Buena!

ALL.—Long may he live! *(Gabble of voices within upon their arrival, after which enter First and Third Man center from the right.)*

FIRST MAN.—To Manco Benito's shop!

THIRD MAN.—Let's go! *(Calling down the passageway to Tortillita, who has remained behind inside.)* Come on, Tortillita.

FIRST MAN.—Come on! Long live Don Buena! *(He goes out running, right, followed by the Third Man.)*

TORTILLITA.—*(Enters running center, right, and goes to the door right, but stops at Peñita's call.)*

PEÑITA.—*(Enters center, right, calling.)* Tortillita, wait! They want you here. Let the others follow. *(Peñita goes out center, right, followed by Tortillita, who goes grumbling.)*

BORRACHO.—*(Enters center, right, followed by Tonia, and yells out in the passageway.)* Long live Don Buenaventura Padilla! *(Coming into the room.)* Long live Don Buenaventura Padilla!

TONIA.—Let's get out of here, Chencho, you're in a noisy mood...

BORRACHO.—Leave me alone. Tonia, leave me alone, leave me alone... Long live Don Buenaventura Padilla! *(A bugle call sounds within. The drunk gives a military salute and goes back to his vivas, while Tonia little by little drags him to the door at the right.)*

JUAN.—Get out, get out, I need this room. *(To Mariana who has seated herself on the bench.)* Please be so kind, Mariana. *(The drunk and Tonia go out right, struggling.)*

MARIANA.—Jesus, Villegas, you sure are a pain today! *(She goes out center, right, Juan closes the center door so that no more pests shall enter and draws the table near the window, but the door opens slowly and a ridiculous man in dark glasses sticks his nose in, with a sign on his chest that says "TOURIST, HELP THE BLIND" and also a sort of metal cup in his left hand to receive alms. He takes off his glasses and calls.)*

BLIND MAN.—Pst, Villegas. (*Juan turns and gives him a terrible look, making a gesture for him to get out, so that the Blind Man withdraws rapidly, intimidated, closing the door behind him. Juan, who has turned his back, exclaims after the other has gone:*)

JUAN.—Outside! I don't want anybody here now! (*As he is about to move the table again, he goes quite near the window and receives noisy applause and vivas! from the people below in the street, to whom he replies:*) Long live the Workers Party! Long live Buenaventura Padilla! (*The door at the back flies open and there enter the Blind Man and the Bugler.*)

BUGLER.—(*After blowing the bugle once is going to speak but has lost his voice. He makes an effort and says in a whisper:*) Hurray!... (*He climbs to the edge of the window.*)

BLIND MAN.—If you go on shouting you are going to lose your voice.

BUGLER.—(*After a heroic effort makes himself understood.*) Hurray! for the defender of our daughters' virtues. (*Blows the bugle once. The vivas! from the street can be heard.*)

BLIND MAN.—Hurray!

JUAN.—Outside! Outside! Don Buenaventura Padilla is having his breakfast here. Let him rest for a minute; he has not closed his eyes for the last twenty-four hours. And you (*Referring to the Bugler.*) leave the darn bugle alone; it's four in the morning. (*Puts them out and closes the door, reinforcing it with a chair. The bugle can be heard from the outside and is breaking his eardrums. As he approaches the window to get the table, he gets more applause from the street and yells out:*) Comrades, at last we are going to wipe out Don Ramón Torres and his gang. Hurray for Don Buenaventura Padilla, our Master! (*After getting hold of the table, Carmela comes in thru the door at the right, a beautiful, sweet youngster, who wants to be a practical woman. She brings in the breakfast service.*)

CARMELA.—(*Trying to find a place where to put the breakfast.*) The place has not been fixed up yet, Juan?

JUAN.—(*Hurries to help her.*) Carmelita! I'll fix everything right away. Here, give it to me, let me do it.

CARMELA.—No, no. Put the typewriter away first. On the floor! If father sees you! He loves that machine more than he does me! (*Juan picks up the typewriter and with great care, sets it on a chair.*) What have you been doing all this time? I bet you were asleep, now, almost at dawn...

JUAN.—(*Cleaning the table in a hurry and helping to set up the breakfast.*) Don't scold me, you know very well it took you a long time to go downstairs and ask Doña Zoila for this

coffee. Everything is ready. This little draft... No! This is not the place for the table!

CARMELA.—(*Teasing.*) Godfather Juan...

JUAN.—For twenty years I have been your father's bodyguard. Am I or am I not? Come here, sit down. (*Absentmindedly he removes the chair he previously put against the door and makes her sit down.*) Nobody appointed me, nobody ever paid me a cent for it, and God forbid anybody from offering me money! But (*With pride.*) I am Don Buenaventura's bodyguard. Since the first pier strike twenty years ago!

CARMELA.—Seventeen. (*Interrupting Juan before he can start to argue.*) It was when the police killed my mother.

JUAN.—Jails, persecutions, clubbings... scars... (*Looks for an old scar on his head.*) With this one Tirado was promoted to a sergeant.

CARMELA.—(*With friendly irony.*) And the one over... here? (*She runs her finger from one side to the other of his stomach.*)

JUAN.—Well, that one was with a barbed wire, running away...

CARMELA.—Godfather Juan, what will be your finish?

JUAN.—Do you think that after seventeen years I am going to allow a man who has gone for twenty-four hours without sleep, making the last preparations for today's elections, come into an innocent gust of dawn that lovingly nears him, lovingly plays on his back... (*Pointing out the nearness of the table to the window.*) and... (*As if of a sudden the air had turned him to ashes.*) paf!

CARMELA.—You exaggerate. (*Going to serve the coffee.*)

JUAN.—I exaggerate where the Master is concerned! (*Sweetening his expression.*) Carmela, my dear Godchild, the University has not ruined you! Has it? (*Despicably.*) The University! Books! Books! Bah, paper! Here, (*Touching his heart.*) have they filled you with paper here?

CARMELA.—(*Reproaches him, smiling, and pulls his nose.*) Oh, stop the foolishness! Fortunately father doesn't mind cold coffee...

JUAN.—Anyway it's good that you took a secretarial course at the University. The Master needs one. (*Confidentially and with dislike.*) Because the secretary he has... that Jaime Yepes... (*Sarcastically.*) his favorite pupil... (*Jaime Yepes enters from the right, a young man of uncultured manners who pretends to be refined, with affected gravity and superiority that marks with distaste all that surrounds him. Juan fearful of having been overheard displays a confused*

smile.) Hello, Jaime! Did you give orders for the other car to be downstairs? (He points to the right. Jaime nods.)

CARMELA.—I'll tell father. *(She leaves by the door Jaime left open. Juan, seeing the Bugler and the Blind Man approaching, runs to close the door and reinforces it with the chair.)*

JAIME.—Ah, coffee! *(He sits down to the table.)* Can it be the watery coffee made by the lady on the first floor?

JUAN.—*(Nears him as if to squash him but goes to the window.)* Yes, yes, you're right. Your back a little more to this side. *(He opens the window wider.)* Comfortable, eh? Stay. *(Changes his tone.)* But don't touch a thing. Not even a cracker!

JAIME.—Come now, man! I've been up all night the same as you, organizing our people for today's elections. Are you also going to turn traitor to the ideals of equality among men?

JUAN.—Equality! Exactly! At your age the Master didn't have breakfast. It was when no shipper would give him work as they considered him dangerous. What does this new generation know of the Master's first political triumphs! At first he was alone... alone! Then I joined him. Later others followed. And then came the great test, the pier strike... Now there are even clubs... clubs of the Labor Party all over. Luxurious clubs like this one, *(Gesture of incomprehension and then displeasance by Jaime.)* paid for punctually, no more than six months behind... Pictures... Typewriters... *(Jaime continues despective gestures.)*... Like this one.

JAIME.—*(With sarcasm.)* Dust it off.

JUAN.—*(Mechanically obeys with a handkerchief as he continues.)* And the election days like today. *(Puts the handkerchief away in a rage, realizing Jaime has been poking fun at him.)* The dawn would find us at the table of operations or in the jail, not stretched out in comfortable chairs. *(The chair he sits on breaks.)*

JAIME.—Is someone calling? *(Carmelita can be heard calling Godfather Juan to open the door.)*

JUAN.—*(Through the door.)* Carmelita? Yes, it's them. *(The Bugler can be heard. Juan calls to Jaime so loudly he jumps to his feet.)* Up, and put that table over there. *(While Jaime places the table on the right side of the room, Juan opens the door. Coming up the passageway surrounded by a group of comrades who push to get near him is Buenaventura Padilla, a man of fifty years of age, frank, sincere, authorative, generous, plain, gruff, who likes to hear himself because he can't avoid thinking himself a great man. His spirit keeps him going even though he has labored all through the night. Followed by Carmela he comes in fixing his shirt, saying to*

his companions something like: "Calm down, calm down, I'll fix everything," but his words can't be distinguished due to the noise made by the others. Juan, a little late and coolly helped by Jaime, tries to keep the group out of the room.) No. No, you can't come in. No, no, you can't. *(The Bugler and Blind Man try to force an entrance.)* Out!

BUGLER AND BLIND MAN.—*(Shout.)* We have to talk to Don Buena.

JUAN.—Ventura, shall I let those two in?

BUENAVENTURA.—*(Magnanimously.)* As you like. I am indifferent. *(Enter the Bugler, playing his instrument in triumph, and the Blind Man, followed by Peñita, Concepción, and Mariana who slip in, despite all of Juan's efforts. The two men go over to the bench to whisper.)*

JUAN.—*(To one of those who tries to enter.)* You, you, I name you Guard. Don't allow anyone to enter without the Master's consent. *(The Guard proud of his appointment closes the door, remaining outside with the rest of the group, which still echoes, Long live Buenaventura Padilla!)*

BUENAVENTURA.—*(To Carmelita.)* Now! Why have you brought me to the library?

BUGLER.—Library?

BUENAVENTURA.—*(Pointing to the chair full of books.)* Library. A blind man can see that.

BLIND MAN.—*(To Buenaventura's amazement.)* Yes, I see it.

BUENAVENTURA.—I've made a blind man see! *(The Blind Man removes his glasses for a moment.)*

PEÑITA.—*(To Buenaventura.)* You remember me, don't you? I am Peñita. *(He becomes annoyed upon being interrupted.)*

CARMELA.—Father, what we want is for you to have your breakfast here, where you can be more relaxed. *(To the Bugler, who has resumed his playing.)* Please keep quiet now. *(To Buenaventura.)* Take your medicine as you may not have time later.

JUAN.—Oh yes! Here it is! *(He takes the medicine from his pocket and places it on the tray.)*

BUENAVENTURA.—*(Indignant, points to Juan.)* I bet this has been his idea. I'm in fine shape for banquets now. *(Shivering with distance as he pronounces the word.)* Banquets! Is it really true, without exaggeration, that banquets are celebrated in the world? Remember, the day you see Buenaventura Padilla at a banquet, that day...

CARMELA.—Father, this is your breakfast.

BUENAVENTURA.—Breakfast, me? Alone? And all these people and the others (*Pointing to those who couldn't get in.*) and those downstairs and those who are coming along the road without sleep to vote for me. (*Pointing to some of those present.*) Don't you see them? They're about to drop in the arms of Orpheus.

CARMELA.—(*Murmurs.*) With "m," father.

BUENAVENTURA.—(*Correcting himself.*) Of Orpheum.* (*Over his protests Carmela takes him toward the table and begs him to be seated. She has almost succeeded when Buenaventura sees Peñita put the typewriter on the floor in order to sit on the chair.*) No! My typewriter! (*He picks it up tenderly.*) Carmelita, dear daughter, this is a struggle of ideals. It's the fight of the poor against the powerful. A fight! You all know what a fight is. In a fight neither side wants to lose. Result? Result: That both tries to win. And if we're fighting for the oppressed, am I going to stop for half an hour the launch of my ideals in the field of combat while I stuff myself? (*He places the typewriter on the table. Juan makes notes in a small notebook, without Buenaventura noticing.*) What are your pretensions? That they throw us on to the tragic beach where the sepulchers, in which cold remnants of the corpses of those who conform with living like slaves, rest? (*To Carmelita, who subtly and finally succeeds in making him sit.*) What fluency! Eh? How I can manage the language! Without universities! (*The handle of the cup is at the left-hand side, with which hand he raises it.*) Next time, remember I am not left-handed. Bring me a cup with the handle on the right side. (*Carmela in good humor turns the cup halfway.*) Ah! (*Coming out of his astound satisfaction, with anger again.*) But what time do I have for... (*The idea coming back to him.*) for banquets?... (*Gestures for the word.*) Banquets!... (*Coming back to reality. To Carmelita.*) What time do I have for breakfast when right now he has come to tell me... (*Points to Peñita who tries to get close to him.*) No, no, it was not you... Now that someone has come to tell me our people from Hato Arriba cannot come to town because the others are waiting by the river to club them? How about the judges at the polls? And the bails for the incriminators? And you, (*To Concepción who is trying hard to tell him something.*) say, what do you want? Don't speak to me if it isn't about ideals!

CONCEPCIÓN.—I came to vote for you illegally, Don Buena... (*Gesture of approval from Don Buena, more noise in the street.*) I have been stopped because I am not of age, but

* Buenaventura does not know the classical allusion is to Morpheus, the Greek god of sleep/dreams.—J.C.

mother says that I have to vote for you... Because she says that for one that does not have the necessities, the best thing is to get a job with enough pay to supply a decent living. And the day we win... Mother, you know her, Concha... the leader of Garbanzo, our suburb... and my name is Concepción.

BUENAVENTURA.—Ah, very good! Juan, look for the illegal card file in the living room.

JAIME.—Bah! Principles! Ideals! *(Makes a gesture of dislike.)*

GUARD.—*(Opens the door and shouts:)* Here is a reporter.

BUENAVENTURA.—Don't let him in.

JUAN.—I'll see him readily. *(To the Bugler who had fallen asleep.)* You, come and bring the cards. *(Both come out rear right.)*

BUENAVENTURA.—*(Getting up and nearing Jaime.)* This election is going to be honest. The only thing we will do is to put back the votes they steal from us.

[Later, following a confrontation with Buenaventura's arch enemy, Don Ramón, who backs his political opposition with gangsters and who has just threatened his life.—J.C.]

BUENAVENTURA.—How stupid talented men can be. Kill me! Bah! As if I would fear a death previously announced in advance! Cowardness has a... has a antithesis *(Mispronounced: "anti-thesis.")* Cowardness, don't forget, has a *(Accentuating the word.)* antithesis: That of not being cowardly. They can trample me, but I'll not run away. *(Juan looks for his notebook.)* Make notes, Juan... make notes... They kill me and what happens? There is Jaime. *(Juan puts his notebook away with indignation.)* And there is Juan my most faithful friend... *(Juan enchanted, again brings out his notebook.)* My blood, hear me, my blood...