

Gabriel García Márquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude

The banana company and the massacre: selections from chapters 12 and 15

Translated by Gregory Rabassa; selections prepared from the instructor's course copy

Chapter 12: the banana company arrives

DAZZLED BY SO MANY and such marvelous inventions, the people of Macondo did not know where their amazement began. They stayed up all night looking at the pale electric bulbs fed by the plant that Aureliano Triste had brought back when the train made its second trip, and it took time and effort for them to grow accustomed to its obsessive toom-toom. They became indignant over the living images that the prosperous merchant Bruno Crespi projected in the theater with the lion-head ticket windows, for the character who had died and was buried in one film and for whose misfortune tears of affliction had been shed would reappear alive and transformed into an Arab in the next one. The audience, who paid two cents apiece to share the difficulties of the actors, would not tolerate that outlandish fraud and they broke up the seats. The mayor, at the urging of Bruno Crespi, explained in a proclamation that the cinema was a machine of illusions that did not merit the emotional outbursts of the audience. With that discouraging explanation many felt that they had been the victims of some new and showy gypsy business and they decided not to return to the movies, considering that they already had too many troubles of their own to weep over the acted-out misfortunes of imaginary beings. Something similar happened with the cylinder phonographs that the merry matrons from France brought with them as a substitute for the antiquated hand organs and that for a time had serious effects on the livelihood of the band of musicians. At first curiosity increased the clientele on the forbidden street and there was even word of respectable ladies who disguised themselves as workers in order to observe the novelty of the phonograph from first hand, but from so much and such close observation they soon reached the conclusion that it was not an enchanted mill as everyone had thought and as the matrons had said, but a mechanical trick that could not be compared with something so moving, so human, and so full of everyday truth as a band of musicians. It was such a serious disappointment that when phonographs became so popular that there was one in every house they were not considered objects for amusement for adults but as something good for children to take apart. On the other hand, when someone from the town had the opportunity to test the crude reality of the telephone installed in the railroad station, which was thought to be a rudimentary version of the phonograph because of its crank, even the most incredulous were upset. It was as if God had decided to put to the test every capacity for surprise and was keeping the inhabitants of Macondo in a permanent alternation between excitement and disappointment, doubt and revelation, to such an extreme that no one knew for certain where the limits of reality lay. It was an intricate stew of truths and mirages that convulsed the ghost of José Arcadio Buendía under the chestnut tree with impatience and made him wander all through the house even in broad daylight. Ever since the railroad had been officially inaugurated and had begun to arrive with regularity on Wednesdays at eleven o'clock and the primitive wooden station with a desk, a telephone, and a ticket window had been built, on the streets of Macondo men and women were seen who had adopted everyday and normal customs and manners but who really looked like people out of a circus. In a town that had chafed under the tricks of the gypsies there was no future for those ambulatory acrobats of commerce who with equal effrontery offered a whistling kettle and a daily regime that would assure the salvation of the soul on the seventh day; but from those who let themselves be convinced out of fatigue and the ones who were always unwary, they reaped stupendous benefits. Among those theatrical creatures, wearing riding breeches and leggings, a pith helmet and steel-rimmed glasses, with topaz eyes and the skin of a thin rooster, there arrived in Macondo on one of so many Wednesdays the chubby and smiling Mr. Herbert, who ate at the house.

No one had noticed him at the table until the first bunch of bananas had been eaten. Aureliano Segundo had come across him by chance as he protested in broken Spanish because there were no rooms at the Hotel Jacob, and as he frequently did with strangers, he took him home. He was in the captive-balloon business, which had taken him halfway around the world with excellent profits, but he had not succeeded in taking anyone up in Macondo because they considered that invention backward after having seen and tried the gypsies' flying carpets. He was

leaving, therefore, on the next train. When they brought to the table the tiger-striped bunch of bananas that they were accustomed to hang in the dining room during lunch, he picked the first piece of fruit without great enthusiasm. But he kept on eating as he spoke, tasting, chewing, more with the distraction of a wise man than with the delight of a good eater, and when he finished the first bunch he asked them to bring him another. Then he took a small case with optical instruments out of the toolbox that he always carried with him. With the auspicious attention of a diamond merchant he examined the banana meticulously, dissecting it with a special scalpel, weighing the pieces on a pharmacist's scale, and calculating its breadth with a gunsmith's calipers. Then he took a series of instruments out of the chest with which he measured the temperature, the level of humidity in the atmosphere, and the intensity of the light. It was such an intriguing ceremony that no one could eat in peace as everybody waited for Mr. Herbert to pass a final and revealing judgment, but he did not say anything that allowed anyone to guess his intentions.

On the days that followed he was seen with a net and a small basket hunting butterflies on the outskirts of town. On Wednesday a group of engineers, agronomists, hydrologists, topographers, and surveyors arrived who for several weeks explored the places where Mr. Herbert had hunted his butterflies. Later on Mr. Jack Brown arrived in an extra coach that had been coupled onto the yellow train and that was silver-plated all over, with seats of episcopal velvet, and a roof of blue glass. Also arriving on the special car, fluttering around Mr. Brown, were the solemn lawyers dressed in black who in different times had followed Colonel Aureliano Buendía everywhere, and that led the people to think that the agronomists, hydrologists, topographers, and surveyors, like Mr. Herbert with his captive balloons and his colored butterflies and Mr. Brown with his mausoleum on wheels and his ferocious German shepherd dogs, had something to do with the war. There was not much time to think about it, however, because the suspicious inhabitants of Macondo barely began to wonder what the devil was going on when the town had already become transformed into an encampment of wooden houses with zinc roofs inhabited by foreigners who arrived on the train from halfway around the world, riding not only on the seats and platforms but even on the roof of the coaches. The gringos, who later on brought their languid wives in muslin dresses and large veiled hats, built a separate town across the railroad tracks with streets lined with palm trees, houses with screened windows, small white tables on the terraces, and fans mounted on the ceilings, and extensive blue lawns with peacocks and quails. The section was surrounded by a metal fence topped with a band of electrified chicken wire which during the cool summer mornings would be black with roasted swallows. No one knew yet what they were after, or whether they were actually nothing but philanthropists, and they had already caused a colossal disturbance, much more than that of the old gypsies, but less transitory and understandable. Endowed with means that had been reserved for Divine Providence in former times, they changed the pattern of the rains, accelerated the cycle of harvest, and moved the river from where it had always been and put it with its white stones and icy currents on the other side of the town, behind the cemetery. It was at that time that they built a fortress of reinforced concrete over the faded tomb of José Arcadio, so that the corpses smell of powder would not contaminate the waters. For the foreigners who arrived without love they converted the street of the loving matrons from France into a more extensive village than it had been, and on one glorious Wednesday they brought in a trainload of strange whores, Babylonish women skilled in age-old methods and in possession of all manner of unguents and devices to stimulate the unaroused, to give courage to the timid, to satiate the voracious, to exalt the modest man, to teach a lesson to repeaters, and to correct solitary people. The Street of the Turks, enriched by well-lit stores with products from abroad, displacing the old bazaars with their bright colors, overflowed on Saturday nights with the crowds of adventurers who bumped into each other among gambling tables, shooting galleries, the alley where the future was guessed and dreams interpreted, and tables of fried food and drinks, and on Sunday mornings there were scattered on the ground bodies that were sometimes those of happy drunkards and more often those of onlookers felled by shots, fists, knives, and bottles during the brawls. It was such a tumultuous

and intemperate invasion that during the first days it was impossible to walk through the streets because of the furniture and trunks, and the noise of the carpentry of those who were building their houses in any vacant lot without asking anyone's permission, and the scandalous behavior of couples who hung their hammocks between the almond trees and made love under the netting in broad daylight and in view of everyone. The only serene corner had been established by peaceful West Indian Negroes, who built a marginal street with wooden houses on piles where they would sit in the doors at dusk singing melancholy hymns in their disordered gabble. So many changes took place in such a short time that eight months after Mr. Herbert's visit the old inhabitants had a hard time recognizing their own town.

"Look at the mess we've got ourselves into," Colonel Aureliano Buendía said at that time, "just because we invited a gringo to eat some bananas."

Aureliano Segundo, on the other hand, could not contain his happiness over the avalanche of foreigners. The house was suddenly filled with unknown guests, with invincible and worldly carousers, and it became necessary to add bedrooms off the courtyard, widen the dining room, and exchange the old table for one that held sixteen people, with new china and silver, and even then they had to eat lunch in shifts. Fernanda had to swallow her scruples and their guests of the worst sort like kings as they muddled the porch with their boots, urinated in the garden, laid their mats down anywhere to take their siesta, and spoke without regard for the sensitivities of ladies or the proper behavior of gentlemen. Amaranta, was so scandalized with the plebeian invasion that she went back to eating in the kitchen as in olden days. Colonel Aureliano Buendía, convinced that the majority of those who came into his workshop to greet him were not doing it because of sympathy or regard but out of the curiosity to meet a historical relic, a museum fossil, decided to shut himself in by barring the door and he was not seen any more except on very rare occasions when he would sit at the street door. Úrsula, on the other hand, even during the days when she was already dragging her feet and walking about groping along the walls, felt a juvenile excitement as the time for the arrival of the train approached. "We have to prepare some meat and fish," she would order the four cooks, who hastened to have everything ready under the imperturbable direction of Santa Sofía de la Piedad. "We have to prepare everything," she insisted, "because we never know what these strangers like to eat." The train arrived during the hottest time of day. At lunchtime the house shook with the bustle of a marketplace, and the perspiring guests-who did not even know who their hosts were-trooped in to occupy the best places at the table, while the cooks bumped into each other with enormous kettles of soup, pots of meat, large gourds filled with vegetables, and troughs of rice, and passed around the contents of barrels of lemonade with inexhaustible ladles. The disorder was such that Fernanda was troubled by the idea that many were eating twice and on more than one occasion she was about to burst out with a vegetable hawker's insults because someone at the table in confusion asked her for the check. More than a year had gone by since Mr. Herbert's visit and the only thing that was known was that the gringos were planning to plant banana trees in the enchanted region that José Arcadio Buendía and his men had crossed in search of the route to the great inventions. Two other sons of Colonel Aureliano Buendía, with the cross of ashes on their foreheads, arrived, drawn by that great volcanic belch, and they justified their determination with a phrase that may have explained everybody's reasons.

"We came," they said, "because everyone is coming."

Remedios the Beauty was the only one who was immune to the banana plague. She was becalmed in a magnificent adolescence, more and more impenetrable to formality, more and more indifferent to malice and suspicion, happy in her own world of simple realities. She did not understand why women complicated their lives with corsets and petticoats, so she sewed herself a coarse cassock that she simply put over her and without further difficulties resolved the problem of dress, without taking away the feeling of being naked, which according to her lights was the only decent way to be when at home. They bothered her so much to cut the rain of hair that already

reached to her thighs and to make rolls with combs and braids with red ribbons that she simply shaved her head and used the hair to make wigs for the saints. The startling thing about her simplifying instinct was that the more she did away with fashion in a search for comfort and the more she passed over conventions as she obeyed spontaneity, the more disturbing her incredible beauty became and the more provocative she became to men. When the sons of Colonel Aureliano Buendía were in Macondo for the first time, Úrsula remembered that in their veins they bore the same blood as her great-granddaughter and she shuddered with a forgotten fright. “Keep your eyes wide open,” she warned her. “With any of them your children will come out with the tail of a pig.” The girl paid such little attention to the warning that she dressed up as a man and rolled around in the sand in order to climb the greased pole, and she was at the point of bringing on a tragedy among the seventeen cousins, who were driven mad by the unbearable spectacle. That was why none of them slept at the house when they visited the town and the four who had stayed lived in rented rooms at Úrsula’s insistence. Remedios the Beauty, however, would have died laughing if she had known about that precaution. Until her last moment on earth she was unaware that her irreparable fate as a disturbing woman was a daily disaster. Every time she appeared in the dining room, against Úrsula’s orders, she caused a panic of exasperation among the outsiders. It was all too evident that she was completely naked underneath her crude nightshirt and no one could understand that her shaved and perfect skull was not some kind of challenge, and that the boldness with which she uncovered her thighs to cool off was not a criminal provocation, nor was her pleasure when she sucked her fingers after eating. What no member of the family ever knew was that the strangers did not take long to realize that Remedios the Beauty gave off a breath of perturbation, a tormenting breeze that was still perceptible several hours after she had passed by. Men expert in the disturbances of love, experienced all over the world, stated that they had never suffered an anxiety similar to the one produced by the natural smell of Remedios the Beauty. On the porch with the begonias, in the parlor, in any place in the house, it was possible to point out the exact place where she had been and the time that had passed since she had left it. It was a definite, unmistakable trace that no one in the family could distinguish because it had been incorporated into the daily odors for a long time, but it was one that the outsiders identified immediately. They were the only ones, therefore, who understood how the young commander of the guard had died of love and how a gentleman from a faraway land had been plunged into desperation. Unaware of the restless circle in which she moved, of the unbearable state of intimate calamity that she provoked as she passed by, Remedios the Beauty treated the men without the least bit of malice and in the end upset them with her innocent complaisance. When Úrsula succeeded in imposing the command that she eat with Amaranta in the kitchen so that the outsiders would not see her, she felt more comfortable, because, after all, she was beyond all discipline. In reality, it made no difference to her where she ate, and not at regular hours but according to the whims of her appetite. Sometimes she would get up to have lunch at three in the morning, sleep all day long, and she spent several months with her timetable all in disarray until some casual incident would bring her back into the order of things. When things were going better she would get up at eleven o’clock in the morning and shut herself up until two o’clock, completely nude, in the bathroom, killing scorpions as she came out of her dense and prolonged sleep. Then she would throw water from the cistern over herself with a gourd. It was an act so prolonged, so meticulous, so rich in ceremonial aspects that one who did not know her well would have thought that she was given over to the deserved adoration of her own body. For her, however, that solitary rite lacked all sensuality and was simply a way of passing the time until she was hungry. One day, as she began to bathe herself, a stranger lifted a tile from the roof and was breathless at the tremendous spectacle of her nudity. She saw his desolate eyes through the broken tiles and had no reaction of shame but rather one of alarm.

Chapter 15: the strike, massacre, and official denial

The new Aureliano was a year old when the tension of the people broke with no forewarning. José Arcadio Segundo and other union leaders who had remained underground until then suddenly appeared one weekend and organized demonstrations in towns throughout the banana region. The police merely maintained public order. But on Monday night the leaders were taken from their homes and sent to jail in the capital of the province with two-pound irons on their legs. Taken among them were José Arcadio Segundo and Lorenzo Gavilán, a colonel in the Mexican revolution, exiled in Macondo, who said that he had been witness to the heroism of his comrade Artemio Cruz. They were set free, however, within three months because of the fact that the government and the banana company could not reach an agreement as to who should feed them in jail. The protests of the workers this time were based on the lack of sanitary facilities in their living quarters, the nonexistence of medical services, and terrible working conditions. They stated, furthermore, that they were not being paid in real money but in scrip, which was good only to buy Virginia ham in the company commissaries. José Arcadio Segundo was put in jail because he revealed that the scrip system was a way for the company to finance its fruit ships; which without the commissary merchandise would have to return empty from New Orleans to the banana ports. The other complaints were common knowledge. The company physicians did not examine the sick but had them line up behind one another in the dispensaries and a nurse would put a pill the color of copper sulfate on their tongues, whether they had malaria, gonorrhea, or constipation. It was a cure that was so common that children would stand in line several times and instead of swallowing the pills would take them home to use as bingo markers. The company workers were crowded together in miserable barracks. The engineers, instead of putting in toilets, had a portable latrine for every fifty people brought to the camps at Christmas time and they held public demonstrations of how to use them so that they would last longer. The decrepit lawyers dressed in black who during other times had besieged Colonel Aureliano Buendía and who now were controlled by the banana company dismissed those demands with decisions that seemed like acts of magic. When the workers drew up a list of unanimous petitions, a long time passed before they were able to notify the banana company officially. As soon as he found out about the agreement Mr. Brown hitched his luxurious glassed-in coach to the train and disappeared from Macondo along with the more prominent representatives of his company. Nonetheless some workers found one of them the following Saturday in a brothel and they made him sign a copy of the sheet with the demands while he was naked with the women who had helped to entrap him. The mournful lawyers showed in court that that man had nothing to do with the company and in order that no one doubt their arguments they had him jailed as an impostor. Later on, Mr. Brown was surprised traveling incognito, in a third-class coach and they made him sign another copy of the demands. On the following day he appeared before the judges with his hair dyed black and speaking flawless Spanish. The lawyers showed that the man was not Mr. Jack Brown, the superintendent of the banana company, born in Prattville Alabama, but a harmless vendor of medicinal plants, born in Macondo and baptized there with the name of Dagoberto Fonseca. A while later, faced with a new attempt by the workers the lawyers publicly exhibited Mr. Brown's death certificate, attested to by consuls and foreign ministers which bore witness that on June ninth last he had been run over by a fire engine in Chicago. Tired of that hermeneutical delirium, the workers turned away from the authorities in Macondo and brought their complaints up to the higher courts. It was there that the sleight-of-hand lawyers proved that the demands lacked all validity for the simple reason that the banana company did not have, never had had, and never would have any workers in its service because they were all hired on a temporary and occasional basis. So that the fable of the Virginia ham was nonsense, the same as that of the miraculous pills and the Yuletide toilets, and by a decision of the court it was established and set down in solemn decrees that the workers did not exist.

The great strike broke out. Cultivation stopped halfway, the fruit rotted on the trees and the hundred-twenty-car trains remained on the sidings. The idle workers overflowed the towns. The Street of the Turks echoed with a Saturday that lasted for several days and in the poolroom at the Hotel Jacob they had to arrange twenty-four-hour shifts. That was where José Arcadio Segundo was on the day it was announced that the army had been assigned to reestablish public order. Although he was not a man given to omens, the news was like an announcement of death that he had been waiting for ever since that distant morning when Colonel Gerineldo Márquez had let him see an execution. The bad omen did not change his solemnity, however. He took the shot he had planned and it was good. A short time later the drumbeats, the shrill of the bugle, the shouting and running of the people told him that not only had the game of pool come to an end, but also the silent and solitary game that he had been playing with himself ever since that dawn execution. Then he went out into the street and saw them. There were three regiments, whose march in time to a galley drum made the earth tremble. Their snorting of a many-headed dragon filled the glow of noon with a pestilential vapor. They were short, stocky, and brutelike. They perspired with the sweat of a horse and had a smell of suntanned hide and the taciturn and impenetrable perseverance of men from the uplands. Although it took them over an hour to pass by, one might have thought that they were only a few squads marching in a circle, because they were all identical, sons of the same bitch, and with the same stolidity they all bore the weight of their packs and canteens, the shame of their rifles with fixed bayonets, and the chancre of blind obedience and a sense of honor. Úrsula heard them pass from her bed in the shadows and she made a crow with her fingers. Santa Sofía de la Piedad existed for an instant, leaning over the embroidered tablecloth that she had just ironed, and she thought of her son, José Arcadio Segundo, who without changing expression watched the last soldiers pass by the door of the Hotel Jacob.

Martial law enabled the army to assume the functions of arbitrator in the controversy, but no effort at conciliation was made. As soon as they appeared in Macondo, the soldiers put aside their rifles and cut and loaded the bananas and started the trains running. The workers, who had been content to wait until then, went into the woods with no other weapons but their working machetes and they began to sabotage the sabotage. They burned plantations and commissaries, tore up tracks to impede the passage of the trains that began to open their path with machine-gun fire, and they cut telegraph and telephone wires. The irrigation ditches were stained with blood. Mr. Brown, who was alive in the electrified chicken coop, was taken out of Macondo with his family and those of his fellow countrymen and brought to a safe place under the protection of the army. The situation was threatening to lead to a bloody and unequal civil war when the authorities called upon the workers to gather in Macondo. The summons announced that the civil and military leader of the province would arrive on the following Friday ready to intercede in the conflict.

José Arcadio Segundo was in the crowd that had gathered at the station on Friday since early in the morning. He had taken part in a meeting of union leaders and had been commissioned, along with Colonel Gavilán, to mingle in the crowd and orient it according to how things went. He did not feel well and a salty paste was beginning to collect on his palate when he noticed that the army had set up machine-gun emplacements around the small square and that the wired city of the banana company was protected by artillery pieces. Around twelve o'clock, waiting for a train that was not arriving, more than three thousand people, workers, women, and children, had spilled out of the open space in front of the station and were pressing into the neighboring streets, which the army had closed off with rows of machine guns. At that time it all seemed more like a jubilant fair than a waiting crowd. They had brought over the fritter and drink stands from the Street of the Turks and the people were in good spirits as they bore the tedium of waiting and the scorching sun. A short time before three o'clock the rumor spread that the official train would not arrive until the following day. The crowd let out a sigh of disappointment. An army lieutenant then climbed up onto the roof of the station where there were four machine-gun emplacements aiming at the crowd and called for silence. Next to José Arcadio Segundo there was a barefooted woman, very fat,

with two children between the ages of four and seven. She was carrying the smaller one and she asked José Arcadio Segundo, without knowing him, if he would lift up the other one so that he could hear better. José Arcadio Segundo put the child on his shoulders. Many years later that child would still tell, to the disbelief of all, that he had seen the lieutenant reading Decree No. 4 of the civil and military leader of the province through an old phonograph horn. It had been signed by General Carlos Cortes Vargas and his secretary, Major Enrique García Isaza, and in three articles of eighty words he declared the strikers to be a “bunch of hoodlums” and he authorized the army to shoot to kill.

After the decree was read, in the midst of a deafening hoot of protest, a captain took the place of the lieutenant on the roof of the station and with the horn he signaled that he wanted to speak. The crowd was quiet again.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the captain said in a low voice that was slow and a little tired. “you have five minutes to withdraw.”

The redoubled hooting and shouting drowned out the bugle call that announced the start of the count. No one moved.

Five minutes have passed,” the captain said in the same tone. “One more minute and we’ll open fire.”

José Arcadio Segundo, sweating ice, lowered the child and gave him to the woman. “Those bastards might just shoot,” she murmured. José Arcadio Segundo did not have time to speak because at that instant he recognized the hoarse voice of Colonel Gavilán echoing the words of the woman with a shout. Intoxicated by the tension, by the miraculous depth of the silence, and furthermore convinced that nothing could move that crowd held tight in a fascination with death, José Arcadio Segundo raised himself up over the heads in front of him and for the first time in his life he raised his voice.

“You bastards!” he shouted. “Take the extra minute and stick it up your ass!”

After his shout something happened that did not bring on fright but a kind of hallucination. The captain gave the order to fire and fourteen machine guns answered at once. But it all seemed like a farce. It was as if the machine guns had been loaded with caps, because their panting rattle could be heard and their incandescent spitting could be seen, but not the slightest reaction was perceived, not a cry, not even a sigh among the compact crowd that seemed petrified by an instantaneous invulnerability. Suddenly, on one side-of the station, a cry of death tore open the enchantment: “Aaaagh, Mother.” A seismic voice, a volcanic breath. the roar of a cataclysm broke out in the center of the crowd with a great potential of expansion. José Arcadio Segundo barely had time to pick up the child while the mother with the other one was swallowed up by the crowd that swirled about in panic.

Many years later that child would still tell, in spite of people thinking that he was a crazy old man, how José Arcadio Segundo had lifted him over his head and hauled him, almost in the air, as if floating on the terror of the crowd, toward a nearby street. The child’s privileged position allowed him to see at that moment that the wild mass was starting to get to the corner and the row of machine guns opened fire. Several voices shouted at the same time:

“Get down! Get down!”

The people in front had already done so, swept down by the wave of bullets. The survivors, instead of getting down, tried to go back to the small square, and the panic became a dragon’s tail as one compact wave ran against another which was moving in the opposite direction, toward the other dragon’s tail In the street across the way, where the machine guns were also firing without cease. They were Penned in. swirling about in a gigantic

whirlwind that little by little was being reduced to its epicenter as the edges were systematically being cut off all around like an onion being peeled by the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine guns. The child saw a woman kneeling with her arms in the shape of a cross in an open space, mysteriously free of the stampede. José Arcadio Segundo put him up there at the moment he fell with his face bathed in blood, before the colossal troop wiped out the empty space, the kneeling woman, the light of the high, drought-stricken sky, and the whorish world where Úrsula Iguarán had sold so many little candy animals.

When José Arcadio Segundo came to he was lying face up in the darkness. He realized that he was riding on an endless and silent train and that his head was caked with dry blood and that all his bones ached. He felt an intolerable desire to sleep. Prepared to sleep for many hours, safe from the terror and the horror, he made himself comfortable on the side that pained him less, and only then did he discover that he was lying against dead people. There was no free space in the car except for an aisle in the middle. Several hours must have passed since the massacre because the corpses had the same temperature as a plaster in autumn and the same consistency of petrified foam that it had, and those who had put them in the car had had time to pile them up in the same way in which they transported bunches of bananas. Trying to flee from the nightmare, José Arcadio Segundo dragged himself from one car to another in the direction in which the train was heading, and in the flashes of light that broke through the wooden slats as they went through sleeping towns he saw the man corpses, woman corpses, child corpses who would be thrown into the sea like rejected bananas. He recognized only a woman who sold drinks in the square and Colonel Gavilán, who still held wrapped in his hand the belt with a buckle of Morelia silver with which he had tried to open his way through the panic. When he got to the first car he jumped into the darkness and lay beside the tracks until the train had passed. It was the longest one he had ever seen, with almost two hundred freight cars and a locomotive at either end and a third one in the middle. It had no lights, not even the red and green running lights, and it slipped off with a nocturnal and stealthy velocity. On top of the cars there could be seen the dark shapes of the soldiers with their emplaced machine guns.

After midnight a torrential cloudburst came up. José Arcadio Segundo did not know where it was that he had jumped off, but he knew that by going in the opposite direction to that of the train he would reach Macondo. After walking for more than three hours, soaked to the skin, with a terrible headache, he was able to make out the first houses in the light of dawn. Attracted by the smell of coffee, he went into a kitchen where a woman with a child in her arms was leaning over the stove.

“Hello,” he said, exhausted. “I’m José Arcadio Segundo Buendía.”

He pronounced his whole name, letter by letter, in order to convince her that he was alive. He was wise in doing so, because the woman had thought that he was an apparition as she saw the dirty, shadowy figure with his head and clothing dirty with blood and touched with the solemnity of death come through the door. She recognized him. She brought him a blanket so that he could wrap himself up while his clothes dried by the fire, she warmed some water to wash his wound, which was only a flesh wound, and she gave him a clean diaper to bandage his head. Then she gave him a mug of coffee without sugar as she had been told the Buendías drank it, and she spread his clothing out near the fire.

José Arcadio Segundo did not speak until he had finished drinking his coffee.

“There must have been three thousand of them” he murmured.

“What?”

“The dead,” he clarified. “It must have been an of the people who were at the station.”

The woman measured him with a pitying look. "There haven't been any dead here," she said. "Since the time of your uncle, the colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo." In the three kitchens where José Arcadio Segundo stopped before reaching home they told him the same thing. "There weren't any dead. He went through the small square by the station and he saw the fritter stands piled one on top of the other and he could find no trace of the massacre. The streets were deserted under the persistent rain and the houses locked up with no trace of life inside. The only human note was the first tolling of the bells for mass. He knocked at the door at Colonel Gavilán's house. A pregnant woman whom he had seen several times closed the door in his face. "He left," she said, frightened. "He went back to his own country." The main entrance to the wire chicken coop was guarded as always by two local policemen who looked as if they were made of stone under the rain, with raincoats and rubber boots. On their marginal street the West Indian Negroes were singing Saturday psalms. José Arcadio Segundo jumped over the courtyard wall and entered the house through the kitchen. Santa Sofía de la Piedad barely raised her voice. "Don't let Fernanda see you," she said. "She's just getting up." As if she were fulfilling an implicit pact, she took her son to the "chamberpot room." arranged Melquíades' broken-down cot for him and at two in the afternoon, while Fernanda was taking her siesta, she passed a plate of food in to him through the window.

Aureliano Segundo had slept at home because the rain had caught him time and at three in the afternoon he was still waiting for it to clear. Informed in secret by Santa Sofía de la Piedad, he visited his brother in Melquíades' room at that time. He did not believe the version of the massacre or the nightmare trip of the train loaded with corpses traveling toward the sea either. The night before he had read an extraordinary proclamation to the nation which said that the workers had left the station and had returned home in peaceful groups. The proclamation also stated that the union leaders, with great patriotic spirit, had reduced their demands to two points: a reform of medical services and the building of latrines in the living quarters. It was stated later that when the military authorities obtained the agreement with the workers, they hastened to tell Mr. Brown and he not only accepted the new conditions but offered to pay for three days of public festivities to celebrate the end of the conflict. Except that when the military asked him on what date they could announce the signing of the agreement, he looked out the window at the sky crossed with lightning flashes and made a profound gesture of doubt.

"When the rain stops," he said. "As long as the rain lasts we're suspending all activities."

It had not rained for three months and there had been a drought. But when Mr. Brown announced his decision a torrential downpour spread over the whole banana region. It was the one that caught José Arcadio Segundo on his way to Macondo. A week later it was still raining. The official version, repeated a thousand times and mangled out all over the country by every means of communication the government found at hand, was finally accepted: there were no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families, and the banana company was suspending all activity until the rains stopped. Martial law continued with an eye to the necessity of taking emergency measures for the public disaster of the endless downpour, but the troops were confined to quarters. During the day the soldiers walked through the torrents in the streets with their pant legs rolled up, playing with boats with the children. At night after taps, they knocked doors down with their rifle butts, hauled suspects out of their beds, and took them off on trips from which there was no return. The search for and extermination of the hoodlums, murderers, arsonists, and rebels of Decree No. 4 was still going on, but the military denied it even to the relatives of the victims who crowded the commandant's offices in search of news. "You must have been dreaming," the officers insisted. "Nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened, and nothing ever will happen. "This is a happy town." In that way they were finally able to wipe out the union leaders.

The only survivor was José Arcadio Segundo. One February night the unmistakable blows of rifle butts were heard at the door. Aureliano Segundo, who was still waiting for it to clear, opened the door to six soldiers under the command of an officer. Soaking from the rain, without saying a word, they searched the house room by room,

closet by closet, from parlor to pantry. Úrsula woke up when they turned on the light in her room and she did not breathe while the march went on but held her fingers in the shape of a cross, pointing them to where the soldiers were moving about. Santa Sofía de la Piedad managed to warn José Arcadio Segundo, who was sleeping in Melquíades' room, but he could see that it was too late to try to escape. So Santa Sofía de la Piedad locked the door again and he put on his shirt and his shoes and sat down on the cot to wait for them. At that moment they were searching the gold workshop. The officer made them open the padlock and with a quick sweep of his lantern he saw the workbench and the glass cupboard with bottles of acid and instruments that were still where their owner had left them and he seemed to understand that no one lived in that room. He wisely asked Aureliano Segundo if he was a silversmith, however, and the latter explained to him that it had been Colonel Aureliano Buendía's workshop. "Oho," the officer said, turned on the lights, and ordered such a minute search that they did not miss the eighteen little gold fishes that had not been melted down and that were hidden behind the bottles Is their tin can. The officer examined them one by one on the workbench and then he turned human. "I'd like to take one, if I may," he said. "At one time they were a mark of subversion, but now they're relics." He was young, almost an adolescent, with no sign of timidity and with a natural pleasant manner that had not shown itself until then. Aureliano Segundo gave him the little fish. The officer put it in his shirt pocket with a childlike glow in his eyes and he put the others back in the can and set it back where it had been.

"It's a wonderful memento," he said. "Colonel Aureliano Buendía was one of our greatest men."

Nevertheless, that surge of humanity did not alter his professional conduct. At Melquíades' room, which was locked up again with the padlock, Santa Sofía de la Piedad tried one last hope. "No one has lived in that room for a century," she said. The officer had it opened and flashed the beam of the lantern over it, and Aureliano Segundo and Santa Sofía de la Piedad saw the Arab eyes of José Arcadio Segundo at the moment when the ray of light passed over his face and they understood that it was the end of one anxiety and the beginning of another which would find relief only in resignation. But the officer continued examining the room with the lantern and showed no sign of interest until he discovered the seventy-two chamberpots piled up in the cupboards. Then he turned on the light. José Arcadio Segundo was sitting on the edge of the cot, ready to go, more solemn and pensive than ever. In the background were the shelves with the shredded books, the rolls of parchment, and the clean and orderly worktable with the ink still fresh in the inkwells. There was the same pureness in the air, the same clarity, the same respite from dust and destruction that Aureliano Segundo had known in childhood and that only Colonel Aureliano Buendía could not perceive. But the officer was only interested in the chamberpots.

"How many people live in this house?" he asked.

"Five."

The officer obviously did not understand. He paused with his glance on the space where Aureliano Segundo and Santa Soft de la Piedad were still seeing José Arcadio Segundo and the latter also realized that the soldier was looking at him without seeing him. Then he turned out the light and closed the door. When he spoke to the soldiers, Aureliano, Segundo understood that the young officer had seen the room with the same eyes as Colonel Aureliano Buendía.

"It's obvious that no one has been in that room for at least a hundred years." the officer said to the soldiers. "There must even be snakes in there."

When the door closed, José Arcadio Segundo was sure that the war was over. Years before Colonel Aureliano Buendía had spoken to him about the fascination of war and had tried to show it to him with countless examples drawn from his own experience. He had believed him. But the night when the soldiers looked at him without

seeing him while he thought about the tension of the past few months, the misery of jail, the panic at the station, and the train loaded with dead people, José Arcadio Segundo reached the conclusion that Colonel Aureliano Buendía was nothing but a faker or an imbecile. He could not understand why he had needed so many words to explain what he felt in war because one was enough: fear. In Melquíades' room, on the other hand, protected by the supernatural light, by the sound of the rain, by the feeling of being invisible, he found the repose that he had not had for one single instant during his previous life, and the only fear that remained was that they would bury him alive. He told Santa Sofía de la Piedad about it when she brought him his daily meals and she promised to struggle to stay alive even beyond her natural forces in order to make sure that they would bury him dead. Free from all fear, José Arcadio Segundo dedicated himself then to peruse the manuscripts of Melquíades many times, and with so much more pleasure when he could not understand them. He became accustomed to the sound of the rain, which after two months had become another form of silence, and the only thing that disturbed his solitude was the coming and going of Santa Sofía de la Piedad. He asked her, therefore, to leave the meals on the windowsill and padlock the door. The rest of the family forgot about him including Fernanda, who did not mind leaving him there when she found that the soldiers had seen him without recognizing him. After six months of enclosure, since the soldiers had left Macondo Aureliano Segundo removed the padlock, looking for someone he could talk to until the rain stopped. As soon as he opened the door he felt the pestilential attack of the chamberpots, which were placed on the floor and all of which had been used several times. José Arcadio Segundo, devoured by baldness, indifferent to the air that had been sharpened by the nauseating vapors, was still reading and rereading the unintelligible parchments. He was illuminated by a seraphic glow. He scarcely raised his eyes when he heard the door open, but that look was enough for his brother to see repeated in it the irreparable fate of his great-grandfather.

“There were more than three thousand of them,” was all that José Arcadio Segundo said. “I’m sure now that they were everybody who had been at the station.”