

The Celt's Dream



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2010, Santillana Ediciones Generales, S. L.
Torrelaguna, 60. 28043 Madrid Telephone 91 744
90 60 Fax 91 744 92 24 www. alfaguara, com

ISBN: 978-84-204-0682-4 Legal deposit: M. 39-038-
2010 Printed in Spain - Printed in Spain

Design:

Project by Enric Satué

© Cover: Pep Carrió

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*For Alvaro, Gonzalo, and
Morgana. And for Josefina,
Leandro, Ariadna, Aitana,
Isabella, and Anaís.*

Each one of us is, successively, not one, but many. And these successive personalities, which emerge from one another, often present the rarest and most astonishing contrasts among themselves.

JOSÉ ENRIQUE RODRÍGUEZ
Reasons of
Proteus

The Congo

When they opened the door of the cell, a stream of light and a gust of wind also brought in the noise of the street, which the stone walls muffled, awakening Roger, startled. Blinking, still confused and struggling to calm himself, he spotted, leaning against the door frame, the silhouette of the *sheriff*. His flabby face, with blonde mustaches and malice-filled little eyes, gazed at him with the disdain he had never attempted to hide. Here was someone who would suffer if the English Government granted his plea for clemency.

—Visitor —murmured the *sheriff*, not taking his eyes off him.

He stood up, rubbing his arms. How long had he slept? One of the torments of Pentonville Prison was not knowing the time. In Brixton jail and at the Tower of London, he could hear the bells marking the half hours and the hours; here, the thick walls prevented the sounds of the bells from the churches on Caledonian Road or the bustle of the market in Islington from reaching the interior of the prison, and the guards stationed at the door strictly adhered to the order not to speak to him. The *sheriff* handcuffed him and indicated for him to walk in front of him. Would his lawyer bring him any good news? Had the cabinet met and made a decision? Perhaps the look from the *sheriff*, more laden than ever with the displeasure he inspired, was due to the fact that his sentence had been commuted. He was walking down the long corridor of red bricks blackened by dirt, between the metal doors of the cells and faded walls where every twenty or twenty-five steps there was a high barred window through which reached

to glimpse a small piece of grayish sky. Why was he so cold? It was July, the heart of summer, there was no reason for that ice that prickled his skin.

Upon entering the narrow visiting room, he felt distressed. Who awaited him there was not his lawyer, *maitre* George Gavan Duffy, but one of his assistants, a young, blond, and disheveled man with prominent cheekbones, dressed like a meter-man, whom he had seen during the four days of the trial, carrying papers back and forth for the defense lawyers. Why did *maitre* Gavan Duffy, instead of coming in person, send one of his clerks?

The young man shot him a cold glance. His eyes reflected anger and disgust. What was wrong with this idiot? "He looks at me as if I were a vermin," Roger thought.

—Any complaints?

The young man shook his head. He took a breath before speaking:

—Regarding the pardon request, still—he murmured dryly, making a grimace that further distorted his features—. We must wait for the Council of Ministers to convene.

Roger was troubled by the presence of the *sheriff* and the other guard in the small visiting room. Although they remained silent and motionless, he knew they were attentive to everything he and others said. This thought weighed heavily on his chest and made it difficult for him to breathe.

—But considering the recent events—added the young blond man, blinking for the first time and dramatically opening and closing his mouth—, everything has now become more difficult.

—News from the outside does not reach Pentonville Prison. What has happened?

What if the German Admiralty had finally decided to attack Great Britain from the shores of Ireland? What if the dreamed invasion was taking place and the cannons of the Kaiser

were avenging at that very moment the Irish patriots shot by the English during the Easter Rising? If the war had taken that turn, their plans were being realized, despite everything.

—Now it has become difficult, perhaps impossible, to succeed — the intern repeated. He was pale, holding back his indignation, and Roger guessed that beneath the whitish skin of his complexion lay his skull. He sensed that, behind him, the *sheriff* was smiling.

—What are you talking about? Mr. Gavan Duffy was optimistic about the petition. What happened to change his mind?

—His diaries — the young man spelled out, with another grimace of distaste. He had lowered his voice and Roger found it hard to hear him—. Scotland Yard discovered them at his house on Ebury Street.

He took a long pause, waiting for Roger to say something. But since Roger had fallen silent, he unleashed his indignation and twisted his mouth:

—How could you be so foolish, man of God — he spoke with a slowness that made his anger more evident—. How could you put such things in ink and paper, man of God? And if you did, how did you not take the elementary precaution of destroying those diaries before conspiring against the British Empire?

«It is an insult for this youth to call me "man of God"», Roger thought. He was rude because, at the very least, he was twice the age of this effeminate young man.

—Fragments of those diaries are now circulating everywhere — the intern added, more calmly, though still displeased, now without looking at him—. At the Admiralty, the spokesperson for the minister, Captain Reginald Hall himself, has handed out copies to dozens of journalists. They are all over London. In Parliament, in the House of Lords, in the liberal and conservative clubs, in the newsrooms, in churches. There is no other topic being discussed in the city.

Roger said nothing. He did not move. He had, once again, that strange sensation that had seized him many times in recent months, since that gray and rainy morning in April 1916 when, frozen with cold, he was arrested among the ruins of McKenna's Fort, in the south of Ireland: it was not about him, it was someone else they were talking about, someone else to whom these things were happening.

—I know that your private life is none of my business, nor Mr. Gavan Duffy's nor anyone else's —added the young intern, trying to lessen the cholera that tinged his voice—. This is strictly a professional matter. Mr. Gavan Duffy wanted to keep you informed of the situation. And to warn you. The plea for clemency may be compromised. This morning, in some newspapers, there are already protests, leaks, rumors about the contents of your diaries. Public opinion in favor of the petition could be affected. A mere assumption, of course. Mr. Gavan Duffy will keep you informed. Would you like me to pass on any message?

The prisoner shook his head almost imperceptibly. Immediately, he turned around, facing the visiting room door. The *sheriff* made a gesture with his chubby face towards the guard. The guard slid the heavy bolt and the door opened. The return to the cell felt endless. During the walk down the long hallway with stone walls of reddish-black bricks, he felt that at any moment he would trip and fall face down onto those damp stones and would not get back up. Upon reaching the metal door of the cell, he recalled: the day they brought him to Pentonville Prison, the *sheriff* told him that all the prisoners who occupied this cell, without exception, had ended up on the gallows.

—Can I take a bath today? —he asked, before entering.

The obese jailer shook his head, looking him in the eyes with the same disgust that Roger had noticed in the intern's gaze.

—You won't be able to bathe until the execution day— said the *sheriff*, savoring each word—. And on that day, only if it is your last wish. Others, instead of a bath, prefer a good meal. A bad deal for Mr. Ellis, because then, when they feel the noose, they mess themselves. And they leave the place in a filth. Mr. Ellis is the executioner, in case you didn't know.

When he felt the door close behind him, he lay down on his back on the small cot. He closed his eyes. It would have been nice to feel the cold water from that pipe stimulating his skin and making it blue with cold. In Pentonville Prison, prisoners, except for those sentenced to death, could bathe with soap once a week in that cold water stream. The conditions in the cells were tolerable. In contrast, he recalled with a shiver the filth of Brixton jail, where he had become infested with lice and fleas that swarmed on the mattress of his cot, covering his back, legs, and arms with bites. He tried to think about that, but again and again the disgusted face and odious voice of the blond passerby dressed like a mannequin who had been sent by *maitre* Gavan Duffy instead of coming himself to deliver the bad news returned to his memory.

III

He did not remember anything from his birth on September 1, 1864, at Doyle's Cottage, Lawson Terrace, in the Sandy Cove suburb of Dublin, of course. Although he always knew that he had seen the light in the capital of Ireland, for much of his life he assumed what his father, Captain Roger Casement, who had served eight distinguished years in the Third Regiment of Light Dragoons in India, instilled in him: that his true birthplace was Antrim County, in the heart of Ulster, the Protestant and pro-British Ireland, where the Casement lineage had been established since the eighteenth century.

Roger was raised and educated as an Anglican of the Church of Ireland, just like his siblings Agnes (Nina), Charles, and Tom —the three older than him— but, even before he could think for himself, he sensed that in matters of religion not everything in his family was as harmonious as in other aspects. Even for a child of a few years, it was impossible not to notice that his mother, when she was with her sisters and cousins from Scotland, acted in a way that seemed to hide something. He would discover what it was as a teenager: although, in appearance, to marry his father, Anne Jephson had converted to Protestantism, secretly from her husband she remained Catholic (“papist” Captain Casement would have said), confessing, attending Mass, and receiving communion, and, in the most zealous of secrets, he himself had been baptized as a Catholic when he turned four, during a vacation trip that he and his siblings had taken.

they went with their mother to Rhyl, in the north of Wales, where the maternal aunts and uncles lived there.

In those years, in Dublin, or during the periods spent in London and Jersey, Roger was not at all interested in religion, although, to avoid displeasing his father, he would pray, sing, and respectfully follow the service during Sunday worship. His mother had given him piano lessons, and he had a clear and steady voice that often earned him applause at family gatherings when he sang old Irish ballads. What truly captivated him during that time were the stories that Captain Casement would tell him and his brothers when he was in a good mood. Stories of India and Afghanistan, especially regarding his battles against the Afghans and the Sikhs. Those names and exotic landscapes, those journeys through jungles and mountains hiding treasures, wild beasts, pests, ancient towns with strange customs, barbaric gods, ignited his imagination. Sometimes, those tales bored his brothers, but little Roger could have spent hours and days listening to his father's adventures on the remote borders of the Empire.

When he learned to read, he enjoyed immersing himself in the stories of great navigators, the Vikings, Portuguese, English, and Spanish who had traversed the seas of the planet, vaporizing the myths according to which, upon reaching a certain point, the seawater began to boil, abysses opened, and monsters appeared whose jaws could swallow an entire ship. However, between hearsay and readings, Roger always preferred to listen to those adventures from his father's mouth. Captain Casement had a warm voice, vividly describing the jungles of India or the rocky outcrops of Khyber Pass, in Afghanistan, where his company of light dragons was once ambushed by a mass of turbanned fanatics against whom the brave English soldiers faced.

a gunfire first, then with the bayonet, and finally with daggers and bare hands, until forcing them to retreat defeated. But it was not the feats of weapons that most dazzled the imagination of little Roger, but the journeys, opening paths through landscapes never trodden by white man, the physical feats of endurance, overcoming the obstacles of nature. His father was entertaining but very strict and did not hesitate to beat his children when they misbehaved, even Nina, the little girl, since that was how offenses were punished in the Army, and he had found that only that form of punishment was effective.

Although he admired his father, the one Roger truly loved was his mother, that slender woman who seemed to float instead of walk, with light eyes and hair, and whose hands, so soft, filled him with happiness when they tangled in his curls or caressed his body during bath time. One of the first things he would learn was — was he five or six years old? — that he could only run to throw himself into his mother's arms when the captain wasn't nearby. He, true to his family's Puritan tradition, was against children growing up spoiled, as that made them weak for the struggles of life. In front of his father, Roger kept his distance from the pale and delicate Anne Jephson. But when the latter went off to meet his friends at the club or to take a walk, he would run to her, who showered him with kisses and affection. Sometimes, Charles, Nina, and Tom would protest: 'You love Roger more than us.' His mother assured them that she did not; she loved them all equally, only Roger was very little and needed more attention and affection than the older ones.

When his mother died in 1873, Roger was nine years old. He had learned to swim and won all the races against children of his age and even older ones. Unlike Nina, Charles, and Tom, who shed many tears during Anne Jephson's wake and burial, Roger did not cry even once. In those gloomy days, the home of

the Casements became a funeral chapel, filled with people dressed in mourning, who spoke in low voices and embraced Captain Casement and the four children with sorrowful faces, uttering words of condolence. For many days, he could not say a single sentence, as if he had become mute. He responded with nods or gestures to the questions and remained serious, with his head down and a distant gaze, even at night in the dark room, unable to sleep. From then on, throughout the rest of his life, occasionally in his dreams, the figure of Anne Jephson would come to visit him with that inviting smile, opening her arms, into which he would shrink, feeling protected and happy with those sharp fingers on his head, on his back, on his cheeks, a sensation that seemed to shield him against the evils of the world.

His siblings soon consoled themselves. And Roger did too, apparently. Because, although he had regained his ability to speak, it was a topic he never mentioned. When a family member brought up his mother, he would fall silent and remain locked in his mutism until that person changed the subject. In his sleepless nights, he sensed in the darkness, looking at him with sadness, the face of the unfortunate Anne Jephson.

Who was not consoled nor returned to being the same was Captain Roger Casement. Since he was not effusive and neither Roger nor his siblings had ever seen him show kindness to his mother, the four children were astonished by the cataclysm that their father's wife's disappearance meant for him. He, so dapper, now walked dressed in any way, with a grown beard, a furrowed brow, and a look of resentment as if his children were to blame for his widowhood. Shortly after Anne's death, he decided to leave Dublin and sent the four children to Ulster, to Magherintemple House, the family home, where, from then on, their paternal great-uncle John Casement and his wife Charlotte would take care of the

education of the brothers. Their father, as if wanting to distance himself from them, went to live forty kilometers away, in the Adair Arms Hotel in Ballymena, where, as the great-uncle John would sometimes let slip, Captain Casement, "half mad with pain and loneliness," dedicated his days and nights to spiritualism, trying to communicate with the dead through mediums, cards, and crystal balls.

Since then, Roger saw his father rarely and never heard him tell those stories from India and Afghanistan again. Captain Roger Casement died of tuberculosis in 1876, three years after his wife. Roger had just turned twelve years old. At Ballymena Diocesan School, where he spent three years, he was a distracted student who received average grades, except in Latin, French, and Ancient History, subjects in which he excelled. He wrote poetry, always seemed lost in thought, and devoured travel books about Africa and the Far East. He practiced sports, especially swimming. He spent weekends at the Young's castle in Galgorm, where he was invited by a classmate. However, Roger spent more time with Rose Maud Young, a beautiful, cultured writer, who traveled through the fishing and farming villages of Antrim gathering poems, legends, and songs in Gaelic. It was from her that he first heard the epic tales of Irish mythology. The castle, made of black stones, with towers, coats of arms, chimneys, and a cathedral-like façade, was built in the 17th century by Alexander Colville, a theologian with an unfortunate face—according to his portrait in the hallway—who, it was said in Ballymena, had made a pact with the devil and whose ghost wandered the place. Shaking, on some moonlit nights Roger dared to search for it in the passages and empty rooms, but he never found it.

Only many years later would he learn to feel comfortable in Magherintemple House, the ancestral home of the

Casement, which had previously been called Churchfield and had served as a rectory for the Anglican parish of Culfeightrin. During the six years he lived there, between the ages of nine and fifteen, with his great-uncle John, great-aunt Charlotte, and other paternal relatives, he always felt somewhat like a foreigner in that imposing mansion of gray stones, three stories high, with tall ceilings, ivy-covered walls, faux gothic ceilings, and draperies that seemed to hide ghosts. The vast rooms, long corridors, and staircases with worn wooden handrails and creaking steps only intensified his loneliness. In contrast, he enjoyed being outdoors among the sturdy elms, sycamores, and peach trees that withstood the howling wind, as well as the gentle hills with cows and sheep from which he could see the village of Ballycastle, the sea, the crashing waves against Rathlin Island, and, on clear days, the blurred silhouette of Scotland. He frequently visited the nearby villages of Cushendun and Cushendall, which seemed like the setting for ancient Irish legends, and the nine *glens* of Northern Ireland, those slender valleys surrounded by hills and rocky slopes where eagles traced circles in the sky, a sight that made him feel brave and uplifted. His favorite pastime was to hike through that rugged land, inhabited by farmers as old as the landscape, some of whom spoke the ancient Irish language to each other, which his great-uncle John and his friends sometimes made cruel jokes about. Neither Charles nor Tom shared his enthusiasm for outdoor life or enjoyed cross-country walks or climbing the steep hills of Antrim; Nina, however, did, and because of this, despite being eight years older than him, she became his favorite and the one he would always get along better with. He took several excursions with her to Murlough Bay, strewn with black rocks and its pebbly beach at the foot of Glenshesk, the memory of which would accompany him throughout his life and to which he would always return.

he would refer, in his letters to the family, as "that corner of Paradise."

But even more than walks in the countryside, Roger loved summer vacations. He spent them in Liverpool, where his aunt Grace, his mother's sister, made him feel loved and welcomed: by *aunt* Grace, of course, but also by her husband, Uncle Edward Bannister, who had traveled a lot and made business trips to Africa. He worked for the Eider Dempster Line shipping company, which transported goods and passengers between Great Britain and West Africa. Aunt Grace's and Uncle Edward's children, his cousins, were better playmates for Roger than his own siblings, especially his cousin Gertrude Bannister, Gee, with whom, from a very young age, he had a closeness that was never marred by a single disappointment. They were so close that once Nina joked: "You two will end up getting married." Gee laughed, but Roger blushed from head to toe. He dared not raise his eyes and stammered: "No, no, why do you say such nonsense?"

When he was in Liverpool, where his cousins were, Roger sometimes overcame his shyness and asked Uncle Edward about Africa, a continent whose mere mention filled his head with forests, beasts, adventures, and intrepid men. Thanks to Uncle Edward Bannister, he heard about Dr. David Livingstone for the first time, the Scottish doctor and evangelist who had been exploring the African continent for years, navigating rivers like the Zambezi and the Shire, naming mountains, unknown places, and bringing Christianity to the tribes of savages. He had been the first European to cross Africa from coast to coast, the first to traverse the Kalahari desert, and he had become the most popular hero of the British Empire. Roger dreamed of him, read the pamphlets that described his feats, and yearned to be part of his expeditions, in-

facing alongside him the dangers, helping him bring the Christian religion to those pagans who had not emerged from the Stone Age. When doctor Livingstone, searching for the sources of the Nile, disappeared swallowed by the African jungles, Roger was two years old. When, in 1872, another adventurer and legendary explorer, Henry Morton Stanley, journalist of Welsh origin employed by a New York newspaper, emerged from the jungle announcing to the world that he had found doctor Livingstone alive, he was about to turn eight. The boy lived the novel-like story with amazement and envy. And when, a year later, it was known that doctor Livingstone, who never wanted to leave African soil nor return to England, had passed away, Roger felt he had lost a very dear relative. As an adult, he too would be an explorer, like those titans, Livingstone and Stanley, who were expanding the borders of the Occidente and living such extraordinary lives.

Upon turning fifteen years old, Uncle John Case-ment advised Roger to leave his studies and find a job, as neither he nor his brothers had any income to live on. He readily agreed. By mutual consent, they decided that Roger would go to Liverpool, where there were more job opportunities than in Northern Ireland. Indeed, shortly after arriving at the Bannister's, Uncle Edward got him a position at the same company where he had worked for many years. He began his apprenticeship at the shipping company shortly after his fifteenth birthday. He seemed older. He was very tall, with deep gray eyes, slim, with tightly curled black hair, very light skin, and even teeth; he was reserved, discreet, well-groomed, friendly, and helpful. He spoke English with an Irish accent, which was the subject of jokes among his cousins.

He was a serious, diligent, and laconic young man, not very intellectually prepared but hardworking. He took his obligations in the company very seriously, determined to

learn. He was placed in the administration and accounting department. At first, his tasks were those of a messenger. He carried documents from one office to another and went to the puerto to handle paperwork between ships, customs, and warehouses. His bosses regarded him. In the four years he worked at the Eider Dempster Line, he never became close to anyone, due to his withdrawn nature and austere habits: averse to revelry, he hardly drank and was never seen frequenting the bars and brothels of the puerto. Since then, he became a chain smoker. His passion for Africa and his dedication to earning merit in the company led him to carefully read and annotate brochures and publications that circulated through the offices related to maritime trade between the British Empire and West Africa. Then, he confidently repeated the ideas conveyed in those texts. Bringing European products to Africa and importing the raw materials produced by the African soil was, more than a commercial operation, an endeavor for the progress of peoples stuck in prehistory, mired in cannibalism and the slave trade. The trade brought there religion, morality, law, and the values of modern, cultured, free, and democratic Europe, a progress that would ultimately transform the unfortunate tribes into men and women of our time. In this enterprise, the British Empire was at the forefront of Europe, and one should feel proud to be a part of it and of the work they were doing at the Eider Dempster Line. His office colleagues exchanged mocking glances, wondering if the young Roger Casement was a fool or clever, if he truly believed in those nonsense ideas or advocated them to gain favor with his bosses.

During the four years he worked in Liverpool, Roger continued living with his uncles Grace and Edward, to whom he gave part of his salary, and who treated him

like a son. He got along well with his cousins, especially with Gertrude, with whom he went rowing and fishing on Sundays and holidays if the weather was nice, or stayed at home reading aloud by the fireplace if it rained. Their relationship was brotherly, with no trace of malice or coquetry. Gertrude was the first person to whom he showed the poems he wrote in secret. Roger came to know the company's operations in detail and, having never set foot in the African ports, spoke of them as if he had spent his life among their offices, businesses, dealings, customs, and the people who inhabited them.

He made three trips to West Africa on the *SSBounny*, and the experience excited him so much that, after the third trip, he resigned from his job and announced to his brothers, uncles, and cousins that he had decided to go to Africa. He did so in an exalted manner, and according to his uncle Edward, "like those crusaders who in the Middle Ages set off to the East to liberate Jerusalem." The family went to say goodbye to him at the port, and Gee and Nina shed some tears. Roger had just turned twenty years old.

III

When the *sheriff* opened the cell door and glared at him, Roger was feeling embarrassed as he remembered that he had always been in favor of the death penalty. He had made this public a few years earlier in his *Report on the Putumayo* for the Foreign Office, the *Blue Book*, demanding exemplary punishment for the Peruvian Julio César Arana, the king of rubber in Putumayo: "If we could at least ensure that he was hanged for those atrocious crimes, that would be the beginning of the end of that endless martyrdom and the infernal persecution against the unfortunate indigenous people." He would not write those same words now. And prior to that, he had recalled the discomfort he often felt upon entering a house and discovering a birdcage. The canaries, finches, or caged parrots had always seemed to him victims of unnecessary cruelty.

—Visit—he murmured, the *sheriff* observing him with contempt in his eyes and voice. As Roger stood up and brushed off the uniform of a convict with slaps, he added sarcastically—: Today you are once again in the press, Mr. Casement. Not for being a traitor to your country...

—My country is Ireland—he interrupted.

—... but for your filth—the *sheriff* clicked his tongue as if about to spit—. Traitor and wicked at the same time. What rubbish! It will be a pleasure to see you dance on a rope, ex sir Roger.

—Did the cabinet reject the request for clemency?

—Not yet —the *sheriff* took a moment to respond—. But he will reject it. And of course, His Majesty the King will as well.

—I will not ask him for mercy. He is your king, not mine.

—Ireland is British —murmured the *sheriff* . Now more than ever, after having crushed that cowardly Easter Rising in Dublin. A stab in the back against a country at war. I would not have executed its leaders; I would have hanged them.

He fell silent because they had already arrived at the visiting room.

It was not Father Carey, the catholic chaplain of Pentonville Prison, who had come to visit him, but Gertrude, Gee, his cousin. She embraced him tightly, and Roger felt her tremble in his arms. He thought of a frightened little bird. How much Gee had aged since her incarceration and trial. He remembered the mischievous and lively girl from Liverpool, the attractive and life-loving woman from London, whom her friends affectionately called *Hoppy* because of her injured leg. She was now a frail, sickly little old lady, not the healthy, strong, and self-assured woman she had been just a few years ago. The clear light in her eyes had faded, and there were wrinkles on her face, neck, and hands. She was dressed in dark, worn clothes.

—I must smell like all the filth in the world—joked Roger, pointing to his fuzzy blue uniform—. They have taken away my right to bathe. I will only get it back once, if they execute me.

—They won't, the Council of Ministers will approve clemency —asserted Gertrude, shaking her head to emphasize her words—. President Wilson will intercede for you before the British Government, Roger. He has promised to send a telegram. They will grant it, there will be no execution, believe me.

She said it so tensely, with such a broken voice, that Roger felt pity for her, for all the friends who, like Gee, were suffering the same anguish and uncertainty these days. He wanted to ask her about the newspaper attacks the jailer had mentioned, but he held back. Would the President of the United States intercede for him? It would be initiatives from John Devoy and other friends of Clan na Gael. If he did, their efforts would have an effect. There was still a possibility that the cabinet would commute his sentence.

There was nowhere to sit, and Roger and Gertrude remained standing very close together, turning their backs to *the sheriff and* the guard. The four presences made the small visiting room feel claustrophobic.

—Gavan Duffy told me that you were expelled from Queen Anne's school —Roger apologized—. I know it was my fault. I am truly sorry, dear Gee. Causing you harm is the last thing I would have wanted.

—I was not expelled; they asked me to accept the cancellation of my contract. And they provided me with a compensation of forty pounds. I do not care. This way, I have had more time to help Alice Stopford Green with her efforts to save your life. That is the most important thing now.

She took her cousin's hand and squeezed it tenderly. Gee had been teaching for many years at the Queen Anne's Hospital school in Caversham, where she had become the deputy head. She always enjoyed her work, from which she shared amusing anecdotes in her letters to Roger. And now, because of her relation to an outcast, she would be unemployed. Would she have enough to live on or someone to help her?

—No one believes the slanders that are being published against you —said Gertrude, lowering her voice significantly, as if the two men present might not hear her—. All decent people are indignant that the Government is using these calumnies to undermine

the manifesto that so many important people have signed in your favor, Roger.

Her voice broke, as if she were about to sob. Roger hugged her again.

—I have loved you so much, Gee, dearest Gee—he whispered in her ear—. And now, even more than before. I will always be grateful for how loyal you have been to me in good times and bad. That's why your opinion is one of the few that matters to me. Do you know that everything I have done was for Ireland, isn't that right? For a noble *and* generous cause, like that of Ireland. Isn't that so, Gee?

She had begun to sob softly, her face pressed against his chest.

—They had ten minutes and five have passed—the *sheriff* reminded them, without turning to look at them—. They still have five left.

—Now, with so much time to think—Roger said in his cousin's ear—I remember those years in Liverpool so well, when we were so young and life smiled upon us, Gee.

—Everyone believed we were in love and that one day we would get married—murmured Gee—. I also remember that time with nostalgia, Roger.

—We were more than in love, Gee. Brothers, accomplices. The two sides of a coin. That united. You were many things to me. The mother I lost at nine years old. The friends I never had. With you, I always felt better than with my own brothers. You gave me trust, security in life, joy. Later, during all my years in Africa, your letters were my only bridge to the rest of the world. You have no idea how happy I was to receive your letters and how I read and reread them, dear Gee.

He fell silent. He didn't want his cousin to notice that he was about to cry as well. Since he was young, he had detested, undoubtedly due to his puritan upbringing, public displays of sentimentality, but in the last few months, he sometimes indulged in certain weaknesses that he had once found so distasteful in others.

Gee said nothing. She remained embraced to him, and Roger felt her agitated breathing, which inflated and deflated his chest.

—You were the only person to whom I showed my poems. Do you remember?

—I remember they were awful —Gertrude said—. But I cared for you so much that I praised them. I even memorized some of them.

—I was very aware that you didn't like them, Gee. It was fortunate I never published them. I was close, as you know.

They looked at each other and ended up laughing.

—We are doing everything, everything, to help you, Roger —Gee said, becoming serious again. Her voice had also aged; it used to be firm and cheerful, and now it was hesitant and cracked—. Those of us who care about you, of whom there are many. Alice, the first, of course. Moving heaven and earth. Writing letters, visiting politicians, authorities, diplomats. Explaining, pleading. Knocking on all doors. She is making arrangements to come and see you. It's difficult. Only family members are allowed. But Alice is well-known, she has influence. She will get the permission and will come, you'll see. Did you know that when the Rising in Dublin occurred, Scotland Yard searched her house from top to bottom? They took many papers. She loves you and admires you so much, Roger.

“I know,” thought Roger. He also wanted to and admired Alice Stopford Green. The historian, Irish and from an Anglican family like Casement, whose home was one of the most frequented intellectual salons in London, a center for gatherings and meetings of all the nationalists and autonomists of Ireland, had been more than a friend and advisor to him on political matters. She had

educated him and helped him discover and love the past of Ireland, its long history and its flourishing culture before being absorbed by its powerful neighbor. She had recommended books, illustrated it with passionate conversations, and encouraged him to continue with those lessons in the Irish language that, unfortunately, he never managed to master. “I will die without speaking Gaelic,” he thought. And later, when he became a radical nationalist, it was Alice who was the first person to begin calling him in London by the nickname that Herbert Ward had given him and that Roger found so amusing: “The Celt.”

—Ten minutes —the *sheriff*—. Time to say goodbye.

He felt his cousin hugging him and her mouth trying to get close to his ear, without success, as he was much taller than her. She spoke to him, thinning her voice until it was almost inaudible:

—All those horrible things that the newspapers say are slander, abject lies. Isn’t that right, Roger?

The question caught him so off guard that he took a few seconds to respond.

—I don’t know what the press says about me, dear Gee. It doesn’t reach here. But —he carefully searched for the words—, I’m sure they are. I want you to keep one thing in mind, Gee. And believe me. I have made mistakes many times, of course. But I have nothing to be ashamed of. Neither you nor any of my friends need to be ashamed of me. You believe me, right, Gee?

—Of course I believe you —his cousin sobbed, covering her mouth with both hands.

Upon returning to his cell, Roger felt his eyes fill with tears. He made a great effort not to let the *sheriff* notice. It was unusual for him to feel like crying. As far as he remembered, he hadn’t cried in those months, de-

since his capture. Neither during the interrogations at Scotland Yard, nor during the trial hearings, nor while listening to the sentence that condemned him to be hanged. Why now? Because of Gertrude. Because of Gee. Seeing her suffer in that way, doubting in that way, meant at least that for her, his person and his life were precious. He was not, therefore, as alone as he felt.

III

The journey of the British consul Roger Casement up the Congo River, which began on June 5, 1903 and would change his life, should have started a year earlier. He had been suggesting this expedition to the Foreign Office since, in 1900, after serving in Oíd Calabar (Nigeria), Lourenço Marques (Maputo), and São Paulo de Luanda (Angola), he officially took up residence as consul of Great Britain in Boma—a made-up village—arguing that the best way to present a report on the situation of the natives in the Independent State of the Congo was to leave this remote capital for the forests and tribes of the Middle and Upper Congo. There, the exploitation he had been reporting to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since he arrived in these domains was taking place. Finally, after weighing those state reasons which the consul, although he understood them, could not help but churn his stomach—Great Britain was allied with Belgium and did not want to push it into the arms of Germany—the Foreign Office authorized him to embark on the journey to the villages, stations, missions, posts, camps, and factories where the extraction of rubber, black gold avidly coveted now worldwide for trucks and automobiles wheels and bumpers, and a thousand more industrial and domestic uses, was taking place. He was to verify on the ground what was true in the allegations of injustices committed against the natives in the Congo of Her Majesty Leopold II, the King of the Belgians, which the Society for the Protection of

the Indigenous people, in London, and some Baptist churches and Catholic missions in Europe and the United States.

He prepared the trip with his usual meticulousness and an enthusiasm he concealed from the Belgian officials and the colonists and traders of Boma. Now he could argue before his superiors, with well-founded knowledge, that the Empire, true to its tradition of justice and *fair play*, should lead an international campaign to put an end to this ignominy. However, in mid-1902, he suffered his third malaria attack, one even worse than the two previous ones he had experienced since, in a burst of idealism and adventurous dreams, he decided in 1884 to leave Europe and come to Africa to work to emancipate the Africans from backwardness, disease, and ignorance through trade, Christianity, and the social and political institutions of the West.

They were not mere words. He deeply believed in all of that when, at twenty years of age, he arrived on the black continent. The first paludism fevers only struck him some time later. The yearning of his life had just been realized: to be part of an expedition led by the most famous adventurer on African soil: Henry Morton Stanley. To serve under the orders of the explorer who on a legendary journey of nearly three years between 1874 and 1877 had crossed Africa from east to west, following the course of the Congo River from its sources to its mouth in the Atlantic! To accompany the hero who found the missing doctor Livingstone! Then, as if the gods wanted to douse his exhilaration, he had his first attack of malaria. Nothing compared to what the second one was and, especially, three years later —1887— and especially this third one in 1902, in which for the first time he thought he was going to die. The symptoms were the same that morning in mid-1902 when, with his suitcase bulging with maps, compass, pencils and

notebooks, he felt, upon opening his eyes in the bedroom of the high floor of his house in Boma, in the settlers' neighborhood, a few steps from the Governor's office, which served both as residence and office of the consulate, shivering from the cold. He moved aside the mosquito net and saw, through the windows without glass or curtains but with metal grilles for insects, pelted by the downpour, the muddy waters of the great river and the lush islands around it. He couldn't get up. His legs buckled, as if they were made of cloth. *John*, his Bulldog, began to jump and bark, frightened. He let himself fall back onto the bed. His body was on fire and the cold penetrated his bones. He shouted for Charlie and Mawuku, the Congolese butler and cook who slept downstairs, but neither replied. They must be outside, and, surprised by the storm, they would have run for shelter under the canopy of some baobab until it subsided. Malaria, again? cursed the consul. Just on the eve of the expedition? He would have diarrhea, he hemorrhages, and weakness would force him to stay in bed for days and weeks, dazed and with chills.

Charlie was the first of the servants to return, dripping water. "Go call Doctor Salabert," Roger ordered him, not in French but in Lingala. Doctor Salabert was one of the two doctors in Boma, an old slave port—then called Mboma—where, in the 16th century, Portuguese traffickers from the island of Sao Tome came to buy slaves from the tribal chiefs of the now-disappeared kingdom of Kongo, and now converted by the Belgians into the capital of the Independent State of the Congo. Unlike Matadi, there was no hospital in Boma, just a dispensary for emergency cases attended by two Flemish nuns. The doctor arrived half an hour later, shuffling his feet and using a cane. He was older than he appeared, but the harsh climate and, above all, alcohol had aged him.

He looked like an old man. He dressed like a vagabond. His boots lacked laces and he wore the vest unbuttoned. Despite it being early in the day, his eyes were burning.

—Yes, my friend, malaria, what else could it be? What a high fever. You know the remedy: quinine, plenty of fluids, broth diet, small breads, and lots of warmth to sweat out the infections. Don't even dream of getting up before two weeks. And even less of going on a trip, not even to the corner. The tertians wreck the body, you know that well.

It was not two but three weeks that he was laid low by fevers and shaking. He lost eight kilos, and on the first day he could stand, after just a few steps he collapsed to the ground, exhausted, in a state of weakness he did not remember having felt before. Doctor Salabert, looking him straight in the eyes with a deep voice and acid humor, warned him:

—In your condition, embarking on that expedition would be suicide. Your body is in ruins and would not even withstand crossing the Crystal Mountains. Much less several weeks of living outdoors. You wouldn't make it to Mbanza-Ngungu. There are quicker ways to kill yourself, Mr. Consul: a bullet in the mouth or an injection of strychnine. If you need them, count on me. I have helped several to embark on the great journey.

Roger Casement telegraphed the Foreign Office that his health condition forced him to postpone the expedition. And since the rains later made the forests and river impassable, the expedition into the Independent State had to wait a few more months, which would turn into a year. Another year, recovering very slowly from the fevers and trying to regain lost weight, returning to play tennis, swim, play bridge or chess to pass the long nights in Boma, while resuming the tedious consular duties: taking note of

the ships that arrived and departed, the goods that the merchants from Antwerp unloaded—rifles, ammunitions, whips, wine, small religious images, crucifixes, little glass trinkets—and those taken to Europe, the immense piles of rubber, ivory pieces, and animal skins. This was the exchange that, in his youthful imagination, was going to save the Congolese from cannibalism, from the Arab merchants of Zanzibar who controlled the slave trade and open the doors of civilization for them!

For three weeks, he lay there with malaria fevers, delirious at times and taking quinine drops dissolved in herbal infusions prepared for him by Charlie and Mawuku three times a day—his stomach could only tolerate broths and pieces of boiled fish or chicken— and playing with *John*, his bulldog and most faithful companion. He didn't even have the energy to concentrate on reading.

In that forced inaction, Roger often recalled the expedition of 1884 under the command of his hero Henry Morton Stanley. He had lived in the forests, visited innumerable indigenous villages, camped in clearings surrounded by palisades of trees where monkeys screamed and wild beasts roared. He was tense and happy despite the lacerations from mosquitoes and other bugs against which the applications of camphorated alcohol were useless. He practiced swimming in dazzlingly beautiful lagoons and rivers, unafraid of crocodiles, still convinced that by doing what they did—he, the four hundred porters, guides, and African assistants, the twenty white people—English, Germans, Flemish, Walloons, and French—who made up the expedition, and, of course, Stanley himself—were the spearhead of progress in this world where the Stone Age was just beginning to emerge, which Europe had long left behind.

Years later, in the visionary half-sleep of the fever, he blushed thinking about how blind he had been. At first, he didn't even fully realize the purpose of that expedition led by Stanley and financed by the King of the Belgians, whom, of course, he then considered — like Europe, like Occidente, like the world — the great humanitarian monarch, dedicated to ending the scourges of slavery and cannibalism and to liberating the tribes from paganism and the servitudes that kept them in a feral state.

It was still a year before the great Western powers would grant Leopold II, at the Berlin Conference of 1885, that Independent State of the Congo of more than two and a half million square kilometers—eighty-five times the size of Belgium—but the King of the Belgians had already started administering the territory that they were going to bestow upon him so he could exert his redemptive principles with the twenty million Congolese that were believed to inhabit it. The monarch with the trimmed beard had hired the great Stanley for this purpose, sensing, with his prodigious ability to detect human weaknesses, that the explorer was equally capable of great feats and formidable villainies if the reward matched his appetites.

The apparent reason for the 1884 expedition during which Roger made his first explorations was to prepare the scattered communities along the Upper, Middle, and Lower Congo, over thousands of kilometers of dense jungle, rugged terrain, waterfalls, and thick vegetation-covered hills, for the arrival of European traders and administrators that the International Association of the Congo (AIC), chaired by Leopold II, would bring once the Western powers granted the concession. Stanley and his companions were to explain to those semi-nude, tattooed, and feathered chiefs, sometimes with

thorns in their faces and arms, sometimes with reeds inserted in their genitalia, the benevolent intentions of the Europeans: they would come to help them improve their living conditions, free them from plagues like the deadly sleeping sickness, educate them, and open their eyes to the truths of this world and the next, thanks to which their children and grandchildren would achieve a decent, just, and free life.

«I didn't realize because I didn't want to realize,» he thought. Charlie had wrapped him in all the blankets in the house. Despite that and the scorching sun outside, the consul, curled up and frozen, trembled under the mosquito net like a sheet of paper. But worse than being a voluntary blind man was finding explanations for what any impartial observer would have called a swindle. Because in all the villages where the 1884 expedition arrived, after distributing trinkets and baubles and following the usual explanations through interpreters (many of whom failed to communicate with the natives), Stanley made chiefs and shamans sign contracts, written in French, committing to provide labor, lodging, guidance, and sustenance for the officials, representatives, and employees of the AIC in the work they undertook to achieve their inspired goals. They signed with Xs, sticks, stains, and doodles, without complaining and without knowing what they were signing or what signing meant, entertained by the necklaces, bracelets, and painted glass adornments they received, and the shots of aguardiente with which Stanley invited them to toast to the agreement.

«They don't know what they are doing, but we know it's for their own good and that justifies the deception,» thought the young Roger Casement. What other way was there to do it? How could legitimacy be given to the future colonization with people who couldn't understand a word of those «treaties» in which their future was compromised and

that of their descendants? It was necessary to give some legal form to the enterprise that the Belgian monarch wanted to be carried out through persuasion and dialogue, unlike others carried out with blood and fire, through invasions, murders, and plunder. Wasn't this peaceful and civil?

With the years —eighteen had passed since the expedition he commanded in 1884—, Roger Casement came to the conclusion that the hero of his childhood and youth was one of the most unscrupulous rogues that the West had unleashed upon the African continent. Despite this, like all those who had worked under his orders, he could not help but recognize his charisma, his charm, his magic, that blend of recklessness and cold calculation with which the adventurer crafted his feats. He went back and forth across Africa, sowing desolation and death on one side — burning and plundering villages, shooting natives, flaying the backs of his porters with those whips made of strips of hippopotamus skin that had left thousands of scars on the ebony bodies throughout the African landscape— and, on the other, opening routes for trade and evangelization in immense territories filled with wild beasts, vermin, and epidemics that seemed to respect him like one of those titans from Homeric legends and biblical stories.

—Don't you sometimes feel remorse, guilt, for what we do?

The question sprang from the young man's lips in an unpremeditated manner. He could no longer take it back. The flames of the bonfire, in the center of the camp, crackled with the twigs and the unwary insects that were being scorched in it.

—Guilt? Bad conscience? —The expedition leader wrinkled his nose and contorted his sunburned, freckled face as if he had never heard those words and was guessing what they meant—.

words and was guessing what they wanted to mean—. What thing?

—From the contracts we make them sign —said the young Casement, overcoming his embarrassment—. They put their lives, their communities, everything they have, in the hands of the International Association of the Congo. And not a single one knows what they are signing, because none of them speak French.

—If they knew French, they still wouldn't understand those contracts —the explorer laughed with his frank, open laughter, one of his most charming traits—. I don't understand what they mean either.

He was a strong, very short man, almost a dwarf, with a sporty appearance, still young, sparkling gray eyes, a thick mustache, and a captivating personality. He always wore high boots, a pistol at his waist, and a light jacket with many pockets. He laughed again, and the foremen of the expedition, who were drinking coffee and smoking around the bonfire with Stanley and Roger, also laughed, flattering their boss. But young Casement did not laugh.

—I do, although, it's true, the gibberish they are written in seems deliberately designed to be incomprehensible —he said respectfully—. It boils down to something very simple. They hand over their lands to the AIC in exchange for promises of social assistance. They commit to supporting the projects: roads, bridges, docks, factories. To provide the necessary manpower for agriculture and public order. To feed officials and workers while the jobs last. The Association offers nothing in return. No salaries or compensations. I always believed we are here for the good of the Africans, Mr. Stanley. I would like you, whom I have admired since I can remember, to give me reasons to keep believing that this is the case. That those contracts are truly for their benefit.

There was a long silence, broken by the crackling of the bonfire and sporadic growls from nocturnal animals.

They had stopped raining a while ago, but the atmosphere remained damp and heavy, and it seemed everything in the surroundings was germinating, growing, and thickening. Eighteen years later, Roger, amid the disordered images that the fever caused to flutter in his head, remembered the inquisitive, surprised, and at times mocking gaze with which Henry Morton Stanley inspected him.

—Africa is not made for the weak—he finally said, as if speaking to himself—. The things that concern him are a sign of weakness. In the world we are in, I mean. It is neither the United States nor England, as you may have noticed. In Africa, the weak do not last. They are finished off by bites, fevers, poisoned arrows, or the tsetse fly.

He was Welsh, but he must have lived a long time in the United States because his English had the music, expressions, and turns of North Americans.

—All this is for their own good, of course—Stanley added, with a nod towards the circle of conical huts of the settlement by the shores where the camp was set up—. Missionaries will come to pull them out of paganism and teach them that a Christian should not eat their neighbor. Doctors who will vaccinate them against epidemics and cure them better than their sorcerers. Companies that will give them work. Schools where they will learn civilized languages. Where they will be taught to dress, to pray to the true God, to speak in Christian and not in those monkey dialects that they speak. Gradually, they will replace their barbaric customs with those of modern, educated beings. If they knew what we do for them, they would kiss our feet. But their mental state is closer to that of a crocodile and a hippopotamus than to you or me. That is why we decide for them what is best and have them sign those contracts. Their children and grandchildren will

thank us. And it would not be strange if, given some time, they begin to worship Leopold II as they now worship their fetishes and scares.

Where exactly on the great river was that camp? Vaguely, he thought it was between Bolobo and Chumbiri and that the tribe belonged to the bateke. But he wasn't sure. Those details were recorded in his diaries, if one could call it that, the jumble of notes scattered across notebooks and loose papers over so many years. In any case, he sharply remembered that conversation and the discomfort he felt when he lay down on his cot after the exchange with Henry Morton Stanley. Was that the night when his personal holy trinity of the three 'C's began to crumble? Until then, he believed that colonialism was justified by them: Christianity, civilization, and trade. Ever since he was a modest assistant accountant at the Eider Dempster Line in Liverpool, he thought there was a price to pay. It was inevitable that abuses would occur. Among the colonizers, there would not only be altruistic people like doctor Livingstone but also abusive scoundrels, yet, after the sums were done, the benefits would far out weigh the harms. African life began to show him that things were not as clear-cut as the theory suggested.

In the year he worked under his orders, while continuing to admire the audacity and leadership skills with which Henry Morton Stanley led his expedition through the long-unknown territory that bordered the Congo River and its myriad of tributaries, Roger Case ment also learned that the explorer was an enigma on legs. Everything said about him was always contradictory, making it impossible to know which claims were true and which were false, and how much of the true ones was exaggerated or fanciful. He was one of those men incapable of distinguishing reality from fiction.

The only clear thing was that the idea of a great benefactor of the natives did not correspond to the truth. He realized this by listening to foremen who had accompanied Stanley on his journey of 1871-1872 in search of doctor Livingstone, an expedition that, they said, was much less peaceful than this one, in which, undoubtedly following instructions from Leopold II himself, he was more careful in dealing with the tribes whose chiefs —450 in total— he had them sign over their land and labor force. The things those rough men, dehumanized by the jungle, recounted about the expedition of 1871-1872 sent shivers down one's spine. Devastated villages, beheaded chieftains, and their women and children shot if they refused to feed the expedition members or provide them with porters, guides, and machete-wielders to clear paths through the forest. Those old companions of Stanley feared him and received his reprimands in silence with their heads bowed. Yet, they had blind faith in his decisions and spoke with religious reverence of his famous journey of 999 days between 1874 and 1877, during which all the whites and a good part of the Africans perished.

When, in February 1885, at the Berlin Conference, which not a single Congolese attended, the fourteen participating powers, led by Great Britain, the United States, France, and Germany graciously granted Leopold II — who was always accompanied by Henry Morton Stanley — the two and a half million square kilometers of the Congo and its twenty million inhabitants to "open that territory to trade, abolish slavery, and civilize and Christianize the pagans," Roger Casement, newly turned twenty-one and with a year of life in Africa, celebrated this. So did all the employees of the International Association of the Congo, who, anticipating this cession, had already been in the territory for some time, laying the groundwork for the project that the monarch

planned to carry out. Casement was a strong, tall, thin young man with very black hair and beard, deep gray eyes, and not very prone to jokes, laconic, resembling a mature man. His concerns puzzled his companions. Who among them would take seriously the "civilizing mission of Europe in Africa" that obsessed the young Irishman? But they appreciated him because he was hardworking and always willing to lend a hand and take over a shift or commission for anyone who asked. Aside from smoking, he appeared to be free of vices. He hardly drank alcohol, and when, in the camps, tongues loosened by drink spoke of women, he looked uncomfortable, wanting to leave. He was tireless in his excursions through the forest and an imprudent swimmer in rivers and lagoons, energetically stroking in front of sleepy hippos. He had a passion for dogs, and his companions recalled that during that expedition in 1884, the day a wild boar sunk its tusks into his fox terrier named *Spindler*, upon seeing the little animal bleeding with its side open, he had a nervous breakdown. Unlike the other Europeans on the expedition, money did not matter to him. He had not come to Africa dreaming of becoming rich, but was moved by incomprehensible things like bringing progress to the savages. He spent his salary of eighty pounds sterling a year treating his companions. He lived frugally. However, he took care of his appearance, grooming, washing, and styling himself at meal times as if he were in London, Liverpool, or Dublin instead of camping in a clearing or on the beach of a river. He had a knack for languages; he had learned French and Portuguese and picked up bits of African dialects within a few days of settling in with a tribe. He was always jotting down what he saw in little notebooks. Someone discovered that he wrote poetry. They made him a

He made a joke about it, and the embarrassment barely allowed him to stammer a denial. He once confessed that, as a child, his father had beaten him, which is why it irritated him that the foremen whipped the natives when they dropped a load or failed to follow orders. He had a somewhat dreamy look.

When Roger thought of Stanley, he was overwhelmed by contradictory feelings. He was still slowly recovering from malaria. The Welsh adventurer had only seen in Africa a pretext for sporting feats and personal gain. But how could one deny that he was one of those beings from myths and legends, who through recklessness, a disregard for death, and ambition seemed to have broken the limits of humanity? He had seen him carry children whose faces and bodies were ravaged by smallpox, give water from his own canteen to Indigenous people who were dying from cholera or sleeping sickness, as if he believed that no contagion could touch him. Who had this champion of the British Empire and the ambitions of Leopold II really been? Roger was sure that the mystery would never be unveiled and that his life would always remain hidden behind a web of inventions. What was his real name? The name Henry Morton Stanley he had taken from the merchant in New Orleans who, in the dark years of his youth, had been generous to him and perhaps adopted him. It was said that his real name was John Rowlands, but nobody could confirm that. Nor that he had been born in Wales and spent his childhood in one of those orphanages where children without fathers or mothers were taken by health officers from the streets. Apparently, at a very young age he left for the United States as a stowaway on a cargo ship, and there, during the civil war, he fought as a soldier in the ranks of the Confederates first, and then in those of the Yankees. Afterward, he was believed to have become a journalist and wrote reports

on the advance of pioneers westward and their struggles with the Indians. When the *New York Herald* sent him to Africa in search of David Livingstone, Stanley had no experience as an explorer. How he managed to survive traversing those untouched forests, much like searching for a needle in a haystack, and found, in Ujiji, on November 10, 1871, the man who, according to his boastful confession, was left astonished by his greeting: "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

What Roger Casement admired the most in his youth about Stanley's achievements, even more than his expedition from the sources of the Congo River to his emergence in the Atlantic, was the construction of the *caravan trail* between 1879 and 1881. The caravan route opened a path for European trade from the mouth of the great river to the *pool*, a large river lagoon that would eventually be named after the explorer: Stanley Pool. Later, Roger discovered that this was another of the foresighted operations of the King of the Belgians to begin creating the infrastructure that would allow him to exploit the territory, starting from the Berlin Conference of 1885. Stanley was the audacious executor of that design.

«And I», Roger Casement would tell his friend Herbert Ward many times during his African years, as he became aware of what the Independent State of the Congo meant, «was one of its pawns from the very beginning». Although not entirely, because by the time he arrived in Africa, Stanley had already been opening the *caravan trail* for five years, the first stretch of which, from Vivi to Isanguila, eighty-three kilometers up the Congo River through tangled and swampy jungle, filled with deep ravines, worm-eaten trees, and putrid marshes where the tree tops blocked the sunlight, was completed at the beginning of 1880. From there to Muyanga, about one hundred twenty kilometers downstream, the Congo was navigable for

experienced pilots, capable of maneuvering through whirlpools and, during the rainy hours and rising waters, taking refuge in fords or caves to avoid being thrown against the rocks and shattered in the rapids that formed and dissolved incessantly. When Roger began working for the AIC, which, starting in 1885, became the Independent State of the Congo, Stanley had already founded, between Kinshasa and Ndolo, the station he named Leopoldville. It was December 1881, three years before Roger Casement would arrive in the jungle and four years before the Independent State of the Congo would be legally established. By then, this colonial territory, the largest in Africa, created by a monarch who would never set foot in it, was already a commercial reality accessible to European businessmen from the Atlantic, overcoming the obstacle of an impassable Lower Congo due to the rapids, waterfalls, twists, and turns of the Livingstone Falls, thanks to that route that, for nearly five hundred kilometers, Stanley opened between Boma and Vivi up to Leopoldville and the *pool*. When Roger arrived in Africa, daring traders, the advance scouts of Leopold II, were beginning to venture into Congolese territory and extract the first ivory, skins, and baskets of rubber from a region full of trees that exuded black latex, within reach of anyone willing to collect it.

In his early African years, Roger Casement traveled several times the caravan route, upstream from Boma and Vivi to Leopoldville, or downstream from Leopoldville to the mouth of the Atlantic, where the green and thick waters turned salty and where, in 1482, the caravel of the Portuguese Diego Cao first entered the interior of Congolese territory. Roger came to know the Lower Congo better than any other European residing in Boma or Matadi, the two axes from which the

Belgian colonization advanced into the interior of the continent.

For the rest of his life, Roger lamented—he was telling himself this once again now, in 1902, in the midst of the fever—that he had dedicated his first eight years in Africa to working, like a pawn in a chess game, in the construction of the Independent State of the Congo, investing in it his time, health, efforts, idealism, and believing that, in this way, he was acting for a philanthropic purpose.

Sometimes, searching for justifications, he would ask himself: "How could I have realized what was happening in those two and a half million square kilometers working as a foreman or group leader in the Stanley expedition in 1884 and in that of the American Henry Shelton Sanford between 1886 and 1888, in newly established stations and factories along the caravan route?" He was merely a tiny piece of the gigantic apparatus that had begun to take shape without anyone, other than its cunning creator and a close group of collaborators, knowing what it would consist of.

However, the two times he spoke with the King of the Belgians, in 1900, newly appointed consul in Boma by the Foreign Office, Roger Casement felt a deep distrust towards that robust man, adorned with decorations, with long disheveled beards, a formidable nose, and prophet-like eyes who, knowing that he was passing through Brussels on his way to the Congo, invited him to dinner. The magnificence of that palace with plush carpets, crystal chandeliers, engraved mirrors, and Eastern figurines made him dizzy. There were a dozen guests, in addition to Queen Maria Henrietta, her daughter Princess Clémentine, and Prince Victor Napoleon of France. The monarch monopolized the conversation all night. He spoke like an inspired preacher and when

described the cruelties of the Arab slave traders who departed from Zanzibar to make their "raids," his strong voice reached mystical accents. Christian Europe had the obligation to put an end to that trafficking of human flesh. He had resolved to do so, and this would be the offering of little Belgium to civilization: to free that suffering humanity from such horror. The elegant ladies yawned, Prince Napoleon whispered compliments to his neighbor, and no one listened to the orchestra that was playing a concert by Haydn.

The next morning, Leopold II summoned the English consul for a private conversation. He received him in his personal office. There were many porcelain trinkets and jade and ivory figurines. The sovereign smelled of cologne and had polished nails. As the night before, Roger could hardly utter a word. The King of the Belgians spoke of his quixotic endeavor and how misunderstood he was by resentful journalists and politicians. Mistakes were made, and there were indeed excesses. What was the reason? It was not easy to hire dignified and capable people willing to take the risk of working in the distant Congo. He asked the consul that if he noticed anything to correct in his new post, he should inform him personally. The impression that the King of the Belgians left him was that of a pompous and egotistical character.

Now, in 1902, two years later, it was said that it was undoubtedly that, but also a statesman of cold and Machiavellian intelligence. Barely established the Independent State of the Congo, Leopold II, through a decree of 1886, reserved as *Crown Domain* approximately two hundred fifty thousand square kilometers between the Kasai and Ruki rivers, which his explorers—mainly Stanley—indicated were rich in rubber trees. That area was excluded from all concessions to private companies, intended to be exploited by the sovereign. The International Association

The Congo was replaced, as a legal entity, by the Independent State of the Congo, whose sole president and *trustee* was Leopold II.

Explaining to international public opinion that the only effective way to suppress the slave trade was through "a force of order," the king sent two thousand soldiers from the Belgian regular army to the Congo, to which a militia of ten thousand natives was to be added, the maintenance of which should be borne by the Congolese population. Although most of that army was commanded by Belgian officers, in its ranks and, above all, in the leadership positions of the militia, people of the worst kind infiltrated—ruffians, ex-convicts, adventurers hungry for fortune who emerged from the bilges and brothels of half of Europe. The Forcé Publique became entrenched, like a parasite in a living organism, in the tangled web of villages scattered across a region the size of a Europe that would stretch from Spain to the borders with Russia, to be maintained by that African community that did not understand what was happening to them, except that the invasion descending upon them was a plague more predatory than slave hunters, locusts, red ants, and the spells that brought the dream of death. Because the soldiers and militiamen of the Public Force were greedy, brutal, and insatiable when it came to food, drink, women, animals, skins, ivory, and, in short, everything that could be stolen, consumed, drunk, sold, or fornicated.

At the same time that the exploitation of the Congolese began in this way, the humanitarian monarch started granting concessions to companies too, according to another of the mandates he received, "open the way to civilization for the natives of Africa through trade." Some traders died from paludism fevers, bitten by snakes, or devoured by the

wild animals due to their ignorance of the jungle, and a few others fell under the poisoned arrows and spears of natives who dared to rebel against these armed outsiders who thundered like thunder or burned like lightning, explaining to them that, according to contracts signed by their chiefs, they had to abandon their crops, fishing, hunting, their rites, and routines to become guides, porters, hunters, or rubber gatherers without receiving any salary. A good number of concessionaires, friends, and favorites of the Belgian monarch made great fortunes in a short time, especially him.

Through the concession system, the companies extended across the Independent State of the Congo in concentric waves, increasingly penetrating the vast region bathed by the Middle and Upper Congo and its web of tributaries. In their respective domains, they enjoyed sovereignty. In addition to being protected by the Public Force, they had their own militias, always led by a former military, former jailer, former prisoner, or outlaw, some of whom would become famous throughout Africa for their savagery. Within a few years, the Congo became the world's leading producer of rubber, which the civilized world demanded in ever greater quantities to roll its cars, automobiles, railroads, as well as all kinds of transport systems, clothing, decoration, and irrigation.

Roger Casement was not fully aware of any of this during those eight years —1884 to 1892— when, sweating profusely, suffering from paludism fevers, coughing in the African sun and getting covered in scars from bites, scratches, and scrapes from plants and creatures, he worked diligently to support the commercial and political creation of Leopold II. What he did learn about was the

appearance and reign in those infinite domains of the emblem of colonization: the whip.

Who invented that delicate, manageable, and effective instrument to incite, scare, and punish the indolence, clumsiness, or stupidity of those ebony-colored bipeds who never managed to do things as the colonists expected of them, whether it was work in the field, the delivery of cassava (*kwango*), antelope meat or wild pig, and other food assigned to each village or family, or taxes to fund the public works constructed by the Government? It was said that the inventor had been a captain of the Public Force named Mr. Chicot, a Belgian from the first wave, a man clearly practical and imaginative, endowed with a sharp power of observation, as he was the first to notice that the very tough skin of the hippopotamus could be made into a whip more resistant and harmful than those made from the intestines of horses and felines, a fibrous rope capable of causing more burning, blood, scars, and pain than any other whip and, at the same time, light and functional, since, with a small wooden handle, foremen, barrack leaders, guards, jailers, and group leaders could wrap it around their waist or hang it from their shoulder, almost without realizing they were carrying it due to how little it weighed. Its mere presence among the members of the Public Force had an intimidating effect: the eyes of the black people, black women, and black children widened when they recognized it, and the whites of their faces, whether sunburned or bluish, shone with fear, imagining that, in the event of any mistake, slip, or fault, the whip would slice through the air with its unmistakable whistle and fall upon their legs, buttocks, and backs, making them scream.

One of the first concessionaires in the Independent State of the Congo was the American Henry Shelton Sanford. He had been an agent and lobbyist for Leo-

pold II before the United States Government and a key player in his strategy to have the great powers concede the Congo to him. In June 1886, the Sanford Exploring Expedition (SEE) was formed to trade in ivory, gum, rubber, palm oil, and copper throughout the Upper Congo. Outsiders working in the International Association of the Congo, such as Roger Casement, were transferred to the

SEE and its positions held by Belgians. Roger went on to serve in the Sanford Exploring Expedition for one hundred fifty pounds sterling a year.

He began working in September 1886 as the agent in charge of the warehouse and transportation in Matadi, a word that means stone in Kikongo. When Roger settled there, the station built along the caravan route was just a clearing in the forest carved out with machetes, located on the banks of the great river. Four centuries earlier, the caravel of Diego Cao had reached this location, and the Portuguese navigator left his name inscribed on a rock, which could still be read. A company of German architects and engineers began constructing the first houses using pinewood imported from Europe—importing wood to Africa!—and wharves and warehouses; work that, one morning—Roger vividly remembered that incident—was interrupted by a tremor and the sudden appearance in the clearing of a herd of elephants that nearly obliterated the fledgling village. For six, eight, fifteen, and eighteen years, Roger Casement watched how that tiny village, which he began building with his own hands to serve as a storage facility for the goods of the Sanford Exploring Expedition (SEE), grew larger, climbing the gentle hills in the surroundings, increasing the cubic homes of the settlers, made of wood, two stories tall, with long terraces, conical roofs, little gardens, and windows protected with metal.

metal and filling with streets, corners, and people. In addition to the first small Catholic church, that of Kinkanda, by 1902 there was another, more important one, that of Notre Dame Médiatrice, along with a Baptist mission, a pharmacy, a hospital with two doctors and several nurse nuns, a post office, a beautiful railway station, a police station, a court, several customs warehouses, a solid wharf, and shops selling clothing, food, canned goods, hats, shoes, and farming tools. Around the settlers' city, a diverse neighborhood of bakongos emerged with huts made of reeds and mud. Here in Matadi, Roger sometimes said, much more than in the capital, Boma, was the Europe of civilization, modernity, and the Christian religion. Matadi already had a small cemetery on the hill of Tunduwa, next to the mission. From that height, both banks and a long stretch of the river were overseen. Europeans were buried there. Throughout the city and at the wharf, only indigenous people who worked as servants or porters circulated and had an identification pass. Anyone else who breached those limits was forever expelled from Matadi after paying a fine and receiving a few lashes. Even in 1902, the governor-general could boast that not a single theft, homicide, or violation had been recorded in either Boma or Matadi.

Of the two years he worked for the Sanford Exploring Expedition, between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-four, Roger Casement would always remember two episodes: the transport of *Florida* over several months, from Banana, the tiny port at the mouth of the Congo River in the Atlantic, to Stanley Pool, via the caravan route, and the incident with Lieutenant Francqui, who, breaking for once his usual calm demeanor that his friend Herbert Ward would tease him about,

was nearly thrown into the whirlpools of the Congo River and miraculously saved from being shot.

The *Florida* was an impressive ship that the SEE brought to Boma to serve as a merchant vessel in the Médio and Upper Congo, that is, on the other side of the Crystal Mountains. Livingstone Falls, the chain of waterfalls that separated Boma and Matadi from Leopoldville, ended in a knot of whirlpools that earned it the name Cauldron of the Devil. From there, and toward the east, the river was navigable for thousands of kilometers. However, toward the west, it lost a thousand feet in height on its descent to the sea, which made it unnavigable for long stretches of the journey.

To be transported overland to Stanley Pool, the *Florida* was disassembled into hundreds of pieces, which, classified and packaged, were carried on the shoulders of native porters the 478 kilometers of the caravan route. Roger Casement was entrusted with the largest and heaviest piece: the ship's hull. He did everything. From overseeing the construction of the enormous cart where it was hoisted to recruiting the hundred porters and machete wielders who pulled the immense load through the peaks and ravines of the Crystal Mountains, widening the path with machetes. And building embankments and defenses, setting up camps, tending to the sick and injured, quelling disputes among members of the different ethnic groups, and organizing the shifts for guarding, the distribution of food, and hunting and fishing when food was scarce. It was three months of risks and worries, but also of enthusiasm and the awareness of doing something that meant progress, a successful fight against a hostile nature. And, Roger would repeat it many times in the coming years, without using the whip or allowing those foremen nicknamed "Zanzibari" because they came from Zanzibar, the capital of the trade, to abuse him, or behaving with the cruelty of slave traders.

When, already in the great river lagoon of Stanley Pool, the *Florida* was rearmed and put to sail, Roger traveled on that ship through the Middle and Upper Congo, securing the deposits and the transport of goods of the Sanford Exploring Expedition through places that, years later, he would visit again during his journey to hell in 1903: Bolobo, Lukolela, the region of Irebu, and finally, the Ecuador station renamed Coquilhatville.

The incident involving Lieutenant Francqui, who, unlike Roger, had no repulsion against the whip and used it liberally, occurred upon returning from a journey to the equatorial line, about fifty kilometers upstream from Boma, in a tiny unnamed village. The lieutenant

Francqui, in command of eight soldiers from the Public Force, all natives, had carried out a punitive expedition due to the eternal problem of the laborers. There was always a need for more than were available to load the goods for the expeditions that traveled back and forth between Boma-Matadi and Leopoldville-Stanley Pool. Since the tribes resisted delivering their people for that exhausting service, from time to time the Public Force, and occasionally private concessionaires, would carry out raids against the refractory villages, where, in addition to taking away the men capable of working tied in a row, some huts would be burned, skins, ivories, and animals confiscated, and a good whipping would be given to the chiefs to ensure that future commitments would be met.

When Roger Casement and his small Company of five porters and a Zanzibari entered the riverbank, the three or four huts were already in ashes, and the villagers had fled. The exception was that boy, almost a child, lying on the ground, with his hands and feet tied to stakes, on whose back Lieutenant

Francqui was venting his frustration with lashes. Generally, it was not the officers who administered the whips but the soldiers. However, the lieutenant undoubtedly felt aggrieved by the entire village's escape and wanted to take revenge. Red with rage, dripping with sweat, he let out a small huff with each lash. He showed no reaction upon seeing Roger and his group. He simply responded to their greeting with a nod of his head without interrupting the punishment. The boy must have lost consciousness a while ago. His back and legs were a mass of blood, and Roger remembered a detail: near the naked little body, a column of ants was marching by.

—You have no right to do that, Lieutenant Francqui—he said, in French—. That's enough!

The small officer lowered the whip and turned to look at the tall silhouette, bearded and unarmed, who was holding a stake to probe the ground and clear the leaves during the march. A puppy was fluttering between his legs. The surprise caused the round face of the lieutenant, with his neatly trimmed mustache and blinking little eyes, to go from flushed to pale and back to flushed.

—What did you say?—he roared. Roger saw him let go of the whip, move his right hand to his waist, and fumble with the holster where the handle of the revolver was sticking out. In a second, he realized that in his rage, the officer could shoot him. He reacted quickly. Before the officer could draw the weapon, Roger had grabbed him by the neck at the same moment he snatched away the revolver he had just drawn. Lieutenant Francqui was trying to shake off the fingers that were choking him. His eyes bulged like a frog.

The eight soldiers of the Public Force, who were contemplating the punishment while filming, had not moved, but Roger assumed that, bewildered by what was happening, they had their hands on their shotguns and were waiting for an order from their chief to act.

—My name is Roger Casement, I work for SEE, and you know me very well, Lieutenant Francqui, because we have played poker in Matadi before—he said, releasing him, bending down to pick up the revolver and returning it to him with a friendly gesture—. The way you are whipping this young man is a crime, regardless of the offense he committed. As an officer of the Forcé Publique, you know better than I do because, without a doubt, you are familiar with the laws of the Independent State of the Congo. If this boy dies from the lashes, it will weigh on your conscience as a crime.

—When I came to the Congo, I took the precaution of leaving my conscience in my country—said the officer. Now he had a mocking expression and seemed to wonder whether Casement was a clown or a madman. His hysteria had dissipated—. Thankfully, you were quick; I was about to shoot you. I would have gotten into a good diplomatic mess killing an Englishman. In any case, I advise you not to interfere, as you just did, with my colleagues from the Forcé Publique. They have a bad temper, and dealing with them could go worse for you than with me.

His cholera had passed, and now he seemed depressed. He purred that someone had warned them of his arrival. He would have to return to Matadi empty-handed. He said nothing when Casement ordered his troops to untie the boy, lay him in a hammock, and, hanging it between two stakes, set off with him towards Boma. When they arrived there, two days later, despite the wounds and the lost blood, the boy was still alive. Roger left him at the health post. He went to the court to file a complaint against Lieutenant Francqui for abuse of authority. In the following weeks, he was called to testify twice, and in the long and stupid interrogations of the judge, he understood that his complaint would be filed away without the officer even being reprimanded.

When the judge finally delivered his ruling, dismissing the complaint for lack of evidence and because the victim refused to corroborate it, Roger Casement had resigned from the Sanford Exploring Expedition and was once again working under the orders of Henry Morton Stanley—who, now, the Kikongo people of the region had nicknamed "Bula Matadi" ("Breaker of stones")—on the railway that had begun construction, parallel to the caravan route, from Boma and Matadi to Leopoldville-Stanley Pool. The mistreated boy stayed working with Roger and became his domestic servant, assistant, and travel companion throughout Africa. As he never knew how to say what his name was, Casement named him Charlie. He had been with him for sixteen years.

Roger Casement's resignation from the Sanford Exploring Expedition was due to an incident with one of the executives of the company. He did not regret it, as working alongside Stanley on the railroad, although it required tremendous physical effort, restored the excitement with which he came to Africa. Opening the forest and blasting mountains to lay the sleepers and rails of the railroad was the pioneering task he had dreamed of. The hours he spent outdoors, scorching under the sun or soaked by the downpours, directing laborers and machete workers, giving orders to the "Zanzibari," ensuring that the crews were doing their job well, compacting, leveling, reinforcing the ground where the ties would be laid, and clearing the thick undergrowth, were hours of concentration and the feeling of doing a work that would benefit both Europeans and Africans, colonizers and colonized. Herbert Ward told him one day: "When I met you, I thought you were just an adventurer. Now I know you are a mystic."

Roger liked even less to move from the mountain to the villages to negotiate the hiring of porters and machete men for the railway. The lack of labor had become the

number one problem as the Independent State of the Congo grew. Despite having signed the "treaties," the chieftains, now that they understood what it was about, were reluctant to let the villagers go to open roads, build stations and depots, or collect rubber. Roger managed, while working in the Sanford Exploring Expedition, to persuade the company to pay a small wage, usually in kind, to the workers to overcome this resistance, despite having no legal obligation. Other companies also began to do so. But even then, it was not easy to hire them. The chieftains claimed they could not part with essential men to tend to the crops and secure the hunting and fishing that provided their food. Often, when faced with the proximity of recruiters, men of working age hid in the bush. This led to punitive expeditions, forced recruitment, and the practice of confining women in the so-called *maisons d'otages* (houses of hostages) to ensure that their husbands did not escape.

Both in the Stanley expedition and in that of Henry Shelton Sanford, Roger was often tasked with negotiating with the indigenous communities for the delivery of natives. Thanks to his ease with languages, he could make himself understood in Kikongo and Lingala —later also in Swahili— although always with the help of interpreters. Hearing him mumble their language alleviated the distrust of the natives. His gentle manners, patience, and respectful attitude facilitated conversations, in addition to the gifts he brought them: clothes, knives, and other household items, as well as the little glass beads they liked so much. He usually returned to the camp with a handful of men for clearing the land and carrying out tasks. He gained a reputation as the "friend of the blacks," something that some of his companions judged—

they looked on with pity, while others, especially some officers of the Public Force, deserved their disdain.

For Roger, those visits to the tribes caused him a discomfort that would grow over the years. At first, he did it willingly, as it satisfied his curiosity to learn about the customs, languages, attire, practices, foods, dances, and songs of those peoples, who seemed stuck in the depths of the centuries, where a primitive, healthy, and direct innocence mixed with cruel customs, such as sacrificing twin children in certain tribes or killing a certain number of servants — slaves, almost always — to bury them alongside the chiefs, and the practice of cannibalism among some groups that, because of this, were feared and loathed by other communities. From those negotiations, he came away with an indefinable discomfort, the feeling of playing dirty with those men from another time, who, no matter how hard he tried, would never be able to understand him fully, and thus, despite the precautions he took to mitigate the abusive nature of those agreements, with the guilt of having acted against his convictions, morality, and that 'first principle,' as he referred to God.

Therefore, in late December 1888, before completing a year at the Stanley Railway, he resigned and went to work at the Baptist mission in Ngombe Lute-te, with the Bentley couple, the missionaries who directed it. He made the decision abruptly, after a conversation that began at twilight and ended with the first light of dawn, in a house in the colonists' neighborhood of Matadi, with a character who was just passing through. Theodore Horte was a former officer of the British Navy. He had left the British Navy to become a Baptist missionary in the Congo. The Baptists

had been there since Doctor David Livingstone set out to explore the African continent and preach evangelism. They had opened missions in Palabala, Banza Manteke, Ngombe Lute-te, and had just inaugurated another, Arlhington, near Stanley Pool. Theodore Horte, visitor to these missions, spent his time traveling from one to another, providing assistance to the pastors and looking for ways to open new centers. That conversation left an impression on Roger Casement that he would remember for the rest of his life, and that, during these days of recovery from his third paludism fevers, in mid-1902, he could have reproduced in exquisite detail.

Nobody imagined, hearing him speak, that Theodore Horte had been a career officer and that, as a sailor, he had participated in important military operations of the British Navy. He did not talk about his past or his private life. He was a distinguished-looking man in his fifties with polite manners. On that quiet night in Matadi, with no rain or clouds, under a sky dotted with stars reflected in the waters of the river and a gentle murmur of warm wind tousling their hair, Casement and Horte, lying in two adjacent hammocks, started a post-dinner conversation that Roger initially thought would last only the minutes leading to sleep after a meal and would be one of those conventional and forgettable exchanges. However, shortly after the conversation began, something made his heart beat harder than usual. He felt soothed by the softness and warmth of Pastor Horte's voice, encouraged to talk about topics he never shared with his coworkers—except, perhaps, once with Herbert Ward—and even less with his superiors. Worries, anxieties, doubts, which he hid as if they were ominous matters. Did all that make sense? Was the European adventure of Africa really what it was said to be?

what was written, what was believed? Did civilization, progress, modernity come through free trade and evangelization? Could those beasts of the Forcé Publique that stole everything they could in punitive expeditions be called civilizers? How many, among the colonizers —traders, soldiers, officials, adventurers— had a minimum respect for the natives and considered them brothers, or at least, human? Five percent? One in a hundred? The truth, the truth, in the years I had been here I had only found a number for which there were not enough fingers on the hands of Europeans who did not treat black people as soulless animals, whom they could deceive, exploit, whip, even kill, without the slightest remorse.

Theodore Horte listened in silence to the explosion of bitterness from the young Casement. When he spoke, he did not seem surprised by what he had heard him say. On the contrary, he acknowledged that he too had been plagued by tremendous doubts for years. However, at least in theory, the idea of "civilization" had some truth to it. Were the living conditions of the natives not atrocious? Did their levels of hygiene, their superstitions, their ignorance of the most basic notions of health not cause them to die like flies? Wasn't their life of mere survival tragic? Europe had much to offer them to help them escape primitivism. To put an end to certain barbaric practices, the sacrifice of children and the sick, for example, in many communities, the wars in which they were entangled, the slavery and cannibalism that were still practiced in some places. And besides, was it not good for them to know the true God, to replace the idols they worshiped with the Christian God, the God of mercy, love, and justice? True, a lot of bad people had come here, perhaps the worst of Europe. Did that have no remedy? It was

essential that the good things from the Old Continent came. Not the greed of the merchants with dirty souls, but science, laws, education, the innate rights of human beings, Christian ethics. It was too late to turn back, wasn't it? It was pointless to ask if colonization was good or bad, if, left to their own fate, the Congolese would have fared better than without the Europeans. When things had no way back, it was not worth the time to wonder if it would have been better if they hadn't happened. Better to try to steer them in the right direction. It was always possible to straighten what was crooked. Wasn't this the best teaching of Christ?

When, at dawn, Roger Casement asked him if it was possible for a layperson like him, who had never been very religious, to work in one of the missions that the Baptist Church had in the Lower and Middle Congo region, Theodore Horte chuckled:

—It must be one of those traps from God—he exclaimed—. The Bentley spouses, from the Ngombe Lutete mission, need a lay helper to assist them with the accounting. And now, you ask me that. Could it be something more than mere coincidence? One of those traps that God sometimes sets for us to remind us that He is always there and that we should never despair?

Roger's work, from January to March 1889, at the Ngombe Lutete mission, although brief, was intense and allowed him to emerge from the uncertainty he had been living in for some time. He earned only ten pounds a month and had to use that to pay for his living expenses, but watching Mr. William Holman Bentley and his wife work tirelessly from morning until night, with such enthusiasm and conviction, and sharing life with them in that mission which, while being a religious center, was also a dispensary, vaccination site, school, goods store, and place for recreation, counseling and

advice, made colonial adventure seem less harsh, more reasonable, and even civilizing. This sentiment was encouraged by seeing how a small African community of converts to the Reformed Church had emerged around that couple, which, both in their attire and in the songs of the choir that practiced daily for Sunday services, as well as in literacy and Christian doctrine classes, seemed to be moving away from tribal life and beginning a modern and Christian life.

His work was not limited to keeping the books of income and expenses of the mission. This took him little time. He did everything, from clearing the debris and weeding the small clearing around the mission—it was a daily struggle against the vegetation determined to reclaim the clearing that had been taken from it—to going out to hunt a leopard that was eating the birds from the coop. He handled the transportation by path or by river in a small boat, carrying and bringing back the sick, tools, and workers, and he oversaw the operation of the mission's store, where the natives from the surrounding area could buy and sell goods. Bartering was the most common practice, but Belgian francs and pounds sterling also circulated. The Bentleys mocked his ineptitude for business and his profligate nature, as everything seemed expensive to Roger, who wanted to lower the prices, even if it deprived the mission of the small profit margin that allowed it to complete its meager budget.

Despite the affection he came to feel for the Bentleys and the good conscience that working alongside them provided, Roger knew from the beginning that his stay in the Ngombe Lutete mission would be temporary. The work was noble and altruistic, but it only made sense when accompanied by the faith that inspired Theodore Horte and the Bentleys, which he lacked, even though he cherished their gestures and expressions, attending to the commented readings of the Bible, doctrine classes, and Sunday services.

He was neither an atheist nor an agnostic, but something more uncertain, an indifferent person who did not deny the existence of God —the "first principle"— yet was unable to feel comfortable within the embrace of a church, in solidarity and fellowship with other believers, as part of a common denominator. He tried to explain this during that long conversation in Matadi to Theodore Horte and felt awkward and confused. The former sailor reassured him: "I understand perfectly, Roger. God has His ways. It disturbs, it unsettles, it pushes us to seek. Until one day, everything becomes clear, and there He is. It will happen to you, you will see."

In those three months, at least, it did not happen to him. Now, in 1902, thirteen years after that, he remained in religious uncertainty. The fevers had passed, he had lost a lot of weight, and although he occasionally felt dizzy from weakness, he had resumed his duties as consul in Boma. He went to visit the governor general and other authorities. He returned to playing chess and bridge. The rainy season was in full swing and would last many months.

At the end of March 1889, after finishing his contract with Reverend William Holman Bentley and following five years of absence, he returned to England for the first time.

V

—Getting here has been one of the most difficult things I've done in my life —Alice said in greeting, extending her hand—. I thought I would never succeed. But, well, here I am.

Alice Stopford Green maintained the appearance of a cold, rational person, detached from sentimentalism, but Roger knew her well enough to realize that she was deeply moved. He noticed the slight tremor in her voice that she could not conceal and the rapid flutter of her nose that always appeared whenever something troubled her. She was nearing seventy years old but retained her youthful figure. The wrinkles had not erased the freshness of her freckled face or the brightness of her light, steel-colored eyes. And in them, that intelligent light always shone. She wore, with her customary sober elegance, a light dress, a light blouse, and high-heeled ankle boots.

—What a pleasure, dear Alice, what a pleasure — Roger Casement repeated, taking her hands—. I thought I would never see you again.

—I brought you some books, some sweets, and some clothing, but the guards at the entrance took it all away from me—she made a grimace of helplessness—. I'm sorry. Are you feeling well?

—Yes, yes —said Roger, anxious—. You have done so much for me all this time. Is there no news yet?

—The cabinet meets on Thursday —she said—. I have reliable information that this matter is at the top of the agenda. Ha-

we do what we can and even the impossible, Roger. The petition has around fifty signatures, all important people. Scientists, artists, writers, politicians. John Devoy assures us that at any moment, the telegram from the president of the United States should arrive at the English Government. All friends have mobilized to counteract, I mean, to address that shameful campaign in the press. You are aware, right?

—Vaguely —said Casement, with a look of displeasure—. News from outside does not reach here, and the jailers have orders not to speak to me. Only the *sheriff* does, but to insult me. Do you think there is still any possibility, Alice?

—Of course I believe it —she affirmed strongly, but Casement thought it was a pious lie—. All my friends assure me that the cabinet decides this unanimously. If there is just one minister against the execution, you are saved. And it seems that your former boss at the Foreign Office, sir Edward Grey, is against it. Don't lose hope, Roger.

This time the *sheriff* of Pentonville Prison was not in the visiting room. Only a young and prudent guard stood with his back to them, looking down the hallway through the door's grate, pretending to be uninterested in the conversation between Roger and the historian. "If all the wardens of Pentonville Prison were as considerate, life here would be much more bearable," he thought. He remembered that he had not yet asked Alice about the events in Dublin.

—I know that when the Easter Rising took place, Scotland Yard came to search your house on Grosvenor Road —he said—. Poor Alice. Did they put you through a very bad time?

—Not so much, Roger. They took many papers. Personal letters, manuscripts. I hope they return them to me; I don't think they will be of any use to them —she sighed, saddened—. In com-

parison with what they have suffered over there in Ireland, what I experienced was nothing.

Would the harsh repression continue? Roger tried not to think about the executions, the dead, the aftermath of that tragic week. But Alice must have read the curiosity in his eyes about wanting to know.

—The executions have ceased, it seems—he murmured, glancing at the back of the guard—. There are about three thousand five hundred prisoners, we estimate. Most have been brought here and are spread across prisons throughout England. We have located around eighty women among them. Several associations are helping us. Many English lawyers have offered to handle their cases, pro bono.

Questions were crowding in Roger's mind. How many friends among the dead, the injured, the prisoners? But he held back. What was the point of finding out things he could do nothing about that would only serve to increase his bitterness?

—Do you know something, Alice? One of the reasons I would like my sentence commuted is because, if they don't, I will die without having I earned Irish. If they commute it, I will dive into it and I promise you that in this very visiting room we will speak in Gaelic sometime.

She nodded with a little smile that came out only halfway.

—Irish is a difficult language—he said, patting her on the arm—. It takes a lot of time and patience to learn it. You have had a very busy life, dear. But console yourself, few Irish have done as much for Ireland as you.

—Thanks to you, dear Alice. I owe you so much. Your friendship, your hospitality, your intelligence, your culture. Those Tuesday evenings on Grosvenor Road, with extraordinary people, in such a pleasant atmosphere. They are the best

memories of my life. Now I can tell you and thank you for it, dear friend. You taught me to love the past and the culture of Ireland. You were a generous teacher, who greatly enriched my life.

He said what he had always felt and kept silent about, out of modesty. Since he met her, he admired and loved the historian and writer Alice Stopford Green, whose books and studies on historical past and Irish legends and myths and Gaelic had contributed more than anything to give Casement that "Celtic pride" that he boasted about so much that, at times, it drew the ridicule of his own nationalist friends. He had met Alice eleven or twelve years earlier when she asked him for help for the Congo Reform Association that Roger had founded with Edmund D. Morel. They were beginning the public battle of these bright friends against Leopold II and his Machiavellian creation, the Independent State of the Congo. The enthusiasm with which Alice Stopford Green devoted herself to her campaign denouncing the horrors of the Congo was decisive in getting many of her writer and political friends to join her. Alice became the mentor and intellectual guide of Roger, who, whenever he was in London, attended the writer's salon weekly. Professors, journalists, poets, painters, musicians, and politicians generally attended these soirées, who, like her, were critics of imperialism and colonialism and supporters of Home Rule or Autonomy for Ireland, and even radical nationalists who demanded total independence for Eire. In the elegant and book-filled salons of the Grosvenor Road house, where Alice kept the library of her late husband, the historian John Richard Green, Roger met W. B. Yeats, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Bernard Shaw, G. K. Chesterton, John Galsworthy, Robert Cunningham Graham, and many other fashionable writers.

—I have a question I was about to ask Gee yesterday, but I didn't dare —said Roger—. Did Conrad sign the petition? Neither my lawyer nor Gee have mentioned his name.

Alice shook her head.

—I wrote to him myself, asking for his signature — she added, annoyed—. His reasons were confusing. He has always been elusive on political matters. Perhaps, in his situation as an assimilated British citizen, he does not feel very secure. On the other hand, as a Pole, he hates Germany as much as Russia, both of which obliterated his country for many centuries. In short, I don't know. All your friends deeply lament it. One can be a great writer and a coward in political matters. You know this better than anyone, Roger.

Casement nodded. He regretted having asked the question. It would have been better not to know. The absence of that signature would now torment him as much as finding out from lawyer Gavan Duffy that he also did not want to sign the petition for commutation of the sentence of Edmund D. Morel. His friend, his brother *Bulldog*\ His comrade in the fight for the rights of the natives of the Congo also refused, citing reasons of patriotic loyalty in times of war.

—That Conrad not having signed won't change much —said the historian—. His political influence with the Asquith Government is null.

—No, of course not —Roger nodded.

It may not have mattered for the success or failure of the request, but for him, in his innermost self, it did. It would have done him good to remember, in those moments of despair that assailed him in his cell, that a person of his stature, whom so many people —including him— admired, was supporting him in this difficult time and was sending him, with that signature, a message of understanding and friendship.

—You met him a long time ago, didn't you? —asked Alice, as if guessing his thoughts.

—It's been twenty-six years, exactly. In June 1890, in the Congo —Roger specified—. He was not yet a writer. Although, if I remember correctly, he told me that he had started writing a novel. *The Madness of Almayer*, without a doubt, the first one he published. He sent it to me, dedicated. I still have the copy somewhere. He had not published anything yet. He was a sailor. His English was barely understandable due to his strong Polish accent.

—He is still not understood —Alice smiled—. He still speaks English with that terrible accent. Like 'chewing pebbles,' says Bernard Shaw. But he writes in a heavenly way, like it or not.

Memory brought back to Roger the recollection of that June day in 1890 when, sweating from the humid heat of the summer that was beginning and annoyed by the bites of mosquitoes that relentlessly attacked his foreign skin, that young captain of the British merchant navy arrived in Matadi. In his thirties, with a clear forehead, dark beard, sturdy body, and sunken eyes, his name was Konrad Korzeniowski, and he was Polish, having become a naturalized Englishman only a few years earlier. Hired by the Belgian Company for Trade with the Upper Congo, he came to serve as the captain of one of the small steamers that transported goods and traders between Leopoldville-Kinshasa and the distant Stanley Falls in Kisangani. It was his first assignment as a ship's captain, filling him with hopes and projects. He arrived in the Congo imbued with all the fantasies and myths with which Leopold II had crafted his image as a great humanitarian and monarch committed to civilizing Africa and freeing the Congolese from slavery, paganism, and other barbarities. Despite his extensive traveling experience in the

seas of Asia and America, his gift of languages and his readings, there was in the Pole something innocent and childlike that immediately captivated Roger Casement. The affection was mutual, as from that very day they met until three weeks later, when Korzeniowski departed with thirty porters along the caravan route to Leopoldville-Kinshasa, where he was to take command of his ship *Le Roi des Belges*, they saw each other morning, noon, and night.

They took walks around Matadi, up to the now non-existent Vivi, the first and brief capital of the colony, of which not even the rubble remained, and to the mouth of the Mpozo River, where, according to legend, the first rapids and waterfalls of Livingstone Falls and the Cauldron of the Devil had stopped the Portuguese Diego Cao four centuries ago. In the Lufundi plain, Roger Casement showed the young Polish man the place where the explorer Henry Morton Stanley built his first home, which disappeared years later in a fire. But above all, they talked a lot and about many things, although primarily about what was happening in that newly established Independent State of the Congo that Konrad had just set foot in and where Roger had already spent six years. Just days into their friendship, the Polish sailor had formed a very different idea from the one he had brought with him about the place where he had come to work. And, as he told Roger upon parting, on the dawn of that Saturday, June 28, 1890, heading towards the Crystal Mountains, "deflowered." That's how he said it, with his rocky and emphatic accent: "You have deflowered me, Casement. About Leopold II, about the Independent State of the Congo. Perhaps, about life." And he repeated, dramatically: "Deflowered."

They met several times again during Roger's trips to London, and they exchanged some letters. Thirteen years after that first encounter, in June 1903,

Casement, who was in England, received an invitation from Joseph Conrad (he was now called that and was already a prestigious writer) to spend a weekend at Pent Farm, his country cottage in Hythe, Kent. The novelist lived there a frugal and solitary life with his wife and son. Roger cherished warm memories of those couple of days spent with the writer. Now, he had silver threads in his hair and thick beards, he had gained weight and developed a certain intellectual arrogance in his manner of expression. But he was extraordinarily effusive with him. When Roger congratulated him on his Congolese novel, *Heart of Darkness*, which he had just read and which —he told him— had stirred his gut because it was the most extraordinary description of the horrors experienced in the Congo, Conrad interrupted him with his hands.

—You should have appeared as a co-author of that book, Casement —he asserted, patting him on the shoulders—. I would have never written it without your help. You cleared the sleep from my eyes. About Africa, about the Independent State of the Congo. And about the human beast.

During a private after-dinner conversation —the discreet Mrs. Conrad, a woman of very humble origins, and the child had withdrawn to rest— the writer, after the second sip of port, told Roger that for what he was doing for the Congolese indigenous people, he deserved to be called 'the British Bartolomé de las Casas.' Roger blushed to his ears with such praise. How was it possible that someone who had such a good opinion of him, who had helped both him and Edmund D. Morel so much in their campaign against Leopold II, had refused to sign a memorial that only requested the commutation of the death penalty? What could it compromise him with the Government?

He remembered other sporadic meetings with Conrad during his visits to London. Once, at his club, the Wellington Club on Grosvenor Place, where he was

gathered with colleagues from the Foreign Office, they met. The writer insisted that Roger stay for a cognac with him when he said goodbye to his companions. They reminisced about the disastrous state of mind in which, six months after his visit to Matadi, the sailor reappeared there. Roger Casement was still working at the place, in charge of supplies and transportation. Konrad Korzeniowski was no longer the enthusiastic young man full of hopes that Roger had met six months earlier. Age had taken its toll on him; he was anxious and had stomach problems due to parasites. The continuous diarrhea had caused him to lose many pounds. Bitter and pessimistic, he only dreamed of returning to London as soon as possible to seek help from qualified doctors.

—I see that the jungle has not been kind to you, Konrad. Do not be alarmed. Malaria is like that, it takes time to go away even after the fever has disappeared.

They were conversing over a post-meal drink on the terrace of the little house that served as both home and office for Roger. There was neither moon nor stars on the night in Matadi, but it was not raining, and the hum of the insects lulled them as they smoked and sipped from the glasses in their hands.

—The worst hasn't been the jungle, this unhealthy climate, the fevers that left me in a semi-conscious state for almost two weeks —the Pole complained—. Not even the terrible dysentery that had me expelling blood for five straight days. The worst, the worst, Casement, was witnessing the horrible things that happen daily in that damned country. Committed by the black demons and the white demons, wherever one turns their eyes.

Konrad had made a round trip on the company's steamboat that he was to command, *Le Roi des Belges*, from Leopoldville-Kinshasa to Stanley Falls. Everything had gone wrong during that journey to Kisangani. He was almost drowned because the

canoe in which the inexperienced rowers were trapped in a whirlpool, near Kinshasa. Malaria kept him lying in his small cabin with attacks of fever, too weak to get up. There he learned that the previous captain of *Le Roi des Belges* had been shot to death in a dispute with the natives of a village. Another official of the Belgian Company for Trade with the Upper Congo, whom Konrad had gone to pick up in a remote settlement where he was collecting ivory and rubber, died from an unknown disease during the journey. But it was not the physical misfortunes that relentlessly afflicted him that had the Pole beside himself.

—It is moral corruption, the corruption of the soul that invades everything in this country—he repeated in a hollow, gloomy voice, as if overwhelmed by an apocalyptic vision.

—I tried to prepare you when we met—Case ment reminded him—. I regret not having been more explicit about what you were going to find there in the Upper Congo.

What had affected him so much? Discovering that very primitive practices like cannibalism were still prevalent in some communities? That in the tribes and trading posts there were still slaves who changed masters for a few francs? That the supposed liberators subjected the Congolese to even more cruel forms of oppression and servitude? Had he been overwhelmed by the sight of the backs of the natives scarred by whips? That, for the first time in his life, he saw a white man whip a black man until his body was turned into a crossword of wounds? He didn't ask for details, but without a doubt, the captain of *Le Roi des Belges* had witnessed terrible things when he had just resigned from the three-year contract he had in order to return as soon as possible to England. Moreover, he told Roger that in Leopoldville-Kinshasa, upon his return from Stanley Falls, he had a violent dispute with the director.

of the Belgian Company for Trade with the Upper Congo, Camille Delcommune, whom he called "barbarian with vest and hat." Now he wanted to return to civilization, which for him meant England.

—Have you read *Heart of Darkness*? —Roger asked Alice—. Do you think that view of humanity is fair?

—I suppose it is not —the historian replied—. We discussed it a lot one Tuesday when it came out. That novel is a parable suggesting that Africa turns civilized Europeans who go there into savages. Your *Report on the Congo* rather showed the opposite. That it was us Europeans who brought the worst barbarities there. Besides, you spent twenty years in Africa without becoming a savage. In fact, you returned more civilized than you were when you left here believing in the virtues of colonialism and the Empire.

—Conrad said that in the Congo, the moral corruption of humanity came to the surface. Both of whites and blacks. For me, *Heart of Darkness* often kept me awake. I believe it does not describe the Congo, nor reality, nor history, but hell. The Congo is a pretext to express that dreadful view that certain catholics have of absolute evil.

—I'm sorry to interrupt you —said the guard, turning back to them—. Fifteen minutes have passed, and the visiting permission was for ten. You need to say goodbye.

Roger extended his hand to Alice, but to his surprise, she opened her arms. She embraced him tightly. "We will continue to do everything, everything, to save your life, Roger," she murmured in his ear. He thought: "For Alice to allow herself these displays of affection, she must be convinced that the request will be denied."

As he returned to his cell, he felt sadness. Would he ever see Alice Stopford Green again? How many things did she represent to him! No one embodied as much as the

historian his passion for Ireland, the last of his passions, the most intense, the most obstinate, a passion that had consumed him and would probably lead him to death. "I do not regret it," he repeated. The many centuries of oppression had caused so much pain in Ireland, so much injustice, that it was worth sacrificing himself for this noble cause. He had failed, undoubtedly. The carefully structured plan to accelerate the emancipation of Eire by associating its struggle with Germany and aligning an offensive action of the Army and Navy of the Kaiser against England with the nationalist uprising did not go as he had foreseen. Nor was he able to stop that rebellion. And now, Sean McDermott, Patrick Pearse, Eamonn Ceannt, Tom Clarke, Joseph Plunkett, and how many others had been executed. Hundreds of comrades would rot in prison, God knew for how many years. At least, there was his example, as the disheveled Joseph Plunkett fiercely determinedly stated in Berlin. Of dedication, of love, of sacrifice, for a cause similar to that which made him fight against Leopold II in the Congo, against Julio C. Arana and the rubber dealers of Putumayo in the Amazon. The cause of justice, the one of the powerless against the abuses of the powerful and the despots. Would the campaign that called him degenerate and traitor erase all else? After all, what did it matter? What was important was decided up there; the final word belonged to that God who, finally, for some time now, was beginning to have compassion for him.

Lying on his cot, on his back, with his eyes closed, Joseph Conrad came back to his memory. Would he have felt better if the former sailor had signed the petition? Maybe yes, maybe no. What had he meant to say that night in his little house in Kent when he stated, 'Before going to the Congo, I was nothing but a poor animal'? The phrase had impressed him, although he did not fully understand it. What did it mean? Perhaps that what he did, did not do, saw, and

heard in those six months in the Middle and Upper Congo awakened deeper and more transcendent concerns about the human condition, about original sin, about evil, about History. Roger could understand that very well. The Congo had humanized him too, if being human meant knowing the extremes that greed, avarice, prejudice, and cruelty could reach. Moral corruption was that, yes: something that did not exist among animals, an exclusivity of humans. The Congo had revealed to him that these things were part of life. It had opened his eyes. 'Deflowered' him too, like the Pole. Then he remembered that he had arrived in Africa at the age of twenty, still a virgin. Wasn't it unfair for the press, as the *sheriff* of Pentonville Prison had told him, to accuse only him, within the vast human species, of being scum?

To combat the demoralization that was overcoming him, he tried to imagine the pleasure of taking a long bath in a tub, with plenty of water and soap, pressing against his own another naked body.

He left Matadi on June 5, 1903, on the railway built by Stanley, which he had himself worked on as a young man. During the two days of travel that the slow journey to Leopoldville took, he obsessively thought about a sports feat from his youth: having been the first white man to swim in the largest river along the caravan route between Manyanga and Stanley Pool: the Nkissi. He had already done so, completely unconsciously, in smaller rivers in the Lower and Middle Congo, the Kwilo, the Lukungu, the Mpozo, and the Lunzadi, where there were also crocodiles, and nothing happened to him. But the Nkissi was larger and more turbulent, nearly a hundred meters wide and filled with whirlpools due to the proximity of the great waterfall. The indigenous people warned him it was reckless; he could be swept away and thrown against the rocks. Indeed, after a few strokes, Roger felt himself being pulled by the legs and tossed toward the center of the waters by opposing currents from which, despite his kicking and vigorous slapping, he could not break free. When he was running out of strength—having swallowed some water—he managed to get close to the shore, getting tossed by a wave. There, he clung to some rocks, as best he could. When he climbed the slope, he was covered in scratches. His heart felt like it was bursting from his chest.

The journey he finally undertook lasted three months and ten days. Later, Roger would think that during this period, his manner of being changed, and he became another man—more lucid and realistic than he had been before—regarding the Congo, Africa, human beings, colonialism, Ireland, and life. However, that experience also made him a being more prone

to unhappiness. In the years he had left to live, he would often tell himself, in moments of discouragement, that it would have been preferable not to have made that journey to Middle and Upper Congo to verify what was true about the accusations of atrocities against indigenous people in rubber-producing areas that certain churches and the journalist, Edmund D. Morel, were launching in London, who seemed to have dedicated his life to criticizing Leopold II and the Independent State of the Congo.

On the first stretch of the journey between Matadi and Leopoldville, he was surprised by how sparsely populated the landscape was, with villages like Tumba, where he spent the night, and those dotted throughout the valleys of Nsele and Ndolo, which used to be bustling with people, now semi-deserted, with ghostly elderly individuals shuffling their feet in the dust or crouching against the trunks, their eyes closed, as if dead or asleep.

In those three months and ten days, the impression of depopulation and eclipse of the people, of the disappearance of villages and settlements where he had been, spent the night, traded, fifteen or sixteen years ago, was repeated over and over again, like a nightmare, in all regions, along the Congo River and its tributaries, or inland, in the entries that Roger made to gather the testimony of missionaries, officials, officers, and soldiers of the Forcé Publique, and of the indigenous people he could interrogate in Lingala, Kikongo, and Swahili, or in their own languages, using interpreters. Where were the people? Memory did not deceive him. He vividly recalled the human effervescence, the flocks of children, women, tattooed men, with filed incisors, necklaces of teeth, sometimes with spears and masks, who used to surround him, examine and touch him. How was it possible that they had vanished in such a few years? Some villages had been extinguished, in others the population had been reduced by half, to a third, and even to a tenth. In some places, he was able to check precise numbers. Lukolela,

for example, in 1884, when Roger visited that populous community for the first time, it had more than 5,000 villagers. Now, barely 352. And, most were in a ruinous state due to age or disease, so that, after the inspection, Casement concluded that only 82 survivors were still able to work. How had more than 4,000 inhabitants of Lukolela vanished?

The explanations from Government agents, employees of the rubber collecting companies, and officers of the Forcé Publique were always the same: the blacks were dying like flies from sleeping sickness, smallpox, typhus, colds, pneumonia, paludism fevers, and other plagues that, due to poor nutrition, decimated those organisms unprepared to resist diseases. It was true, the epidemics wreaked havoc. Sleeping sickness, in particular, resulting, as had been discovered a few years earlier, from the tsetse fly, attacked the blood and the brain, causing paralysis of the limbs and lethargy from which the victims would never emerge. However, by this point in his journey, Roger Casement continued to ask the reason for the depopulation of the Congo, not in search of answers but to confirm that the lies he heard were slogans that everyone repeated. He very well knew the answer. The plague that had decimated a good part of the Congolese of the Middle and Upper Congo was greed, cruelty, rubber, the inhumanity of a system, the relentless exploitation of Africans by European colonizers.

In Leopoldville, he decided that to preserve his independence and avoid being coerced by the authorities, he would not use any official means of transportation. With authorization from the Foreign Office, he rented the *Henry Reed* along with its crew from the American Baptist Missionary Union. The negotiation was slow, as was the gathering of wood and supplies for the journey.

His stay in Leopoldville-Kinshasa was meant to last from June 6 to July 2, when they set off upstream. That wait was wise. The freedom he gained from traveling on his own boat, being able to go and dock wherever he wanted, allowed him to discover things he never would have encountered while subordinated to colonial institutions. And he would never have been able to have so many conversations with the Africans themselves, who only dared to approach him when they saw that he was not accompanied by any military or Belgian civil authority.

Leopoldville had grown a lot since the last time Roger was here, six or seven years ago. It had become filled with houses, warehouses, missions, offices, courts, customs, inspectors, judges, accountants, officials, soldiers, shops, and markets. There were priests and pastors everywhere. Something about the nascent city displeased him from the first moment. They did not receive him poorly. From the governor to the commissioner, including the judges and inspectors he went to greet, as well as the Protestant pastors and Catholic missionaries he visited, all treated him cordially. Everyone was willing to provide the information he requested, even though, as he would confirm in the following weeks, it was often evasive or blatantly false. He felt that something hostile and oppressive permeated the air and the profile that the city was taking on. In contrast, Brazzaville, the neighboring capital of the French Congo, which stood across the river, where he crossed a couple of times, left him with a less oppressive impression, even a pleasant one. Perhaps it was due to its open, well-planned streets and the good humor of its people. He did not notice that secretly ominous atmosphere of Leopoldville there. In the nearly four weeks he spent there negotiating the rental of *Henry Reed*, he obtained much information, but always with the feeling that no one was getting to the heart of things, that even the most well-intentioned people were hiding something from him and from themselves, fearful of confronting a terrible and accusatory truth.

same, fearful of facing a terrible and accusing truth.

His friend Herbert Ward would later tell him that all of this was pure prejudice, that the things he saw and heard in the weeks that followed retrospectively clouded his memory of Leopoldville. Moreover, his memory would not only retain bad images of his stay in the city founded by Henry Morton Stanley in 1881. One morning, after a long walk taking advantage of the day's coolness, Roger arrived at the dock. There, suddenly, his attention focused on two dark-skinned, semi-nude boys who were unloading some boats while singing. They appeared very young. They wore a light loincloth that barely concealed the shape of their buttocks. Both were thin and agile, and with the rhythmic movements they made while unloading the bundles, they conveyed an impression of health, harmony, and beauty. He watched them for a long time. He regretted not having his camera with him. He would have liked to photograph them, to remember later that not everything was ugly and sordid in the emerging city of Leopoldville.

On July 2, 1903, as *Henry Reed* set sail and crossed the smooth and vast river lagoon of Stanley Pool, Roger felt moved: on the French shore, against the clear morning sky, sand cliffs reminiscent of the white cliffs of Dover were visible. Ibis with large wings flew over the lagoon, elegant and proud, showcasing themselves in the sun. Much of the day, the beauty of the landscape remained unchanged. From time to time, interpreters, porters, and machete men excitedly pointed out the tracks in the mud of elephants, hippos, buffalo, and antelopes. *John*, his bulldog, happy with the journey, ran back and forth on the boat, suddenly barking loudly. But upon arriving at Chumbiri, where they docked to collect firewood, *John*, abruptly changing mood, got angry and managed to bite a

pig and a goat, as well as the gardener of the orchard that the pastors of the Baptist Missionary Society had next to their small mission. Roger had to appease them with gifts.

Starting on the second day of the journey, they began to cross small steamers and barges loaded with baskets full of rubber that were going down the Congo River towards Leopoldville. This spectacle would accompany them for the rest of the journey, as well as, from time to time, seeing the telegraph poles under construction and rooftops of villages from which, upon seeing them approach, the inhabitants fled, retreating into the forest. From then on, when Roger wanted to question the natives of a village, he opted to first send an interpreter to explain to the locals that the British consul was coming alone, without any Belgian official, to find out the problems and needs they faced.

On the third day of the journey, in Bolobo, where there was also a mission of the Baptist Missionary Society, he had the first hint of what awaited him. Among the group of Baptist missionaries, the one who impressed him the most, with her energy, intelligence, and kindness, was Dr. Lily de Hailes. Tall, tireless, ascetic, eloquent, she had been in the Congo for fourteen years, spoke several indigenous languages, and ran the hospital for natives with as much dedication as effectiveness. The place was crowded. As they walked through the hammocks, cots, and mats where the patients lay, Roger intentionally asked her why there were so many victims of wounds on their buttocks, legs, and backs. Miss Hailes looked at him with indulgence.

—They are victims of a plague called whip, Mr. consul. A beast more bloodthirsty than the lion and the cobra. Are there no whips in Boma and Matadi?

—They are not applied as liberally as here.

Dr. Hailes must have had a great reddish mane in her youth, but, over the years, she had been filled with

gray hairs and only a few fiery strands remained that escaped from the scarf with which she covered her head. The sun had scorched her bony face, neck, and arms, but her greenish eyes remained young and lively, with an indomitable faith shimmering in them.

—And if you want to know why there are so many wounded with bandages on their hands and their private parts, I can also explain that —added Dr. Hailes, defiantly—. Because the soldiers of the Forcé Publique cut off their hands and penises or crushed them with machetes. Don't forget to include it in your report. These are things that are not usually said in Europe when talking about the Congo.

That afternoon, after spending several hours talking through interpreters with the wounded and sick at Bolobo Hospital, Roger could not eat dinner. He felt guilty towards the mission's pastors, among them Dr. Hailes, who had roasted a chicken in his honor. He excused himself, saying that he did not feel well. He was sure that if he took a single bite, he would vomit on his hosts.

—If what you've seen has unsettled you, it may not be wise to meet with Captain Massard —the head of the mission advised him—. Listening to him is an experience, well, how should I say it, for strong stomachs.

—That's why I have come to the Middle Congo, gentlemen.

Captain Pierre Massard, of the Forcé Publique, was not stationed in Bolobo but in Mbongo, where there was a garrison and a training camp for the Africans who would become soldiers in this body responsible for order and security. He was on an inspection trip and had set up a small tent near the mission. The pastors invited him to talk with the consul, warning him that the officer was famous for his irascible character. The natives nicknamed him 'Malu Malu,' and among the sinister deeds attributed to him was the killing of three rebellious Africans, whom he lined up in a single

gunshot. It was unwise to provoke him, as anything could be expected from him.

He was a stocky man, rather short, with a square face and a buzz cut, sporting nicotine-stained teeth and a frozen smile on his face. He had small, somewhat slanted eyes and a high-pitched voice, almost feminine. The shepherds had set up a table with cassava pastries and mango juices. They did not drink alcohol but did not object to Casement bringing a bottle of brandy and another of red wine from *Henry Reed*. The captain shook hands with everyone, ceremoniously, and greeted Roger with a baroque bow, calling him "*Your Excellency, Monsieur le Consul*". They toasted, drank, and lit cigarettes.

—If you allow me, Captain Massard, I would like to ask you a question —Roger said.

—What good French, Mr. Consul. Where did you learn it?

—I began studying it as a young person in England. But, above all, here in the Congo, where I have been for many years. I imagine I must speak with a Belgian accent.

—Ask me all the questions you want —said Massard, taking another sip—. Your brandy is excellent, by the way.

The four Baptist pastors were there, still and silent, as if petrified. They were North Americans, two young men and two elders. Dr. Hailes had gone to the hospital. It was beginning to get dark, and the buzz of nocturnal insects could already be heard. To ward off the mosquitoes, they had lit a bonfire that crackled softly and occasionally smoked.

—I will tell you frankly, Captain Massard —Casement said, not raising his voice, very slowly—. Those crushed hands and those severed penises I have seen at Bolobo Hospital seem to me an unacceptable savagery.

—They are, of course they are —the officer admitted immediately, with a gesture of disgust—. And something worse than that, Mr. Consul: a waste. Those mutilated men will no longer be able to work, or they will work poorly and their output will be minimal. With the lack of arms we suffer here, it is a true crime. Bring me the soldiers who cut off those hands and those penises, and I will slash their backs until they are drained of blood.

He sighed, overwhelmed by the levels of stupidity that plagued the world. He took another sip of brandy and had a good drag on his cigarette.

—Do the laws or regulations allow for the mutilation of indigenous people? —asked Roger Casement.

Captain Massard burst out laughing, and his square face, with the laughter, rounded out and some humorous dimples appeared on it.

—They categorically prohibit it —he asserted, gesturing against something in the air—. Make those two-legged animals understand what laws and regulations are. Don't you know them? If you have been in The Congo for so many years, you should. It's easier to make a hyena or a tick understand things than a Congolese.

He laughed again but, at once, became furious. Now his expression was harsh, and his squinty little eyes had almost disappeared under his swollen eyelids.

—I am going to explain to you what happens, and then you will understand —he added, sighing, already tired in advance of having to explain such obvious things as that the Earth is round—. Everything stems from a very simple concern —he affirmed, gesturing again with more fury against that winged enemy—. The Forcé Publique cannot waste ammunitions. We cannot allow the soldiers to expend the bullets we distribute on killing monkeys, snakes, and other filthy animals that sometimes like to crawl into their bellies raw. In training, they are taught that the

ammunitions can only be used in self-defense, when the officers order them to do so. But these blacks find it hard to obey orders, no matter how many lashes they receive. That is why the order was given. Do you understand, Mr. Consul?

—No, I don't understand, captain —said Roger—. What kind of provision is that?

—That every time they shoot, they cut off the hand or the penis of the one they have shot —explained the captain—. To ensure they don't waste bullets hunting. A sensible way to avoid wasting ammunition, is it not?

He sighed again and took another sip of brandy. He spat into the void.

—Well, no, it wasn't like that —the captain complained immediately, furious again—. Because these bastards figured out how to mock the provision. Can you guess how?

—I can't think of anything —said Roger.

—Very simple. By cutting off the hands and penises of the living, to make us believe they have shot at people, when they have actually done it against monkeys, snakes, and other garbage that they swallow. Do you now understand why there are all those poor devils without hands and without birds in the hospital?

He took a long pause and gulped down the rest of the brandy that remained in his glass. He seemed to grow sad, even pouting.

—We do what we can, Mr. consul —Captain Massard added, sorrowfully—. It is nothing easy, I assure you. Because, in addition to being brutish, the savages are congenital liars. They lie, deceive, lack feelings and principles. Not even fear opens their minds. I assure you that the punishments in the Forcé Publique for those who cut off hands and live birds to deceive and continue hunting with the ammunition the State gives them are very harsh. Please visit our posts and see for yourself, Mr. consul.

The conversation with Captain Massard lasted for the duration of the bonfire crackling at their feet, at least two hours. When they said goodbye, the four Baptist pastors had already gone to sleep some time ago. The officer and the consul had drunk the brandy and the claret. They were somewhat tipsy, but Roger Casement remained clear-headed. Months or years later, he could have recounted in detail the outbursts and confessions he heard, and how Captain Pierre Massard's square face gradually flushed with alcohol. In the following weeks, he would have many other conversations with officers of the Forcé Publique, Belgians, Italians, French, and Germans, and he would hear terrible things from their mouths, but in his memory, the most striking, a symbol of the Congolese reality, would always stand out: that talk, on the night in Bolobo, with Captain Massard. From a certain point onward, the officer became sentimental. He confessed to Roger that he missed his wife dearly. He hadn't seen her for two years and received few letters from her. Maybe she had stopped loving him. Maybe she had taken a lover. It was not surprising. Many officers and officials, serving Belgium and Her Majesty the King, found themselves buried in this hell, contracting diseases, being bitten by snakes, living without the most basic comforts. And for what? To earn meager salaries that barely allowed for savings. Would anyone thank them for those sacrifices back in Belgium? On the contrary, in the metropolis, there was a stubborn prejudice against the "colonials." Officers and officials returning from the colony were discriminated against, kept at a distance, as if, by rubbing shoulders with savages, they had also become savages.

When Captain Pierre Massard shifted to the sexual topic, Roger felt an anticipatory disgust and wanted to say goodbye. However, the officer was already drunk, and to avoid offending him or having a confrontation, he had to stay.

Meanwhile, while holding back his nausea as he listened to him, he told himself that he was not in Bolobo to play the justiciero, *but to* investigate and gather information. The more accurate and complete his report was, the more effective his contribution would be in fighting against the institutionalized evil that had become the Congo. Captain Massard felt pity for those young lieutenants or ranks of the Belgian Army who came full of hope to teach these unfortunate beings to be soldiers. And what about their sex lives? They had to leave their girlfriends, wives, and lovers back in Europe. And here, what was available? Not even worthy prostitutes existed in these godforsaken solitude. Just some filthy black women full of bugs, whom one had to be very drunk to sleep with, risking catching crabs, a purge, or a chancre. For him, for example, it was difficult. He had flops, */nom de Dieu* This had never happened to him before, in Europe. Flops in bed, him, Pierre Massard! Even the horn was not advisable because, with those teeth that so many black women had the habit of sharpening, one might suddenly get bitten and end up castrated.

He fastened his trousers and laughed, making an obscene grimace. Taking advantage of the fact that Massard was still celebrating, Roger stood up.

—I have to leave, captain. I must depart very early tomorrow and would like to rest a bit.

The captain mechanically shook his hand but continued speaking without getting up from his seat, his voice weak and his eyes glassy. As Roger walked away, he heard him behind, murmuring that choosing a military career had been the great mistake of his life, a mistake he would continue to pay for throughout the rest of his existence.

He set sail the next morning on the *Henry Reed* heading to Lukolela. He stayed there for three days, talking day and night with all kinds of people: officials, settlers, foremen, natives. Then he moved on to Ikoko, where he entered the lake

Mantumba. In its surroundings was that vast expanse of land known as the "Crown Domain."

Around her operated the main private rubber companies, the Lulonga Company, the ABIR Company, and the Anversoise Company of Commerce in Congo, which had vast concessions throughout the region. She visited dozens of villages, some by the shores of the immense lake and others inland. To reach the latter, it was necessary to travel in small rowboats or pirogues and walk for hours through the dark, damp underbrush, which the indigenous people were clearing with machetes and which often forced her to wade through water up to her waist across flooded terrain and foul swamps amid clouds of mosquitoes and the silent silhouettes of bats. Throughout those weeks, she endured fatigue, natural difficulties, and the caprices of the weather without being disheartened, in a state of spiritual fever, almost enchanted, because every day, every hour, it seemed she was sinking deeper into layers of suffering and evil. Could this be the hell that Dante described in his *Divine Comedy*? She had not read that book, and during those days she vowed to read it as soon as she could get her hands on a copy.

The indigenous people, who, at the beginning of their journey, would run as soon as they saw *Henry Reed*, believing that the small steamer brought soldiers, soon started to rather go out to meet him and send him emissaries to visit their villages. Word had spread among the natives that the British consul was touring the region listening to their complaints and requests, and, then, they went to him with testimonies and stories each worse than the other. They believed that he had the power to set right everything that was wrong in the Congo. He explained it in vain. He had no power at all. He would report on those injustices and crimes, and Great Britain and its allies would demand that the Belgian Government put an end to the abuses and punish the torturers and criminals. That was all he could do. Did they understand him? It wasn't even certain that they

They would listen. They were so eager to talk, to share the things that were happening to them that they were not paying attention. They spoke in a rush, with desperation and anger, stumbling over their words. The interpreters had to intervene, begging them to speak more slowly so they could do their job well.

Roger listened, taking notes. Then, he spent entire nights writing in his index cards and notebooks what he had heard, so that none of it would be lost. He barely tasted food. He was so troubled by the fear that all those scrawled papers might get lost that he didn't know where to hide them anymore or what precautions to take. He decided to carry them with him, on the shoulders of a porter who was instructed never to leave his side.

He hardly slept, and when fatigue overwhelmed him, nightmares would haunt him, taking him from fear to astonishment, from satanic visions to a state of desolation and sadness in which everything lost meaning and reason for being: his family, his friends, his ideas, his country, his feelings, his work. In those moments, he missed his friend Herbert Ward more than ever and his contagious enthusiasm for all manifestations of life, that optimistic joy that nothing and no one could diminish.

After that, when that journey had ended and he wrote his report and left the Congo, and his twenty years spent in Africa were only a memory, Roger Casement often told himself that if there was a single word that was the root of all the horrible things happening here, that word was greed. Greed for that black gold which, to the misfortune of its people, abounded in the Congolese forests. That wealth was the curse that had fallen upon those unfortunate ones, and if things continued this way, they would disappear from the face of the Earth. This conclusion he reached in those three months and ten days: if the rubber did not run out first, it would be the Congolese who would be depleted by the system that was annihilating them by the hundreds and thousands.

In those weeks, starting from his entry into the waters of Lake Mantumba, the memories would mix like shuffled cards. If he had not kept such a meticulous record of dates, places, testimonies, and observations in his notebooks, all that would be jumbled and disordered in his memory. He closed his eyes and, in a dizzying whirl, those ebony bodies with reddish scars like little vipers slicing their backs, buttocks, and legs, the stumps of children and old people in their severed arms, the wan, cadaverous faces from which life, fat, and muscles seemed to have been extracted, leaving only skin, skull, and that fixed expression or grimace that conveyed, more than pain, the infinite astonishment at what they were enduring would appear and reappear. And it was always the same, events that repeated themselves over and over again in every village and hamlet where Roger Casement set foot with his notebooks, pencils, and camera.

Everything was simple and clear at the starting point. Each village had precise obligations: to deliver weekly or biweekly quotas of food —cassava, poultry, antelope meat, wild pigs, goats, or ducks— to feed the garrison of the Forcé Publique and the laborers who opened roads, planted telegraph poles, and constructed docks and warehouses. Additionally, the village was to deliver a certain amount of rubber collected in baskets woven with plant vines by the indigenous people themselves. The punishments for failing to meet these obligations varied. For delivering less than the established amounts of food or rubber, the punishment was whipping, never less than twenty and sometimes up to fifty or a hundred. Many of those punished bled out and died. The indigenous people who fled —very few— sacrificed their families because, in that case, their women remained as hostages in the *houses of hostages* that the Forcé Publique maintained in all its garrisons. There, the women of

fugitives were scourged, condemned to the torment of hunger and thirst, and sometimes subjected to tortures as twisted as making them swallow their own excrement or that of their guards.

Not even the provisions issued by the colonial power — private companies and properties of the king alike— were respected. Everywhere, the system was violated and worsened by the soldiers and officials tasked with enforcing it because in each village, the military and Government agents increased the quotas to take a portion of the food and some rubber baskets for their small businesses reselling them.

In all the villages that Roger visited, the complaints from the chiefs were identical: if all the men were engaged in collecting rubber, how could they go out hunting and cultivating cassava and other food to feed the authorities, chiefs, guards, and laborers? Moreover, the rubber trees were becoming depleted, forcing the collectors to venture further and further into unfamiliar and inhospitable regions where many had been attacked by leopards, lions, and vipers. It was not possible to meet all those demands, no matter how much effort they put in.

On September 1, 1903, Roger Casement turned thirty-nine years old. They were navigating the Loporí River. The day before, they had left behind the village of Isi Isulo, in the hills that climbed the Bongandanga mountain. The birthday would be indelibly etched in his memory, as if God or perhaps the devil had intended for him to realize that, in terms of human cruelty, there were no limits, and it was always possible to go further by inventing ways to inflict torment on others.

The day dawned cloudy and threatened with a storm, but the rain did not burst and all morning the atmosphere was charged with electricity. Roger was about to have breakfast when he reached the improvised dock where *Henry Reed*, a Trappist monk, was moored.

the mission that order had in the town of Coquilhatville: Father Hutot. He was tall and thin like a character from El Greco, with a long gray beard and eyes in which something that could be cholera, fright, or astonishment, or all three at once stirred.

—I know what you are doing in these lands, consul — said Roger Casement, extending a skeletal hand to him. He spoke in a French interrupted by an urgent demand—. I beg you to accompany me to the village of Walla. It is only an hour or an hour and a half from here. You must see it with your own eyes.

He spoke as if he had the fever and chills of malaria.

—That's fine, *monpere* —Casement nodded—. But, please sit down, let's have some coffee and you eat something first.

While having breakfast, Father Hutot explained to the consul that the Trappists of the Coquilhatville mission had permission from the order to break the strict closure regime that governed them in other places, in order to assist the natives, "who are in great need of it, in this land where Beelzebub seems to be winning the battle against the Lord."

Not only did the monk's voice tremble, but so did his eyes, hands, and spirit. He blinked incessantly. He wore a rustic, stained, and wet tunic, and his feet, filled with mud and scratches, were shoved into strap sandals. Father Hutot had been in the Congo for nearly ten years. For the past eight, he had been traveling through the villages of the region from time to time. He had climbed to the summit of Bongan-danga and seen a leopard up close that, instead of jumping on him, stepped aside from the path, swishing its tail. He spoke indigenous languages and had earned the trust of the natives, especially those of Walla, "those martyrs."

They set off along a narrow path, amid tall foliage, occasionally interrupted by thin streams. The song of invisible birds could be heard, and sometimes a

flock of parrots flew screeching overhead. Roger noticed that the monk walked through the forest with ease, not stumbling, as if he had long experience in these marches through the underbrush. Father Hutot explained to him what had happened in Walla. Since the village, already greatly diminished, could not fully deliver the last quota of food, rubber, and timber, nor provide the number of able bodies that the authorities demanded, a detachment of thirty soldiers from the Forcé Publique, led by Lieutenant Tanville of the garrison in Coquilhatville, arrived. Upon seeing them approach, the entire village fled to the mountains. However, the interpreters went to find them and assured them they could return. Nothing would happen to them; Lieutenant Tanville only wanted to explain the new regulations and negotiate with the village. The chief ordered them to come back. As soon as they did, the soldiers fell upon them. Men and women were tied to trees and whipped. A pregnant woman trying to move away to urinate was shot dead by a soldier who thought she was fleeing. Ten other women were taken to the *maison d'otages* in Coquilhatville as hostages. Lieutenant Tanville gave Walla one week to complete the quota they owed, threatening that if they did not, those ten women would be executed and the village burned.

When, a few days after that occurrence, Father Hutot arrived in Walla, he encountered a horrific sight. To meet the quotas they owed, the families of the village had sold their sons and daughters, and two of the men had sold their wives to itinerant merchants who secretly dealt in the slave trade away from the authorities. The Trappist believed that the number of children and women sold should be at least eight, but perhaps it was more. The Indigenous people were terrified. They had sent to buy rubber and food to meet the debt, but it was uncertain whether the money from the sale would be enough.

—Can you believe that such things happen in this world, Mr. Consul?

—Yes, *my father*. Now I believe all the bad and terrible things they tell me. If I have learned anything in Congo, it is that there is no worse bloodthirsty beast than a human being.

"I didn't see anyone cry in Walla," Roger Casement would later think. He also didn't hear anyone complain. The village seemed inhabited by automatons, spectral beings wandering in the clearing, among the thirty huts made of wooden sticks and conical palm leaf roofs, moving from one side to the other, disoriented, not knowing where to go, forgotten about who they were, where they were, as if a curse had fallen upon the village turning its inhabitants into ghosts. But ghosts with backs and buttocks full of fresh scars, some with traces of blood as if the wounds were still open.

With the help of Father Hutot, who spoke the tribe's language fluently, Roger fulfilled his task. He questioned each and every one of the villagers, listening to them repeat what he had already heard and would hear many times afterward. Here too, in Walla, he was surprised that none of these poor beings complained about the main issue: with what right had these outsiders come to invade them, exploit them, and mistreat them? They only took into account the immediate: the quotas. They were excessive; there was no human strength that could gather so much rubber, so much food, and give so many arms. They didn't even complain about the beatings and the hostages. They only asked for their quotas to be lowered a bit so they could meet them and, in this way, keep the authorities satisfied with the people of Walla.

Roger spent that night in the village. The next day, with his notebooks filled with notes and testimonies, he said goodbye to Father Hutot. He had decided to alter the planned trajectory. He returned to Lake Mantumba, boarded the *Henry Reed*, and headed to Coquilhatville. The town was large, with streets

that were irregular and dusty, with houses scattered among palm trees and small plots of crops. As soon as he disembarked, he went to the Garrison of the Forcé Publique, a vast area of rustic buildings and a palisade of yellow stakes.

Lieutenant Tanville had gone on a work mission. But he was received by Captain Marcel Junieux, the head of the Garrison and military responsible for all the stations and posts of the Forcé Publique in the region. He was a tall, thin, muscular man in his forties, with sun-bronzed skin and hair already cut short in gray. He had a small medal of the Virgin hanging from his neck and a tattoo of a little animal on his forearm. He led him into a rustic office where there were some pennants and a photograph of Leopold II in full uniform hanging on the walls. He offered him a cup of coffee. He had him sit in front of his small work desk, filled with notebooks, rulers, maps, and pencils, on a very fragile little chair that seemed about to collapse with every movement of Roger Casement. The captain had lived in England during his childhood, where his father had a business, and spoke good English. He was a career officer who volunteered to come to the Congo five years ago, "to serve my country, Mr. Consul." He said it with acidic irony.

He was about to be promoted and return to the metropolis. He listened to Roger without interrupting him even once, very seriously and, apparently, deeply focused on what he was hearing. His expression, grave and impenetrable, did not change at any detail. Roger was precise and meticulous. He made it very clear what things he had been told and what he had seen with his own eyes: the shredded backs and buttocks, the testimonies of those who had sold their children to meet quotas that they had been unable to gather. He explained that Her Majesty's Government would be informed about these horrors, but that, in addition, he believed it was his duty to set forth, on behalf of the Government he represented, his protest against the Forcé

Publique being responsible for such atrocious abuses as those in Walla. He was a firsthand witness that the village had turned into a small hell. When he fell silent, Captain Junieux's face remained unchanged. He waited a long moment in silence. Finally, making a slight nod, he softly said:

—As you undoubtedly know, Mr. consul, we, I mean the Forcé Publique, do not make the laws. We merely ensure they are enforced.

He had a clear and direct gaze, without a hint of discomfort or irritation.

—I know the laws and regulations that govern the Independent State of the Congo, captain. Nothing in them allows for the mutilation of the natives, whipping them until they bleed, holding women as hostages to prevent their husbands from fleeing, and extorting the villages to the point where mothers have to sell their children to meet the food and rubber quotas that you demand from them.

—Us? —the captain Junieux exaggerated his surprise. Shaking his head, the little tattooed animal moved —. We don't demand anything from anyone. We receive orders and carry them out, that's all. The Forcé Publique does not set those quotas, Mr. Casement. They are established by the political authorities and the directors of the concession companies. We are the executors of a policy in which we have not intervened at all. No one has ever asked for our opinion. If they had, perhaps things would be better.

He fell silent and seemed to get distracted for a moment. Through the large windows with metal grilles, Roger saw an open square, treeless, where a formation of African soldiers marched, wearing drill trousers, with their torsos bare and barefoot. They changed

direction at the command of a non-commissioned officer, who was indeed wearing boots, a uniform shirt, and a cap. —I will conduct an investigation. If Lieutenant Tanville has committed or condoned extortion, he will be punished —the captain said—. The soldiers will too, of course, if they exceeded their use of the whip. That is all I can promise you. The rest is beyond my reach; it is up to justice. Changing this system is not the task of military personnel, but of judges and politicians. Of the Supreme Government. You know that as well, I imagine.

A slightly discouraged tone suddenly appeared in his voice.

—Nothing would please me more than for the system to change. I also dislike what happens here. What we are forced to do offends my principles —he touched the little medal around his neck—. My faith. I am a very catholic man. Back in Europe, I always tried to be consistent with my beliefs. Here in the Congo, that is not possible, consul. That is the sad truth. For that reason, I am very happy to return to Belgium. I will not be the one to set foot in Africa again, I assure you.

Captain Junieux stood up from his table and approached one of the windows. With his back turned to the consul, he remained silent for a long time, watching those recruits who could never keep step, stumbled, and had crooked lines in their formation.

—If that is the case, you could do something to put an end to these crimes —murmured Roger Casement—. This is not why we Europeans have come to Africa.

—Oh, really? —Captain Junieux turned back to look at him and the consul noticed that the officer had turned somewhat pale—. Why have we come, then? I know: to bring civilization, Christianity, and free trade. Do you still believe that, Mr. Casement?

—No anymore —Roger Casement replied immediately—. I believed it before, yes. With all my heart. I believed it for many years, with

all the naiveté of the idealistic boy that I was. That Europe was coming to Africa to save lives and souls, to civilize the savages. Now I know I was wrong.

Captain Junieux changed his expression, and Roger thought that suddenly the officer's face had replaced that emotionless mask with a more human one. It even looked at him with the compassionate sympathy that idiots deserve.

—I am trying to redeem myself from that youthful sin, captain. That is why I have come all the way to Coquilhatville. For this reason, I am documenting, with the utmost care, the abuses that are committed here in the name of supposed civilization.

—I wish you success, Mr. Consul —the captain Junieux mocked with a smile—. But if I may speak frankly, I am afraid you will not have it. There is no human force that can change this system. It is too late for that.

—If you don't mind, I would like to visit the jail and the *hostage house*, where they have the women they brought from Walla —Roger said, abruptly changing the subject.

—You can visit everything you want —the officer nodded—. You are in your home. However, allow me to remind you once more of what I told you. It is not us who invented the Independent State of the Congo. We only make it function. In other words, we are also its victims.

The jail was a wooden and brick shed, without windows, with a single entrance, guarded by two native soldiers with shotguns. There were a dozen men, some elderly, semi-naked, lying on the floor, and two of them were tied to rings fixed to the wall. It was not the defeated or expressionless faces of those silent skeletons whose eyes followed him from side to side as he moved through the premises that shocked him the most, but rather the smell of urine and excrement.

—We have tried to instill in them to do their business in those buckets —the captain guessed his thoughts, pointing to a container—. But they are not troubled—

they prefer the ground. That's their choice. They don't care about the smell. Perhaps they don't even notice it.

The *hostage house* was a smaller enclosure, but the spectacle was more dramatic because it was crowded to the point where Roger could barely move among those closely packed and semi-nude bodies. The space was so tight that many women could neither sit nor lie down; they had to remain standing.

—This is exceptional —explained Captain Junieux, pointing—. There are never this many. Tonight, to allow them to sleep, we will move half of them to one of the soldiers' barracks.

Here, too, the smell of urine and excrement was overwhelming. Some women were very young, almost girls. All had the same lost, somnambulistic look, beyond life, that Roger would see in so many Congolese women throughout this journey. One of the hostages held a newborn in her arms, so still that it seemed dead.

—What criteria do you follow to release them? —asked the consul.

—I do not decide, but a magistrate, sir. There are three in Coquilhatville. The criterion is one only: when the husbands pay the dues they owe, they can take their wives.

—And if they do not?

The captain shrugged.

—Some manage to escape —he said, without looking at him, lowering his voice—. Others are taken by the soldiers and become their wives. Those are the luckier ones. Some go mad and kill themselves. Others die from grief, cholera, and hunger. As you have seen, they hardly have anything to eat. It's not our fault either. I don't receive enough food to feed the soldiers, let alone the prisoners. Sometimes, we collect small donations among the officers to improve the rations. That's just how things are.

I am the first to regret that things aren't different. If you manage to improve this, the Forcé Publique will be grateful.

Roger Casement went to visit the three Belgian magistrates of Coquilhatville, but only one of them received him. The other two invented excuses to avoid him. *Maitre* Duval, on the other hand, a plump and cheerful man in his fifties who, despite the tropical heat, wore a vest, false cuffs *and* a tailcoat with a watch chain, let him into his sparsely furnished office *and* offered him a cup of tea. He listened to him politely, sweating profusely. From time to time, he wiped his face with a handkerchief that was already soaked. Occasionally, he shook his head and showed a pained expression at what the consul was explaining. When he finished, he asked him to detail everything in writing. This way, he could submit a request to the Tribunal of which he was a member to open a formal investigation into those lamentable events. Although perhaps, *maitre* Duval reflected with a finger on his chin, it would be preferable for the consul to submit that report to the High Court, now established in Leopoldville. Being a higher and more influential body, it could act more effectively across the colony. Not only to remedy that state of affairs but also to provide financial compensation to the victims' families and to the victims themselves. Roger Casement told him he would do just that. He took his leave, convinced that *maitre* Duval would not lift a finger and that the High Court of Leopoldville would not either. But even so, he would submit the written report.

At sunset, just as he was about to leave, a native came to inform him that the monks of the Trappist mission wanted to see him. There he encountered Hutot again. The monks — there were half a dozen — wanted to ask him to secretly take a handful of fugitives, whom they had been hiding in the monastery for days, on his small steamboat. They all came from the village of Bonginda, upstream on the Congo River, where, due to failure to meet rubber quotas, the Forcé Publique had

carried out a punitive operation as harsh as that of Walla.

The Trappist monastery of Coquilhatville was a large two-story house made of clay, stones, and wood that, from the outside, resembled a fort. Its windows were boarded up. The abbot, Dom Jesualdo, of Portuguese origin, was already very old, just like two other monks, gaunt and seemingly lost in their white robes, wearing black scapulars and rough leather belts. Only the older ones were monks; the others were laypeople. All of them, including Father Hutot, displayed that skeletal thinness that was like the emblem of the local Trappists. Inside, the place was bright, as only the chapel, the refectory, and the monks' bedroom were roofed. There was a garden, a vegetable patch, a yard with birds, a cemetery, and a kitchen with a large hearth.

—What crime have those people committed that you ask me to take away from here secretly from the authorities?

—To be poor, Mr. consul —said Dom Jesualdo, saddened—. You know it very well. You just saw in Walla what it means to be poor, humble, and Congolese.

Casement nodded. Surely it was a merciful act to provide the help that the Trappists were asking for. But he hesitated. As a diplomat, secretly extracting fugitives from justice, even if they were pursued for improper reasons, was risky; it could compromise Great Britain and completely distort the information mission he was fulfilling for the Foreign Office.

—Can I see them and talk to them?

Dom Jesualdo nodded. The *priest* Hutot withdrew and returned with the group almost immediately. There were seven of them, all men, including three boys. All of them had their left hand cut off or mangled from beatings. They bore marks of lashes on their chest and back. The leader of the group was named Mansunda and wore a feather headdress and a string of necklaces with animal teeth; his face showed ancient scars from the initiation rites of his tribe. Father's Hutot acted as an interpreter. The

village of Bonginda had failed to deliver rubber twice in a row — the trees in the area were already exhausted of latex — to the emissaries of the Lulonga Company, the concessionaire of the region. Then, the African sentinels stationed by the Forcé Publique in the village began to whip and cut off hands and feet. There was an outbreak of cholera, and the people, rebelling, killed one guard, while the others managed to flee. A few days later, the village of Bonginda was occupied by a column of the Forcé Publique that set fire to all the houses, killed a good number of residents, men and women, some of them being burned inside their huts, and took the rest to the jail of Coquilhatville and to the *hostage house*. The chief Mansunda believed that they were the only ones who had managed to escape, thanks to the Trappists. If the Forcé Publique captured them, they would be victims of the punishment, just like the others, because throughout Congo, the rebellion of the natives was always punished with the extermination of the entire community.

—It's fine, *my father* —Casement said—. I will take them with me in the *Henry Reed* until I can get them away from here. But only to the nearest French shore.

—God will repay you, Mr. consul —said *the father* Hutot.

—I don't know, *my father* —the consul replied—. You and I are breaking the law in this case.

—The law of men —the trapper corrected—. We are transgressing it, precisely, to be faithful to the law of God.

Roger Casement shared his frugal, herbivorous dinner with the monks. He chatted for a long while with them. Dom Jesualdo joked that in his honor the Trappists were breaking the rule of silence that governed the order. Monks and laypeople seemed overwhelmed and defeated by this country just like he was. How could it have come to this? he reflected in

a loud voice before them. And he told them that nineteen years ago he had come to Africa full of enthusiasm, convinced that the colonial enterprise would bring a dignified life to the Africans. How could it be possible that colonization had turned into this horrible plunder, this dizzying cruelty where people who called themselves Christians tortured, mutilated, and killed defenseless beings, subjecting them to such atrocious cruelties, including children and the elderly? Hadn't we Europeans come here to put an end to the slave trade and to bring the religion of charity and justice? Because what was happening here was still worse than the slave trade, right?

The monks let him vent, without saying a word. Was it that, contrary to what the abbot had said, they did not want to break the rule of silence? No: they were as confused and hurt by the Congo as he was.

—The ways of God are inscrutable for poor sinners like us, Mr. consul —sighed Dom Jesualdo—. What matters is not to fall into despair. Not to lose faith. That there are men like you here encourages us, restores our hope. We wish you success in your mission. We will pray that God allows you to do something for this unfortunate humanity.

The seven fugitives boarded the *Henry Reed* at dawn the following day, at a bend in the river, when the small boat was already somewhat distant from Coquilhatville. During the three days they stayed with him, Roger was tense and anxious. He had given the crew a vague explanation to justify the presence of the seven mutilated natives and he felt that the men were suspicious and looked at the group, with whom they had no communication. Near Irebu, the *Henry Reed* approached the French shore of the Congo River and that night, while the crew slept, seven silent silhouettes slipped away and disappeared into the undergrowth.

from the shore. No one later asked the consul what had happened to them.

At this point in the journey, Roger Casement began to feel unwell. Not only morally and psychologically. His body was also showing the effects of lack of sleep, insect bites, excessive physical exertion, and perhaps most of all, his state of mind in which anger followed demoralization, and the will to fulfill his duties was tempered by the premonition that his report would also be of no use because, back in London, the bureaucrats of the Foreign Office and the politicians in the service of Her Majesty would decide that it was unwise to antagonize an ally like Leopold II, that publishing a *repon* with such serious accusations would have detrimental consequences for Great Britain as it would mean pushing Belgium into the arms of Germany. Were not the interests of the Empire more important than the lamenting complaints of half-naked savages who worshipped felines and serpents and were cannibals?

Making superhuman efforts to overcome bouts of depression, headaches, nausea, and bodily decomposition—he felt he was losing weight because he had to make new holes in his belt—he continued to visit villages, outposts, stations, interrogating villagers, officials, workers, sentinels, rubber gatherers, and managing as best as he could to rise above the daily spectacle of bodies tortured by whippings, severed hands, and the nightmarish stories of murders, imprisonments, blackmail, and disappearances. He came to think that this widespread suffering of the Congolese permeated the air, the river, and the vegetation around him with a particular smell, a pestilence that was not only physical but also spiritual, metaphysical.

«I think I am losing my mind, dear Gee,» he wrote to his cousin Gertrude from the Bon-gandanga station on the day he decided to turn back and embark on the

return to Leopoldville. «Today I started the return to Boma. According to my plans, I should have continued in the Upper Congo for a couple more weeks. But the truth is, I already have more than enough material to present in my *Report* on what is happening here. I fear that if I keep probing into the extremes of human evil and disgrace, I won't even be able to write my *report*. I am on the brink of madness. A normal human being cannot plunge into this hell for so many months without losing their sanity, without succumbing to some mental disorder. Some nights, in my wakefulness, I feel it happening to me. Something is disintegrating in my mind. I live with constant anguish. If I continue rubbing shoulders with what is happening here, I too will end up whipping, cutting off hands, and killing Congolese between lunch and dinner without it causing me the slightest pang of conscience or affecting my appetite. Because that is what happens to Europeans in this damned country.»

However, that very long letter was not mainly about the Congo, but rather Ireland. "That's right, dear Gee, it may seem like another symptom of madness to you, but this trip to the depths of the Congo has helped me discover my own country. To understand its situation, its destiny, its reality. In these jungles, I have not only found the true face of Leopold II. I have also found my true self: the incorrigible Irishman. When we meet again, you will be surprised, Gee. You will find it hard to recognize your cousin Roger. I have the impression that I have shed my skin, like certain snakes, in terms of mindset and perhaps even of the soul."

It was true. Throughout all the days it took for *Henry Reed* to travel down the Congo River to Leopoldville-Kinshasa, where he finally docked at sunset on September 15, 1903, the consul barely exchanged a word with the crew. He remained locked in his small cabin, or, if the weather allowed, lying in the hammock at the stern, with the loyal *John*

crouched at his feet, still and attentive, as if the gloom in which he saw his master submerged had infected him.

Just thinking about the country of his childhood and youth, which suddenly brought him a deep nostalgia during this journey, pushed those images of Congolese horror determined to destroy him morally and disturb his psychic equilibrium out of his mind. He remembered his early years in Dublin, pampered and protected by his mother, his school years in Ballymena, and his visits to the haunted castle of Galgorm, his walks with his sister Nina through the countryside of northern Antrim (so gentle compared to the African one!) and the happiness those excursions to the peaks that guarded Glenshesk, his favorite among the nine *glens* of the county, provided him, those summits swept by winds from which he sometimes spotted the flight of eagles with their large wings spread wide and their proud crests defying the sky.

Wasn't Ireland also a colony, like the Congo? Although he had spent so many years refusing to accept that truth that his father and many Irish from Ulster, like him, rejected with blind indignation. Why would what was wrong for the Congo be right for Ireland? Hadn't the English invaded Eire? Hadn't they incorporated it into the Empire by force, without consulting the invaded and occupied, just like the Belgians did to the Congolese? Over time, that violence had diminished, but Ireland remained a colony, whose sovereignty disappeared at the hands of a stronger neighbor. It was a reality that many Irish refused to see. What would his father say if he heard him say such things? Would he take out his little "whip"? And his mother? Would Anne Jephson be scandalized if she knew that in the solitudes of the Congo her son was becoming, if not in action, at least in thought, a nationalist? In those lonely afternoons, surrounded by the brown waters filled with leaves, branches, and trunks of the Congo River, Roger

Casement made a decision: as soon as he returned to Europe, he would seek out a good collection of books dedicated to the history and culture of Eire, which he knew so poorly.

He spent just three days in Leopoldville, without seeking anyone out. In the state he was in, he had no desire to visit authorities and acquaintances or to have to speak to them—lying to them, of course—about his trip through the Middle and Upper Congo and what he had seen in those months. He telegraphed in code to the Foreign Office that he had sufficient material confirming the complaints about the mistreatment of the indigenous people. He requested authorization to move to the neighboring Portuguese possession to write his report with more peace of mind than being subjected to the pressures of the consular service in Boma. He wrote a long complaint, which was also a formal protest, to the Prosecution Office of the Supreme Court of Leopoldville-Kinshasa regarding the events in Walla, asking for an investigation and sanctions for those responsible. He personally delivered his document to the Prosecution Office. A circumspect official promised to inform the prosecutor, *maitre* Leverville, as soon as he returned from an elephant hunting trip with the head of the city's Commercial Registration Office, monsieur Clo-thard.

Roger Casement took the train to Matadi, where he stayed just one night. From there, he traveled to Boma on a small cargo steamer. At the consular office, he found a backlog of correspondence and a telegram from his superiors authorizing him to travel to Luanda to draft his report. It was urgent that he write it with as much detail as possible. In England, the campaign of denunciations against the Independent State of the Congo was in full swing, and the major newspapers were involved, confirming or denying "the atrocities." The denunciations from the Baptist Church had long been joined by those of the British journalist of French origin Edmund D. Morel, a secret friend and accomplice of Roger Casement. His publications caused great

stir in the House of Commons, as well as in public opinion. There had already been a debate on the subject in Parliament. The Foreign Office and Chancellor lord Lansdowne himself were eagerly awaiting the testimony of Roger Casement.

In Boma, as in Leopoldville-Kinshasa, Roger avoided the Government officials as much as he could, even breaking protocol, which he had never done in all his years of consular service. Instead of visiting the governor general, he sent a letter excusing himself from presenting his greetings in person, citing health issues. Not once did he play tennis, billiards, or cards, nor did he host or accept lunch or dinner invitations. He didn't even go swimming early in the morning in the river's pools, something he used to do almost daily, even in bad weather. He did not want to see people or engage in social life. Above all, he didn't want to be asked about his trip and be forced to lie. He was certain that he could never sincerely describe to his friends and acquaintances in Boma what he thought of everything he had seen, heard, and experienced in the Middle and Upper Congo over the past fourteen weeks.

He devoted all his time to resolving the most urgent consular matters and preparing for his trip to Cabinda and Luanda. He hoped that leaving the Congo, even if it was to another colonial possession, would make him feel less overwhelmed, more free. Several times he tried to start writing a draft of the report, but he couldn't manage it. Not only was his discouragement a barrier; his right hand cramped up as soon as he began to move the pen across the paper. The hemorrhoids were bothering him again. He hardly ate, and the two servants, Charlie and Mawuku, worried about seeing him so unwell, urged him to call the doctor. But although he himself was anxious about his sleepless nights, lack of appetite, and physical ailments, he did not do so because seeing Doctor Salabert would mean talking, remembering, recounting everything he currently wanted to forget.

Doctor Salabert would mean talking, remembering, recounting everything he currently wanted to forget.

On September 28, he departed on a boat to Banana, and the next day, another small steamer took him and Charlie to Cabinda. *John* the bulldog stayed with Mawuku. However, even during the four days he spent in that locality, where he had acquaintances with whom he dined, and who, unaware of his journey to the Upper Congo, did not force him to talk about what he did not want to, he did not feel more at ease or secure in himself. Only in Luanda, where he arrived on October 3, did he begin to feel better. The English consul, Mr. Briskley, a discreet and helpful person, provided him with a small office in his establishment. There he finally began working in the mornings and afternoons, outlining the main lines of his *report*.

But he only felt that he was starting to be well again, to be himself again, three or four days after arriving in Luanda, one noon, sitting at a table in the old Café Paris, where he went to eat something after working all morning. He was glancing at an old newspaper from Lisbon when he noticed, on the street in front, several semi-naked natives unloading a large cart full of bundles of some agricultural product, perhaps cotton. One of them, the youngest, was very handsome. He had a long, athletic body, with muscles showing on his back, and his legs and arms flexed from the effort he was making. His dark skin, slightly bluish, glistened with sweat. With the movements he made while shifting the load on his shoulder from the cart to the inside of the warehouse, the small piece of cloth wrapped around his waist opened slightly, revealing his sex, reddish and hanging, larger than normal. Roger felt a warm wave and an urgent desire to photograph the handsome porter. It hadn't happened to him in months. One thought encouraged him: 'I am myself again.' In the small diary he always carried with him, he wrote: 'Very handsome and enormous. I followed him and I convinced him. We kissed hidden by the giant ferns of

an open field. He was mine, I was his. I howled.' He breathed deeply, feverish.

That same afternoon, Mr. Briskley handed him a telegram from the Foreign Office. The Chancellor in person, Lord Lansdowne, ordered him to return to England immediately, to write the *Report on the Congo* in London itself. Roger had regained his appetite, and that night he had a hearty dinner.

Before taking the *Zaire*, which departed from Luanda to England, with a stop in Lisbon, on November 6, he wrote a long letter to Edmund D. Morel. He had been secretly corresponding with him for about six months. He did not know him in person. He learned of his existence first through a letter from Herbert Ward, who admired the journalist, *and* then by hearing Belgian officials *and* passersby in Boma commenting on the extremely harsh articles filled with criticisms of the Independent State of the Congo that Morel, who lived in Liverpool, was publishing to denounce the abuses that the natives of the African colony were suffering. Discreetly, through his cousin Gertrude, he procured some pamphlets published by Morel. Impressed by the seriousness of his accusations, in a bold gesture, Roger wrote to him, sending the letter through Gee. He told him that he had already spent many years in Africa and could provide firsthand information for his just campaign, with which he sympathized. He could not do so openly due to his status as a British diplomat, and therefore, it was necessary to take precautions with the correspondence to avoid identifying his informant in Boma. In the letter he wrote to Morel from Luanda, Roger summarized his latest experience and told him that as soon as he reached Europe, he would get in touch with him. Nothing thrilled him more than to meet in person the only European who seemed to have fully realized the responsibility that the Old Continent had in turning the Congo into a hell.

On the journey to London, Roger regained his energy, enthusiasm, and hope. He felt confident that his *report* would be very useful in putting an end to those horrors. The impatience with which the Foreign Office awaited his *report* demonstrated that. The facts were of such magnitude that the British Government would have to act, demand radical changes, persuade its allies, and revoke that absurd personal concession to Leopold II over a continent like the Congo. Despite the storms that rocked the *Zaire* between Sao Tome and Lisbon, which caused seasickness and vomiting for half the crew, Roger Casement managed to continue drafting his report. Disciplined as before and devoted with apostolic zeal to the task, he sought to write with the utmost accuracy and sobriety, avoiding sentimentality and subjective considerations, describing only what he could verify with objectivity. The more precise and concise he was, the more persuasive and effective it would be.

A cold December 1 arrived in London. He barely had time to glance at that rainy, cold, and ghostly city because, once he left his luggage in his apartment in Philbeach Gardens, in Earl's Court, and took a look at the accumulated correspondence, he had to rush to the Foreign Office. Meetings and interviews followed for three days. He was very impressed. There was no doubt, the Congo was at the center of current events since that debate in Parliament. The denunciations from the Baptist Church and the campaign by Edmund D. Morel had made an impact. Everyone demanded a statement from the Government. Before doing so, it relied on his *report*. Roger Casement discovered that, unknowingly and unintentionally, circumstances had made him an important man. In the two presentations, each lasting an hour, before officials from the Ministry—one of which was attended by the director for African Affairs and the deputy minister—he noted the effect of

his words in the listeners. The incredulous looks at the beginning turned into, when he answered the questions with new precisions, expressions of disgust and horror.

They gave him an office in a quiet place in Kensington, far from the Foreign Office, and a young and efficient typist, Mr. Joe Pardo. He began dictating his report on Friday, December 4th. News had spread that the British consul in the Congo had arrived in London with a comprehensive document about the colony, and Reuters, *The Spectator*, *The Times*, and several correspondents from United States newspapers tried to interview him. But he, in accordance with his superiors, stated that he would only speak to the press after the Government had made a statement on the subject.

In the following days, he did nothing but work on the *report* morning and afternoon, adding, cutting, and rewriting the text, rereading his notebooks with travel notes, which he already knew by heart, over and over again. At noon, he barely ate a sandwich and every night he had an early dinner at his club, the Wellington. Sometimes, Herbert Ward would join him. It did him good to chat with his old friend. One day, Herbert dragged him to his studio at 53 Chester Square and distracted him by showing his sturdy sculptures inspired by Africa. Another day, to make him forget his obsessive worry for a few hours, Herbert forced him to go out and buy one of the fashionable jackets with checks, a French cap, and some shoes with artificial white fronts. Then, he took him to lunch at the favorite spot of London's intellectuals and artists, the Eiffel Tower Restaurant. Those were his only diversions during those days.

Since his arrival, he had requested authorization from the Foreign Office to meet with Morel. He used the pretext of wanting to verify some of the information he brought with the journalist. On December 9, he received the

authorization. And, the following day, Roger Casement and Edmund D. Morel met face to face for the first time. Instead of shaking hands, they embraced. They talked, dined together at the Comedy, went to Roger's apartment in Philbeach Gardens where they spent the rest of the night drinking cognac, chatting, smoking, and debating until they discovered through the blinds that it was already the new day. They had twelve hours of uninterrupted dialogue. Both would later say that this meeting had been the most important of their lives.

They couldn't have been more different. Roger was very tall and very thin, while Morel was rather short, muscular, and tended to gain weight. Every time Casement saw him, he got the impression that his friend's suits fit tightly. Roger had turned thirty-nine years old, but despite his physique affected by the African climate and paludism fevers, he appeared, perhaps due to the care taken in his attire, younger than Morel, who was only thirty-two and had been handsome in his youth but was now aging, with his hair cut medium and already gray, just like his seal-like mustache, and with fiery and somewhat bulging eyes. They only needed to see each other to understand one another and — the word wouldn't have seemed exaggerated to them — to love each other.

What did they talk about during those twelve uninterrupted hours? Much about Africa, of course, but also about their families, their childhood, their dreams, ideals, and adolescent longings, and how, without intending to, the Congo had taken root in the heart of their lives and transformed them from head to toe. Roger was amazed that someone who had never been there knew that country so well. Its geography, its history, its people, its problems. He listened fascinated as, many years ago, that dark employee of the Eider Dempster Line (the same company where Roger had worked as a young man in Liverpool) named Morel, who was in charge at the port of Antwerp to register the ships and audit their cargo, entered into

suspicious upon noticing that the free trade which, it was supposed, had been opened by His Majesty Leopold II between Europe and the Independent State of the Congo, was not only asymmetrical but also a farce. What kind of free trade was it where the ships coming from the Congo unloaded in the great Flemish port tons of rubber and quantities of ivory, palm oil, minerals, and skins, and loaded only rifles, whips, and boxes of colored glass to take over there?

This is how Morel began to take an interest in the Congo, to investigate, to question those who went there or returned to Europe, such as merchants, officials, travelers, pastors, priests, adventurers, soldiers, police, and to read everything that came into his hands about that immense country whose misfortunes he came to know in detail, as if he had made dozens of inspection trips similar to those of Roger Casement through the Middle and Upper Congo. Then, without yet giving up his position in the company, he began to write letters and articles for magazines and newspapers in Belgium and England, initially under a pseudonym and later with his real name, denouncing what he discovered and debunking with data and testimonies the idyllic image of the Congo that the scribes in the service of Leopold II presented to the world. He had already been engaged in this endeavor for many years, publishing articles, pamphlets, and books, and speaking in churches, cultural centers, and political organizations. His campaign had caught fire. Many people were now supporting him. "This is also Europe," Roger Casement thought many times that December 10. "Not just the colonizers, police, and criminals that we send to Africa. Europe is also this clear and exemplary spirit: Edmund D. Morel."

From then on, they met often and continued those dialogues that excited them both. They began to call each other affectionate nicknames: Roger was *Tiger* and Edmund *Bulldog*. During one of these conversations, the idea emerged to create the Congo Reform Association. Both were

surprised by the vast support they garnered in their efforts to find sponsors and supporters. The truth is that very few of the politicians, journalists, writers, religious figures, and well-known personalities they asked for help for the Association refused. This is how Roger Casement met Alice Stopford Green. Herbert Ward introduced them. Alice was one of the first to contribute money, her name, and her time to the Association. Joseph Conrad did so as well, and many intellectuals and artists followed suit. They raised funds, gathered reputable names, and soon began public activities in churches, cultural and humanitarian centers, presenting testimonies, promoting debates and publications to raise public awareness of the true situation in the Congo. Although Roger Casement, due to his status as a diplomat, could not officially appear on the board of the Association, he dedicated all his free time to it once he finally submitted his report to the Foreign Office. He donated part of his savings and his salary to the Association and wrote letters, visited many people, and managed to get a good number of diplomats and politicians to also become advocates for the cause that Morel and he defended.

After many years, when Roger Casement recalled those feverish weeks at the end of 1903 and the beginning of 1904, it would seem that the most important thing for him had not been the popularity he achieved even before Her Majesty's Government published his *Report*, and much more so afterward, when agents in the service of Leopold II began to attack him in the press as an enemy and slanderer of Belgium, but rather, thanks to Morel, the Association, and Herbert, having met Alice Stopford Green, with whom he would become a close friend and, as he boasted, a disciple. From the very first moment, there was an understanding and sympathy between them that only time would deepen.

On the second or third time they were alone, Roger opened his heart to his new friend, as a believer would to his confessor. To her, an Irishwoman from a Protestant family like his, he dared to say what he had not told anyone yet: over there, in the Congo, living with injustice and violence, he had discovered the great lie that colonialism was and had begun to feel like an "Irishman," that is to say, a citizen of a country occupied and exploited by an Empire that had drained and souled Ireland. He was ashamed of so many things he had said and believed, repeating his father's teachings. And he resolved to amend his ways. Now that, thanks to the Congo, he had discovered Ireland, he wanted to be a true Irishman, to learn about his country, to appropriate its tradition, history, and culture.

Caring, a bit maternal —Alice was seventeen years older than him—, sometimes reprimanding him for those childlike bursts of enthusiasm he had even being in his forties, but helping him with advice, books, and conversations that were for him masterclasses, while they had tea with cookies or *scones* with cream and jam. In those early months of 1904, Alice Stopford Green was his friend, his teacher, his introducer to an ancient past in which history, myth, and legend —reality, religion, and fiction— blended to build the tradition of a people that continued to preserve, despite the imperial nation's efforts, their language, their way of being, their customs, something that any Irish person, Protestant or Catholic, believer or skeptic, liberal or conservative, should feel proud of and obligated to defend. Nothing helped to soothe Roger's spirit, to heal him from those moral wounds caused by the trip to the Upper Congo, as much as befriending Morel and Alice. One day, as he was saying goodbye to Roger, who, having requested a three-month leave from the Foreign Office, was about to depart for Dublin, the historian told him:

—Do you realize that you have become a celebrity, Roger? Everyone is talking about you, here, in London.

It was not something that flattered him, for he had never been vain. But Alice spoke the truth. The publication of his *Report* by the British Government had a huge impact in the press, in Parliament, among the political class, and in public opinion. The attacks he faced in Belgium from official publications and English journalists who were propagandists for Leopold II only served to strengthen his image as a great humanitarian fighter and justiciero. He was interviewed by the media, invited to speak at public events and private clubs, inundated with invitations from liberal and anti-colonialist circles, and there were loose articles praising his *Report* and his commitment to the cause of justice and freedom. The campaign for the Congo gained new momentum. The press, churches, and the most progressive sectors of English society, horrified by the revelations of the *Report*, demanded that Great Britain urge its allies to revoke the decision of Western countries to hand the Congo over to the king of the Belgians.

Overwhelmed by this sudden fame —people recognized him in theaters and restaurants and pointed him out on the street with sympathy—, Roger Casement left for Ireland. He spent a few days in Dublin, but soon continued to Ulster, to North Antrim, to Magherintemple House, the family home of his childhood and adolescence. It had been inherited by his uncle and namesake Roger, son of his great-uncle John, who passed away in 1902. Aunt Charlotte was still alive. She welcomed him warmly, as did his other relatives, cousins, and nephews. But he felt that an invisible distance had arisen between him and his paternal family, who remained firmly pro-British. However, the landscape of Magherintemple, the large gray-stoned mansion, surrounded by salt-resistant sycamores, many of which were suffocated by ivy, the poplars, elms, and

Peach trees dominating the meadows where the sheep were grazing, and, beyond the sea, the sight of Rathlin Island and the small town of Ballycastle with its white houses moved him to the core. Walking through the stables, the garden behind the house, the large rooms with deer antlers on the walls, or the ancient villages of Cushendun and Cushendall, where several generations of ancestors were buried, memories of his childhood resurfaced, filling him with nostalgia. But his new ideas *and* feelings about his country made this stay, which would last several months, turn into another great adventure for him. An adventure, unlike his journey to the Upper Congo, enjoyable, stimulating, and that would give him the feeling, while living it, of changing his skin.

He had taken a collection of books, grammars, and essays recommended by Alice, and he dedicated many hours to reading about Irish traditions and legends. He tried to learn Gaelic, first on his own, and, upon realizing that he would never succeed, with the help of a teacher, with whom he took lessons a couple of times a week.

But, above all, he began to socialize with new people from County Antrim who, being from Ulster and Protestants like him, were not unionists. On the contrary, they wanted to preserve the personality of ancient Ireland, fought against the anglicization of the country, defended a return to old Irish, to traditional songs and customs, opposed the recruitment of Irish for the British Army, and dreamed of an isolated Ireland, safe from the destructive modern industrialism, living a bucolic and rural existence, emancipated from the British Empire. This is how Roger Casement became connected to the Gaelic League, which promoted the Irish language and the culture of Ireland. Its *motto* was Sinn Fein ("Us alone"). When it was founded in Dublin in 1893, its president Douglas Hyde reminded the audience in his speech that, until then, "only six books had been published in

Gaelic". Roger Casement met the successor of Hyde, Eoin MacNeill, professor of Ancient and Medieval History of Ireland at University College, with whom he became friends. He began attending readings, lectures, recitals, marches, school contests, and erecting monuments to nationalist heroes promoted by Sinn Fein. And he started writing in their publications political articles defending Irish culture with the

pseudonym of *Shan van Vocht* (The Poor Old Lady), taken from an old Irish ballad that he used to hum. At the same time, he got close to a group of ladies, including the Castilian of Galgorm, Rose Maud Young, Ada MacNeill, and Margaret Dobbs, who were visiting the villages of Antrim to collect old legends of Irish folklore. Thanks to them, he listened to a *seanchai* or wandering storyteller at a popular fair, although he could barely understand one or two little words of what he said.

During a discussion at Magherintemple House with his uncle Roger, Casement, excited, declared one night: "As an Irishman, I hate the British Empire."

The next day he received a letter from the Duke of Argyll informing him that Her Majesty's Government had decided to honor him with the decoration of Companion of St. Michael and St. George for his excellent services rendered in the Congo. Roger excused himself from attending the investiture ceremony, citing that a knee ailment would prevent him from kneeling before the king.

—You hate me and you can't hide it —said Roger Casement. The *sheriff*, after a moment of surprise, nodded, with a grimace that for an instant distorted his swollen face.

I have no reason to hide it, he murmured. But you are mistaken. I do not hate you. I despise you. Traitors only deserve that.

They were walking down the corridor of charred brick in the prison towards the visiting room, where the catholic chaplain, Father Carey, was waiting for the inmate. Through the barred windows, Casement could see patches of swollen, dark clouds. Was it raining out there, over Caledonian Road and that Román Way through which the first Roman legionaries must have marched centuries ago in these bear-filled forests? He imagined the stalls and stands of the neighboring market, in the middle of the large park of Islington, soaked and shaken by the storm. He felt a pang of envy thinking about the people buying and selling, protected by raincoats and umbrellas.

—You had it all —grumbled the *sheriff* behind him. Diplomatic positions. Decorations. The king made him noble. And he went to sell himself to the Germans. What villainy. What ingratitude.

He paused, and Roger felt that the *sheriff* was sighing.

—Every time I think about my poor dead son over there, in the trenches, I tell myself that you are one of his murderers, Mr. Casement.

—I'm very sorry that you lost a son —replied Roger, without turning—. I know you won't believe me, but I haven't killed anyone yet.

—You will no longer have time to do it —declared the *sheriff*. Thank God.

They had arrived at the door of the visiting room. The *sheriff* remained outside, next to the guard. Only visits from chaplains were private; in all other cases, the *sheriff* or the guard remained in the visiting room, and sometimes both. Roger was pleased to see the slender silhouette of the priest. *Father* Carey came out to meet him and shook his hand.

—I did the inquiry and I already have the answer — he announced, smiling—. Your memory was accurate. Indeed, you were baptized as a child in the parish of Rhyl, over in Wales. You are listed in the register book. Your mother and two of your maternal aunts were present. You do not need to be received again into the Catholic Church. You have always been in it.

Roger Casement nodded. That distant impression that had accompanied him throughout his life was, therefore, correct. His mother baptized him in secret from his father during one of her trips to Wales. He was glad for the complicity that this secret established between him and Anne Jephson. And because in this way he felt more in harmony with himself, with his mother, with Ireland. As if his approach to Catholicism was a natural consequence of everything he had done and attempted in these last years, including his mistakes and failures.

—I have been reading Thomas à Kempis, *Father* Carey—he said—. Before, I could hardly concentrate on reading. But in these last days, I have managed to do so. Several hours a day. The *Imitation of Christ* is a very beautiful book.

—When I was in the seminary, we read a lot of Thomas à Kempis—agreed the priest—. The *Imitation of Christ*, above all.

—I feel more serene when I manage to immerse myself in those pages —said Roger—. It's as if I took off from this world and entered another, without worries, a purely spiritual reality. Father Crotty was right to recommend it so much, back in Germany. He could never have imagined under what circumstances I would read his admired Thomas à Kempis.

Recently, a small bench had been installed in the visiting room. They sat down. Their knees touched. *Father* Carey had been a prison chaplain in London for over twenty years and had accompanied many condemned to death until the end. This constant interaction with prison populations had not hardened his character. He was considerate and attentive, and Roger Casement took a liking to him from their first meeting. He could not remember ever hearing him say anything that could hurt him; on the contrary, when it came time to ask questions or converse with him, his delicacy was extreme. He always felt good by his side. Father Carey was tall, bony, almost skeletal, with very pale skin and a grayish pointed beard that covered part of his chin. His eyes were always moist, as if he had just been crying, even though he was laughing.

—How was Father Crotty? —he asked—. I see that you got along well, back in Germany.

—If it hadn't been for *Father* Crotty, I would have gone crazy during those months in the Limburg camp — Roger nodded—. He was very different from you physically. Shorter, stockier, and instead of your pale complexion, he had a flushed face that turned even redder with the first pint of beer. However, from another perspective, he did resemble you. I mean in generosity.

Father Crotty was an Irish Dominican that the Vatican had sent from Rome to the German war prisoner camp established in Limburg. His friendship had been a lifeline for Roger during those months in 1915 and 1916 when he attempted to recruit volunteers for the Irish Brigade among the prisoners.

—He was a man vaccinated against discouragement — said Roger—. I accompanied him to visit the sick, to administer sacraments, and to lead the prisoners in Limburg in praying the rosary. A nationalist too, though less passionate than I, *father* Carey.

He smiled.

—Don't think that Father Crotty tried to draw me into Catholicism —Roger added—. He was very careful in our conversations to make sure I didn't feel as if he wanted me to convert. It happened to me on my own, here inside —he touched his chest—. I was never very religious, as I already told you. Since my mother died, religion became something mechanical and secondary for me. Only after 1903, after that three-month and ten-day trip to the interior of the Congo that I told you about, did I start to pray again. When I thought I was going to lose my reason in the face of so much suffering. That's how I discovered that a human being cannot live without believing.

He felt that his voice was about to break, and he fell silent.

—Did he speak to you about Thomas à Kempis?

—He had great devotion to him —Roger nodded—. He gifted me his copy of the *Imitation of Christ*. But at that time, I couldn't read it. My mind was not there, with the worries of those days. I left that copy in Germany, in a suitcase with my clothes. We were not allowed to carry luggage on the submarine. Fortunately, you got me another one. I'm afraid I won't have time to finish it.

—The English Government has not decided anything yet —the religious man admonished him—. You must not lose hope. There are many people out there who care about you and are making

huge efforts to have the plea for clemency heard.

—I know already, *father* Carey. In any case, I would like you to prepare me. I want to be accepted by the Church formally. To receive the sacraments. To confess. To commune.

—That's why I'm here, Roger. I assure you that you are already prepared for all of that.

—One doubt is greatly troubling me —said Roger, lowering his voice as if someone else could hear him—. Won't my conversion to Christ seem motivated by fear? The truth is, *father* Carey, I am afraid. Very afraid.

—He is wiser than you and me —the religious affirmed—. I don't think Christ sees anything wrong with a man being afraid. He had fear, I am sure, on the road to Calvary. It is the most human thing, isn't it? We all have fear; it is part of our condition. Just a little sensitivity is enough for us to sometimes feel powerless and frightened. Your approach to the Church is pure, Roger. I know it.

—I never feared death, until now. I have encountered it closely many times. In the Congo, on expeditions through inhospitable places, full of ferocity. In the Amazon, on rivers filled with whirlpools and surrounded by outlaws. Recently, when I left the submarine, in Tralee, at Banna Strand, when the boat capsized and it seemed we were drowning. Many times I have felt death very near. And I was not afraid. But now I am.

His voice was cut off, and he closed his eyes. For some days, those fits of terror seemed to freeze his blood and stop his heart. His whole body had begun to tremble. He struggled to calm himself, but to no avail. He felt his teeth chattering, and now shame was added to his panic. When he opened his eyes, he saw that Father Carey

had his hands together and his eyes closed. He was praying silently, barely moving his lips.

—It's already passed—he murmured, confused—. I beg your pardon.

—You don't have to feel uncomfortable with me. Being afraid, crying, is human.

Now he was calm again. There was a great silence in Pentonville Prison, as if the prisoners and guards of its three enormous pavilions, those cubes with sloping roofs, had died or fallen asleep.

—I appreciate that you haven't asked me anything about those disgusting things that, apparently, they say about me, *father* Carey.

—I haven't read them, Roger. When someone has tried to speak to me about them, I've told them to be quiet. I neither know nor want to know what they are about.

—I don't know either—Roger smiled—. You can't read newspapers here. An assistant to my lawyer told me that they were so scandalous that they jeopardized the clemency request. Degenerations, terrible vile acts, it seems.

Father Carey listened to him with his usual calm expression. The first time they had talked in Pentonville Prison, he told Roger that his paternal grandparents spoke to each other in Gaelic, but switched to English when they saw their children approaching. The priest had also not learned the old Irish.

—I think it's better not to know what I am accused of. Alice Stopford Green believes it is a setup by the Government to counter the sympathy that exists in many sectors in favor of the plea for clemency.

—Nothing can be ruled out in the world of politics—said the priest—. It is not the cleanest of human activities.

There were some discreet knocks at the door, it opened, and the chubby face of the *sheriff*: appeared.

—Five more minutes, Father Carey.

—The prison director gave me half an hour. Hasn't he told you?

The *sheriff* looked surprised.

—If you say so, I believe you —he excused himself—. Sorry for the interruption, then. You still have twenty minutes left.

He disappeared and the door closed again.

—Is there more news from Ireland? —Roger asked, somewhat abruptly, as if he suddenly wanted to change the subject.

—The executions have stopped, apparently. Public opinion, not only there but also here in England, has been very critical of the summary executions. Now, the Government has announced that all those detained for the Easter Rising will go through the tribunals.

Roger Casement was distracted. He looked at the small window in the wall, which was also barred. He could only see a tiny square of gray sky and thought about the great paradox: he had been tried and condemned for bringing weapons for an attempt at a violent secession of Ireland, and, in reality, he had undertaken that risky, perhaps absurd, journey from Germany to the shores of Tralee to try to prevent that Rising, which he was sure would fail ever since he learned it was being prepared. Could all of History be like this? The kind learned in school? The one written by historians? A more or less idyllic, rational, and coherent fabrication of what had actually been a chaotic and arbitrary mix of plans, chances, intrigues, fortuitous events, coincidences, and multiple interests that had caused changes, disruptions, advances, and setbacks, always unexpected and surprising compared to what was anticipated or experienced by the protagonists.

—It is likely that I will go down in History as one of those responsible for the Easter Rising —he said, with

irony—. You and I know that I came here risking my life to try to stop that rebellion.

—Well, you and I and someone else —Father Carey said, pointing up with a finger.

—Now I feel better, finally —Roger laughed as well—. The panic attack has passed. In Africa, I often saw both blacks and whites suddenly fall into crises of despair. In the middle of the jungle, when we lost our way. When we entered a territory that the African porters considered hostile. In the middle of the river, when a canoe capsized. Or, in the villages, sometimes during ceremonies with songs and dances led by sorcerers. Now I understand what those states of hallucination induced by fear are. Is that what the trance of mystics is like? That state of suspension of oneself, of all carnal reflections, which is produced by the encounter with God?

—It is not impossible —Father Carey said—. Perhaps the mystics and all those who experience these states of trance are on the same path. Poets, musicians, sorcerers.

They were silent for a long time. Sometimes, from the corner of his eye, Roger would stare at the priest, seeing him motionless with his eyes closed. "He is praying for me," he thought. "He is a compassionate man. It must be terrible to spend a life helping people who are going to die on the gallows." Although he had never been to the Congo or the Amazon, Father Carey must have been as aware as he was of the dizzying extremes that cruelty and despair could reach among human beings.

—For many years I was indifferent to religion —he said slowly, as if speaking to himself—, but I never stopped believing in God. Initially, in the general principle of life. That said, *father* Carey, many times I asked myself in horror: «How can God allow such things to happen?». «What kind of God is this that tolerates so many thousands of men, women, and children suffering such

horrors?» It's hard to understand, isn't it? You, who must have seen so much in prisons, don't you sometimes ask yourself those questions?

Father Carey had opened his eyes and was listening to him with the customary deferential expression, neither agreeing nor denying. —Those poor people beaten, mutilated, those children with their hands and feet cut off, dying of hunger and disease —Roger recited—. Those beings squeezed to extinction and then murdered. Thousands, tens, hundreds of thousands. By men who received a Christian education. I have seen them go to mass, pray, receive communion, before and after committing those crimes. Many days I thought I was going to go crazy, Father Carey. Perhaps, in those years, there in Africa, in Putumayo, I lost my mind. And everything that has happened to me since has been the work of someone who, although he did not realize it, was crazy.

Once again, the chaplain said nothing. He listened to him with the same kind expression and with that patience that Roger had always appreciated.

—Interestingly, I believe it was back in the Congo, during those periods of great demoralization when I wondered how God could allow so many crimes, that I began to take an interest in religion again —he continued—. Because the only beings who seemed to have retained their sanity were a few Baptist pastors and some Catholic missionaries. Not all, of course. Many did not want to see what was happening beyond their noses. But a few did what they could to stop the injustices. A few heroes, to tell the truth.

He fell silent. Remembering the Congo or the Putumayo hurt him: it stirred the muck of his spirit, rescuing images that plunged him into anguish.

—Injustices, tortures, crimes —murmured Father Carey—. Did not Christ suffer them in his own flesh? He can understand your condition better than anyone, Roger. Of course, I sometimes experience what you do. All believers do,

I am sure of it. It is difficult to understand certain things, of course. Our capacity for understanding is limited. We are fallible, imperfect. But I can tell you this: Many times he has erred, like all human beings. However, regarding the Congo, the Amazon, nothing can be reproached. His work was generous and brave. He made many people open their eyes and helped correct great injustices.

«Everything good I could have done is being destroyed by this campaign launched to ruin my reputation,» he thought. It was a subject he preferred not to touch, one he pushed out of his mind each time it resurfaced. The good thing about Father Carey's visits was that with the chaplain, he only talked about what he wanted. The priest's discretion was complete, and he seemed to anticipate anything that might upset Roger and avoided it. Sometimes, they would sit in silence for long periods. Even so, the priest's presence soothed him. When he left, Roger would remain calm and resigned for a few hours.

—If the request is denied, will you be by my side until the end? —he asked, without looking at him.

—Of course —Father Carey said—. You shouldn't think about that. Nothing is decided yet.

—I already know, *Father* Carey. I have not lost hope. But it comforts me to know that you will be there, accompanying me. Your company will give me strength. I promise I won't make a scene.

—Do you want to pray together?

—Let's talk a little more, if you don't mind. This will be the last question I ask you about the matter. If I am executed, can my body be taken to Ireland and buried there?

He felt that the chaplain hesitated and looked at him. *Father* Carey had turned slightly pale. He saw him shake his head, uncomfortable.

—No, Roger. If that happens, you will be buried in the prison cemetery.

—In enemy territory —whispered Casement, trying to make a joke that fell flat—. In a country I have come to hate as much as I once loved and admired when I was young.

—Hating does no good —sighed Father Carey—. The politics of England may be bad. But there are many decent and respectable Englishmen.

—I know that very well, Father. I remind myself of it every time I fill with hatred against this country. It is stronger than I am. Perhaps it happens because as a boy I blindly believed in the Empire, that England was civilizing the world. You would have laughed if you had known me back then.

The priest nodded, and Roger let out a little laugh.

—They say that converts are the worst —he added—. My friends have always reproached me for it. Being too passionate.

—The incorrigible Irishman of fables —Father Carey said, smiling—. That's what my mother used to call me when I misbehaved as a child. 'The incorrigible Irishman has come out in you.'

—If you want, we can pray now, Father.

Father Carey nodded. He closed his eyes, brought his hands together, and began to murmur very softly an Our Father, and then, Hail Marys. Roger closed his eyes and prayed as well, without letting his voice be heard. For quite a while, he did so mechanically, without concentrating, with various images swirling in his head. Until gradually he began to let himself be absorbed by the prayer. When the *sheriff* knocked on the door of the visiting room and came in to announce that they had five minutes left, Roger was focused on the prayer.

Every time he prayed, he remembered his mother, that slender figure dressed in white, with a wide-brimmed straw hat and a blue ribbon that danced in the wind, walking under the trees, in the countryside. Were they in Wales, in Ireland, in Antrim, in Jersey? He didn't know where, but the landscape was as beautiful as the smile that shone on Anne Jephson's face. How proud little Roger felt having that soft and tender hand in his.

It gave him so much security and joy! Praying like this was a wonderful balm, bringing him back to that childhood where, thanks to his mother's presence, everything was beautiful and happy in life.

Father Carey asked him if he wanted to send a message to anyone, or if he could bring him something on the next visit, in a couple of days.

—All I want is to see him again, Father. You don't know how good it does me to talk to you and to hear you.

They parted with a handshake. In the long, damp hallway, without having planned it, Roger Casement let slip to the *sheriff*:

—I am very sorry for the death of your son. I have not had children. I can imagine there is no greater pain in life.

The *sheriff* made a small noise with his throat but did not respond. In his cell, Roger lay down on his cot and took the *Imitation of Christ* in his hands. But he could not concentrate on the reading. The letters danced before his eyes and images crackled in his head in a frenzied round. The figure of Anne Jephson appeared again and again.

What would his life have been like if his mother, instead of dying so young, had lived while he was becoming a teenager, a man? He probably wouldn't have embarked on the African adventure. He would have stayed in Ireland, or in Liverpool, and built a bureaucratic career, leading a decent, obscure, and comfortable existence, with a wife and children. He smiled to himself: no, such a way of life did not suit him. The life he had led, with all its setbacks, was preferable. He had seen the world, his horizon broadened enormously, he understood life better, human reality, the essence of colonialism, the tragedy of so many peoples due to that aberration.

If the airborne Anne Jephson had lived, she would not have discovered the sad and beautiful history of Ireland, the one they never taught her at Ballymena High School, that history

that was still hidden from the children and teenagers of North Antrim. They were still made to believe that Ireland was a barbaric country with no worthy past, uplifted to civilization by the occupant, educated and modernized by the Empire that stripped it of its tradition, language, and sovereignty. She had learned all of that over in Africa, where she would never have spent the best years of her youth and early maturity, nor would she ever have come to feel such pride for the country where she was born and such anger for what Great Britain had done to it, if her mother had still been alive.

Were the sacrifices of those twenty African years, the seven years in South America, the year *and* a bit in the heart of the Amazon rainforests, the year and a half of solitude, illness, and frustrations in Germany justified? He had never cared about money, but wasn't it absurd that after working so hard all his life he was now, solemnly, poor? The last balance of his bank account was ten pounds sterling. He never knew how to save. He had spent all his income on others — on his three brothers, on humanitarian organizations like the Congo Reform Association and Irish nationalist institutions like St. Enda's School and the Gaelic League, to which he had devoted his entire salary for a good time. To be able to spend on those causes, he had lived with great austerity, lodging, for example, for long periods in very cheap pensions that were not up to his status (his colleagues from the Foreign Office had hinted at this). Nobody would remember those donations, gifts, or aids now that he had failed. Only his final defeat would be remembered.

But that was not the worst part. Damn it, there was that cursed idea again. Degenerations, perversions, vices, a human filth. That is what the English Government wanted to be left of him. Not the diseases that the rigors of Africa had inflicted on him, the jaundice, the paludism fevers that weakened his body, the arthritis, the surgeries of

hemorrhoids, the rectal problems that had caused him so much suffering and shame since the first time he had to undergo surgery for a fistula in the anus, in 1893. "You should have come earlier; this operation would have been simple three or four months ago. Now, it is serious." "I live in Africa, doctor, in Boma, a place where my doctor is a habitual alcoholic whose hands tremble from delirium tremens. Was I supposed to have surgery by Doctor Salabert, whose medical knowledge is inferior to that of a bakongo sorcerer?" He had suffered from this for almost his entire life. A few months ago, in the German field of Limburg, he had a hemorrhage that a surly and rude military doctor stitched up. When he decided to take on the responsibility of investigating the atrocities committed by rubber dealers in the Amazon, he was already a very sick man. He knew that this effort would take months and only bring him problems, yet he undertook it, thinking he was serving justice. That too would not remain of him if they executed him.

Could it be true that *father* Carey had refused to read the scandalous things attributed to him by the press? He was a good and supportive man, the chaplain. If he had to die, having him by his side would help him maintain his dignity until the last moment.

Demoralization engulfed him from head to toe. It turned him into a being as helpless as those Congolese attacked by the tsetse fly, whose sleeping sickness prevented them from moving their arms, feet, lips, and even keeping their eyes open. Would it also prevent them from thinking? Unfortunately for him, those spells of pessimism sharpened his clarity, turning his brain into a crackling bonfire. Those pages of the diary handed over by the Admiralty spokesperson to the press, which horrified the ruddy intern of *maitre* Gavan Duffy so much, were they real or forged? He thought of the stupidity that was a central part of human nature, and, of course, of Roger Casement as well. He was very meticulous and was known, as a diplomat, for not taking an initiative or making the slightest move without anticipating all possible consequences.

And now, here he was, trapped in a stupid trap constructed throughout his whole life by himself, to provide his enemies with a weapon that would plunge him into ignominy.

Frightened, he realized he was laughing out loud.

The Amazon

When, on the last day of August 1910, Roger Case ment arrived in Iquitos after an exhausting journey of over six weeks that brought him and the members of the Commission from England to the heart of the Peruvian Amazon, the old infection that irritated his eyes had worsened, as well as his arthritis attacks and his general health condition. However, true to his stoic character ("senequista," as Herbert Ward called him), he never revealed his ailments during the journey and, rather, made an effort to lift his companions' spirits and help them endure the hardships they faced. Colonel R. H. Bertre, a victim of dysentery, had to turn back to England during the stopover in Madeira. The one who was coping better was Louis Barnes, knowledgeable about African agriculture as he had lived in Mozambique. The botanist Walter Folk, an expert in rubber, struggled with the heat and suffered from neuralgias. Seymour Bell feared dehydration and walked around with a water bottle in hand, sipping from it. Henry Fielgald had been in the Amazon a year earlier, sent by the Julio C. Arana Company, and offered advice on how to defend against mosquitoes and Iquitos's "bad temptations."

These were abundant, indeed. It seemed incredible that in such a small and unattractive city, an immense slum filled with rustic wooden and adobe constructions, covered with palm leaves, along with a few noble-material buildings with corrugated roofs and large mansions with facades illuminated by tiles imported from Portugal, there thrived so many bars, taverns, brothels, and gambling houses, *and* prostitutes of all races and colors flaunted themselves so shamelessly on the high sidewalks from the early hours of the day. The landscape was superb. Iquitos was on the banks of a tributary of the Amazon, the Nanay River, surrounded by lush vegetation, towering trees, a constant murmur from the trees, and waters that changed color with the movements of the sun. However, few streets had sidewalks or asphalt; ditches flowed with excrement and trash, there was a pestilence that thickened by nightfall to the point of causing nausea, and the music from the bars, brothels, and entertainment venues did not stop for twenty-four hours a day.

Mr. Stirs, the British consul, who received them at the dock, indicated that Roger would stay at his house. The Company had prepared a residence for the commissioners. That same night, the prefect of Iquitos, Mr. Rey Lama, was giving a dinner in his honor.

It was shortly after noon, and Roger, indicating that he preferred to rest instead of having lunch, retreated to his room. They had prepared a simple chamber for him, adorned with indigenous fabrics featuring geometric patterns hanging from the walls, and a small terrace from which a piece of the river could be seen. The noise from the street diminished here. He lay down without even taking off his jacket or boots and instantly fell asleep. A sense of peace washed over him that he had not experienced throughout the month and a half of travel.

He did not dream of the four years of consular service he had just completed in Brazil — in Santos, Pará, and Rio de Janeiro — but rather of that year and a half he spent in Ireland between 1904 and 1905, after those months of overexcitement and hectic activity, while the British Government prepared the publication of his *Report on the Congo* and the scandal that would make him both a hero and a pariah, receiving at the same time accolades from the liberal press and humanitarian organizations and scorn from Leopold II's writers. To escape that

advertising, while the Foreign Office decided his new destination —after the *Report* it was unthinkable that "the most hated man of the Belgian Empire" would set foot in the Congo again—, Roger Casement left for Ireland, in search of anonymity. He did not go unnoticed, but he escaped that invasive curiosity that had left him without a private life in London. Those months meant the rediscovery of his country, immersion in an Ireland he had only known through conversations, fantasies, and readings, very different from the one in which he had lived as a child with his parents, or as a teenager with his great-uncles and other paternal relatives, an Ireland that was not the tail and shadow of the British Empire, but one that was fighting to reclaim its language, traditions, and customs. "Dear Roger: you have become an Irish patriot," his cousin Gee joked in a letter. "I am recovering lost time," he replied.

In those months he had taken a long walk through Donegal and Galway, taking the pulse of the geography of his captive homeland, observing like a lover the austerity of its desert-like fields, its wild coast, and chatting with its fishermen, timeless beings, fatalistic, unyielding, and its frugal and laconic farmers. He had met many Irish "from the other side," catholics and some Protestants who, like Douglas Hyde, founder of the National Literary Society, promoted the revival of Irish culture, wanting to restore native names to places and villages, resurrect the ancient songs of Eire, the old dances, the traditional spinning and weaving of *tweed* and linen. When his appointment to the consulate in Lisbon was announced, he delayed his departure indefinitely, inventing health excuses, to be able to attend the first Feis na nGleann (Festival of the Glens) in Antrim, which was attended by nearly three thousand people. Those days, Roger felt several times that his eyes were moist from hearing the cheerful melodies played by the pipers and sung in chorus, or listening—without understanding what they were saying—to the storytellers.

referring to tales in Gaelic of romances and legends that sank into the medieval night. Even a match of *hurling*, that centuries-old sport, was played at that festival, where Roger met nationalist politicians and writers like Sir Horace Plunkett, Bulmer Hobson, Stephen Gwynn, and reunited with those friends who, like Alice Stopford Green, had taken the fight for Irish culture to heart: Ada MacNeill, Margaret Dobbs, Alice Milligan, Agnes O'Farrelly, and Rose Maud Young.

Since then, he dedicated part of his savings and income to the associations and schools of the Pearse brothers, which taught Gaelic, and to nationalist magazines in which he collaborated under a pseudonym. When, in 1904, Arthur Griffith founded Sinn Féin, Roger Casement got in touch with him, offered to collaborate, and subscribed to all his publications. The ideas of this journalist aligned with those of Bulmer Hobson, who became a friend of Roger. It was necessary to create, alongside colonial institutions, an Irish infrastructure (schools, businesses, banks, industries) that would gradually replace the imposed one.

by England. In this way, the Irish would begin to become aware of their own destiny. It was necessary to boycott British products, refuse to pay taxes, replace English sports such as cricket and football with national sports, as well as literature and theater. In this way, peacefully, Ireland would begin to detach itself from colonial subjugation.

In addition to reading extensively about Ireland's past under Alice's guidance, Roger once again tried to study Gaelic and hired a tutor, but he made little progress. In 1906, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, sir Edward Grey, from the Liberal Party, offered to send him as consul to Santos, in Brazil. Roger accepted, albeit reluctantly, because his pro-Irish patronage had depleted his small fortune, he was living on loans, and needed to earn a living.

Perhaps the lack of enthusiasm with which he resumed his diplomatic career contributed to making those four years in Brazil —1906-1910— a frustrating experience. He never fully adjusted to that vast country, despite its natural beauty and the good friends he came to have in Santos, Pará, and Rio de Janeiro. What depressed him the most was that, unlike the Congo, where, despite the difficulties, he always felt he was working toward something transcendent that exceeded the consular framework, in Santos his main activity revolved around drunken British sailors who got into trouble and whom he had to bail out of jail, pay their fines, and return to England. In Pará, he heard for the first time about violence in the rubber-producing regions. But the Ministry ordered him to focus on inspecting port and trade activities. His job involved recording the movement of ships and facilitating the transactions of the English arriving to buy and sell. His worst experiences were in Rio de Janeiro, in 1909. The climate worsened all his ailments and added allergies that prevented him from sleeping. He had to choose to live eighty kilometers from the capital, in Petrópolis, situated in higher elevations where the heat and humidity decreased, and the nights were cool. However, his daily commutes to the office by train became a nightmare.

In the dream, he recalled insistently that in September 1906, before departing for Santos, he wrote a long epic poem, "The Celt's Dream," about the past

mythical of Ireland, and a political pamphlet, along with Alice Stopford Green and Bulmer Hobson, *The Irish and the British Army*, rejecting the idea that the Irish should be recruited for the British Army.

The mosquito bites woke him, pulling him from that pleasant nap and plunging him into the Amazon twilight. The sky had turned into a rainbow. He felt better: his eye burned less and the arthritis pains had eased. Showering at Mr. Stirs' house proved to be a complicated operation: the shower head was fed by a container into which a servant poured buckets of water while Roger soaped and rinsed himself. The water was at a temperate temperature that made him think of the Congo. When he went down to the first floor, the consul was waiting for him at the door, ready to take him to the house of Prefect Rey Lama.

They had to walk a few blocks, amid a hot wind that forced Roger to squint. They stumbled in the dim light over holes, stones, and garbage in the street. The noise had increased. Every time they crossed the door of a bar, the music grew louder and they could hear toasts, fights, and the shouting of drunks. Mr. Stirs, elderly, widowed, and childless, had spent half a dozen years in Iquitos and appeared to be a man without hopes and tired.

—What is the atmosphere in the city regarding this Commission? —Roger Casement asked.

—Frankly hostile —the consul replied immediately—. I suppose you already know, half of Iquitos lives off Mr. Arana. Rather, from the businesses of Mr. Julio C. Arana. People suspect that the Commission has bad intentions against the one who provides them with jobs and food.

—Can we expect any help from the authorities?

—More like all the obstacles in the world, Mr. Casement. The authorities of Iquitos also depend on Mr. Arana. Neither the prefect, nor the judges, nor the military have received their salaries from the Government for many months. Without Mr. Arana, they would starve. Keep in mind that Lima is farther from Iquitos than New York and London, due to the lack of transportation. It's a two-month journey at best.

—It's going to be more complicated than I imagined —Roger commented.

—You and the gentlemen of the Commission must be very careful—the consul added, now hesitating and lowering his voice—. Not here in Iquitos. Over there, in Putumayo. In those remote areas, anything could happen to you. It's a barbaric world, without law or order. Just like the Congo, I suppose.

The Prefecture of Iquitos was located in the Plaza de Armas, a large dirt lot without trees or flowers, where, as the consul pointed out to him by indicating a curious iron structure that looked like a half-finished Meccano set, a house made by Eiffel was being assembled ("Yes, the same Eiffel of the Eiffel Tower in Paris"). A prosperous rubber dealer had bought it in Europe, brought it disassembled to Iquitos, and now they were reassembling it to make it the best social club in the city.

The Prefecture occupied almost half a block. It was a ramshackle building, one story high, lacking grace or style, with large rooms and barred windows, divided into two wings, one dedicated to offices and the other to the prefect's residence. Mr. Rey Lama, a tall man with gray hair and large mustaches curled at the ends, wore boots, riding pants, a closed-neck shirt, and a strange jacket with embroidered decorations. He spoke some English and gave Roger Casement an excessively cordial welcome, filled with grand rhetoric. The members of the Commission were already all there, crammed into their evening suits, sweating. The prefect introduced Roger to the other guests: magistrates from the Superior Court, Colonel Arnáez, chief of the Garrison, Father Urrutia, superior of the Augustinians, Mr. Pablo Zumaeta, general manager of the Peruvian Amazon Company, and four or five other people, merchants, the customs chief, the director of *El Oriental*. There was not a single woman in the group. He heard champagne being uncorked. They offered glasses of a sparkling white wine that, although warm, seemed to him to be of good quality, undoubtedly French.

They had prepared dinner in a large courtyard, illuminated with oil lamps. A countless number of indigenous servants, barefoot and wearing aprons, served snacks and brought platters of food. It was a warm evening and a few stars twinkled in the sky. Roger was surprised by how easily he understood the speech of the people from Loreto, a somewhat syncopated and musical Spanish in which he recognized expressions.

Brazilian. He felt relieved: he would be able to understand much of what he would hear during the trip, and this, even with an interpreter, would facilitate the research. Around him, at the table, where they had just been served a greasy turtle soup that he swallowed with difficulty, there were several conversations happening at once, in English, in Spanish, in Portuguese, with interpreters interrupting them, creating moments of silence. Suddenly, the prefect, sitting across from Roger with his eyes already glazed from the glasses of wine and beer, snapped his fingers. Everyone fell silent. He made a toast to the newcomers. He wished them a pleasant stay, a successful mission, and that they enjoy the Amazonian hospitality. "Loreto and especially Iquitian," he added.

As soon as he sat down, he addressed Roger in a voice loud enough for private conversations to cease and a new one to begin, involving the twenty attendees.

—May I ask a question, dear Mr. Consul? What exactly is the purpose of your trip and this Commission? What are you here to investigate? Please do not take this as impertinence. On the contrary, my desire, and that of all the authorities, is to assist you. But we need to know what the British Crown has sent you for. It is a great honor for the Amazon, of which we would like to show ourselves worthy.

Roger Casement had understood almost everything that Rey Lama said, but he patiently waited for the interpreter to translate his words into English.

—As you surely know, in England, in Europe, there have been reports of atrocities that would have been committed against the indigenous people—he explained calmly—. Tortures, murders, very serious accusations. The main rubber company in the region, that of Mr. Julio C. Arana, the Peruvian Amazon Company, is, as I imagine you are aware, an English company, registered on the London Stock Exchange. Neither the Government nor public opinion would tolerate in Great Britain an English company violating human and divine laws in such a way. The reason for our trip is to investigate the truth of those accusations. The Company of Mr. Julio C. Arana itself has sent the Commission. I have been sent by Her Majesty's Government.

A heavy silence had fallen over the courtyard since Roger Casement opened his mouth. The noise from the street seemed to have diminished. A stillness was noticeable,

curious, as if all those gentlemen who moments ago were drinking, eating, conversing, moving, and gesturing had fallen victim to a sudden paralysis. All eyes were on Roger. An atmosphere of suspicion and disapproval had replaced the cordial ambiance.

—The Company of Julio C. Arana is willing to collaborate in defense of its good name —said Mr. Pablo Zumaeta, almost shouting—. We have nothing to hide. The ship you are taking to Putumayo is the best in our company. There, you will have all the facilities to see with your own eyes how infamous these slanders are.

—We appreciate it, sir —Roger Casement nodded.

And, at that very moment, in an unusual burst for him, he decided to put his hosts to a test that he was sure would trigger instructive reactions for him and the commissioners. With the same natural voice he would have used to talk about tennis or rain, he asked:

—By the way, gentlemen. Do you know if the journalist Benjamín Saldaña Roca, I hope I pronounced his name correctly, is in Iquitos? Would it be possible to speak with him?

Her question had the effect of a bomb. The attendees exchanged looks of surprise and displeasure. A long silence followed her words, as if no one dared to touch on such a thorny topic.

—But how! —exclaimed the prefect at last, dramatically exaggerating his dismay—. Has the name of that blackmailer even reached London?

—That's right, sir —Roger Casement nodded—. The accusations from Mr. Saldaña Roca and from engineer Walter Hardenburg sparked a scandal in London regarding the rubber plantations of Putumayo. No one has answered my question: is Mr. Saldaña Roca in Iquitos? Will I be able to see him?

There was another long silence. The discomfort of the attendees was palpable. At last, the superior of the Augustinians spoke:

—No one knows where he is, Mr. Casement —said Father Urrutia, with a Castilian Spanish that was distinctly different from that of the people from Loreto. Roger had more difficulty understanding him—.

He disappeared from Iquitos some time ago. It is said that he is in Lima.

—If he hadn't fled, the people of Iquitos would have lynched him —asserted an old man, shaking a furious fist.

—Iquitos is the land of patriots —exclaimed Pablo Zumaeta—. No one forgives that man for inventing those scoundrel tales to discredit Peru and undermine the company that has brought progress to the Amazon.

—He did it because the trick he had prepared didn't work —added the prefect—. Did they inform you that Saldaña Roca, before publishing those slanders, tried to extort money from the Company of Mr. Arana?

—Since we refused, he published all that nonsense about Putumayo —stated Pablo Zumaeta—. He is being prosecuted for libel, slander, and coercion, and jail awaits him. That's why he fled.

—There's nothing like being on the ground to find out what's going on —commented Roger Casement.

The private conversations dismantled the general conversation. Dinner continued with a dish of Amazonian fish, one of which, called gamitana, Casement found to have delicate and savory meat. However, the seasoning left a strong burning sensation in his mouth.

After finishing dinner and bidding farewell to the prefect, he briefly conversed with his friends from the Commission. According to Seymour Bell, it had been reckless to abruptly bring up the topic of journalist Saldaña Roca, which irritated the prominent figures of Iquitos. But Louis Barnes praised him, saying it had allowed them to study the furious reaction of these people against the journalist.

—It's a shame we can't talk to him —Casement replied—. I would have liked to meet him.

They said goodbye, and Roger and the consul walked back to the latter's home, taking the same route they had come. The commotion, the revelry, the singing, dancing, toasts, and fights had escalated, and Roger was surprised by the abundance of children —ragged, semi-naked, barefoot—gathered at the doors of bars and brothels, peeking in with mischievous faces at what was happening inside. There were also many dogs rummaging through the trash.

—Don't waste your time looking for him, because you won't find him —Mr. Stirs said—. The most likely scenario is that Saldaña Roca is dead.

Roger Casement was not surprised. He also suspected, upon seeing the verbal violence that the mere name of the journalist had provoked, that his disappearance might be final.

—Did you know him?

The consul had a round bald head, and his skull shone as if it were covered in tiny droplets of water. He walked slowly, testing the muddy ground with his cane, perhaps fearful of stepping on a snake or a rat.

—We talked two or three times —Mr. Stirs said—. He was a short man and slightly deformed. What they call here a cholo, a cholito. That is, a mixed-race person. Cholitos are usually soft *and* ceremonious. But Saldaña Roca was not. He was brusque, very self-assured. With one of those intense stares that believers and fanatics have, which honestly make me very nervous. My temperament does not align with that. I have little admiration for martyrs, Mr. Casement. Nor for heroes. Those people who sacrifice themselves for truth or justice often do more harm than they intend to remedy.

Roger Casement said nothing: he tried to imagine that small man, with physical deformities, possessing a heart and will similar to those of Edmund D. Morel. A martyr and a hero, indeed. He pictured him inking the metal plates of his weekly publications *La Felpa* and *La Sanción*. He would edit them in a small artisanal printing press that, without a doubt, would operate in a corner of his home. This modest dwelling would also serve as the editorial office and administration for his two little newspapers.

—I hope you do not take my words amiss —the British consul excused himself, suddenly regretting what he had just said—. Mr. Saldaña Roca was very brave to make those denunciations, of course. A reckless man, almost a suicidal one, for filing a lawsuit against Casa Arana for torture, kidnappings, floggings, and crimes in the rubber plantations of Putumayo. He was no fool. He knew very well what was going to happen to him.

—What happened to him?

—The predictable —Mr. Stirs said, without a trace of emotion—. They burned down his printing house on Morona Street. You can still see it, all charred. They shot up his house as well. The bullet marks are still visible on Próspero Street. He had to take his son out of the Augustinian school because his classmates made his life unbearable. He was forced to send his family to some secret place, who knows where, as his life was in danger. He had to close his two little newspapers because no one would give him any notice, nor would any printing house in Iquitos accept to print them. He was shot at twice in the street, as a warning. Both times he miraculously survived. One of those times left him limping, with a bullet lodged in his calf. The last time he was seen was in February 1909, on the boardwalk. They were pushing him towards the river. His face was swollen from the blows dealt by a gang. They shoved him onto a boat heading to Yurimaguas. He was never seen again. Perhaps he managed to escape to Lima. Hopefully. Or maybe, tied up hand and foot and with bleeding wounds, they threw him into the river for the piranhas to finish him off. If that was the case, his bones, which are the only thing those creatures don't eat, should already have reached the Atlantic. I suppose I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. In the Congo, he would see equally bad or worse stories.

They had arrived at the consul's house. He lit the small lamp in the entrance lounge and offered Casement a glass of port. They sat by the terrace and lit cigarettes. The moon had disappeared behind some clouds, but stars remained in the sky. The distant noise of the streets mixed with the synchronous hum of insects and the splashing of water as it struck the branches and reeds along the banks.

—What good did so much bravery do poor Benjamín Saldaña Roca? —the consul reflected, shrugging his shoulders—. None. He disgraced his family and may have lost his life. Here, we lost those two little newspapers, *La Felpa* and *La Sanción*, which were fun to read every week for their gossip columns.

—I don't believe that your sacrifice was completely useless —Roger Casement corrected him gently—. Without Saldaña Roca, we wouldn't be here. Unless, of course, you think our coming will also be for nothing.

—God forbid—the consul exclaimed—. You are right. All the scandal over there in the United States, in Europe. Yes, Saldaña Roca started all that with his accusations. And then, those of Walter Hardenburg. I have said something foolish. I hope your coming serves a purpose and that things change. Forgive me, Mr. Casement. Living so many years in the Amazon has made me a bit skeptical about the idea of progress. In Iquitos, one ends up not believing in any of that. Especially, that one day justice will push back against injustice. Maybe it's time for me to return to England, to give myself a bath of English optimism. I see that all these years you have spent serving the Crown in Brazil have not made you pessimistic. Who would be like you? I envy you.

When they said good night and retired to their rooms, Roger stayed awake for a long time. Had he done well to accept this assignment? A few months earlier, sir Edward Grey, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, had called him to his office and said: "The scandal over the crimes in Putumayo has reached intolerable limits. Public opinion demands that the Government take action. No one is better suited than you to travel there. An investigative commission composed of independent people has also been decided to be sent by the very Peruvian Amazon Company. But I want you, even while traveling with them, to prepare a personal report for the Government. You have great prestige due to what you did in the Congo. You are a specialist in atrocities. You cannot refuse." His first reaction had been to look for an excuse and decline. Then, reflecting, he told himself that precisely because of his work in the Congo, he had a moral obligation to accept. Had he done well? Mr. Stirs' skepticism seemed like a bad omen. From time to time, the expression from sir Edward Grey, "specialist in atrocities," echoed in his head.

Unlike the consul, he believed that Benjamín Saldaña Roca had rendered great service to the Amazon, to his country, and to humanity. The accusations from the journalist in *La Sanción. Commercial, Political and Literary Biweekly* were the first he had read about the rubber plantations of Putumayo, following his conversation with Sir Edward, who gave him four days to decide whether to travel with the investigative Commission. Immediately, the Foreign Office placed a dossier of documents in his hands, highlighting two

direct testimonies from individuals who had been in that region: the articles by American engineer Walter Hardenburg in the London weekly *Truth* and the articles by Benjamín Saldaña Roca, some of which had been translated into English by The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, a humanitarian organization.

His first reaction was disbelief: that journalist, starting from real facts, had exaggerated the abuses to such an extent that his articles exuded unreality and, even, a somewhat sadistic imagination. But immediately, Roger remembered that this had been the reaction of many English, Europeans, and North Americans when he and Morel made public the injustices in the Independent State of the Congo: disbelief. This is how humans defended themselves against everything that showed the indescribable cruelties to which they could be driven by greed and their bad instincts in a lawless world. If those horrors had occurred in the Congo, why couldn't they have happened in the Amazon?

Distressed, he got out of bed and went to sit on the terrace. The sky was dark, and the stars had also disappeared. There were fewer lights in the direction of the city, but the noise continued. If Saldaña Roca's reports were true, it was likely that, as the consul believed, the journalist had ended up thrown into the river tied up and bleeding to whet the appetites of the piranhas. Mr. Stirs' fatalistic and cynical approach irritated him. As if this did not happen because there were cruel people, but by fatal determination, like how the stars move or the tides rise. He had called him "a fanatic." A fanatic for justice? Yes, undoubtedly. A reckless man. A modest man, with no money or influence. An Amazonian Morel. A believer, perhaps? He had acted because he believed that the world, society, and life could not continue being this shameful. Roger thought about his youth, when the experience of evil and suffering in Africa inundated him with that belligerent feeling, that fierce will to do anything to make the world better. He felt a brotherly affection for Saldaña Roca. He would have liked to shake his hand, to be his friend, to say to him: "You have done something beautiful and noble with your life, sir."

Had he been there, in Putumayo, in the gigantic region where the Julio C. Arana Company operated? Had he himself gone to put his head in the lion's mouth? His articles didn't say so, but the specifics of names, places, and dates indicated that Saldaña Roca had been an eyewitness to what he reported. Roger had read Saldaña Roca's and Walter Hardenburg's testimonies so many times that at times it seemed to him he had been there in person.

He closed his eyes and saw the vast region, divided into stations, the main ones being La Chorrera and El Encanto, each with its chief. "Or rather, its monster." That was all that people like Víctor Macedo and Miguel Loaysa could be, for instance. Both had starred, in the middle of 1903, in their most memorable feat. About eight hundred ocaimas arrived at La Chorrera to deliver the baskets with the rubber balls collected from the forests. After weighing and storing them, the subadministrator of La Chorrera, Fidel Velarde, pointed out to his chief, Víctor Macedo, who was there with Miguel Loaysa from El Encanto, the twenty-five ocaimas set apart from the rest because they had not brought the minimum quota of jebe—latex or rubber—they were obligated to. Macedo and Loaysa decided to give a harsh lesson to the savages. Indicating to their foremen—the blacks from Barbados—to keep the rest of the ocaimas at bay with their Mausers, they ordered the "boys" to wrap the twenty-five in sacks soaked in oil. Then, they set them on fire. Shrieked by the flames, some managed to extinguish the fire by rolling on the ground but ended up with terrible burns. Those who jumped into the river like flaming projectiles drowned. Macedo, Loaysa, and Velarde finished off the wounded with their revolvers. Each time he recalled that scene, Roger felt vertigo.

According to Saldaña Roca, the administrators did that as a punishment, but also for fun. They enjoyed it. Making others suffer and competing in cruelty had become a vice they developed from practicing flogging, beatings, and torture so much. Often, when they were drunk, they looked for excuses for those blood games. Saldaña Roca quoted a letter from the Company's administrator to Miguel Flores, the station chief, admonishing him for "killing Indians for

pure sport," knowing there was a shortage of manpower and reminding him that such excesses should only be resorted to "in cases of necessity." Miguel Flores's response was worse than the accusation: "I protest because in the last two months only about forty Indians died at my station."

Saldaña Roca listed the various types of punishment inflicted on indigenous people for their offenses: whippings, confinement in stocks or torture racks, cutting off ears, noses, hands, and feet, up to murder. Hanged, shot, burned, or drowned in the river. In Matanzas, he asserted, there were more remains of indigenous people than in any of the other stations. It was impossible to make a calculation, but the bones must have belonged to hundreds, perhaps thousands of victims. The person responsible for Matanzas was Armando Normand, a young Bolivian-Englishman, only twenty-two or twenty-three years old. He claimed to have studied in London. His cruelty had become a "hellish myth" among the huitotos, whom he had decimated. In Abyssinia, the Company fined the administrator Abelardo Agüero and his second, Augusto Jiménez, for target shooting at the Indians, knowing that in doing so they were irresponsibly sacrificing useful arms for the company.

Despite being so far away, Roger Casement thought once again, the Congo and the Amazon were connected by an umbilical cord. The horrors repeated themselves, with minimal variations, inspired by profit, the original sin that accompanied humanity since its birth, the secret inspiring its endless evils. Or was there something more? Had the devil won the eternal contest?

Tomorrow, a very intense day awaited him. The consul had located three black men from Barbados in Iquitos who held British nationality. They had worked several years in the rubber plantations of Arana and agreed to be interrogated by the Commission if they were repatriated afterwards.

Although he slept very little, he woke up with the first light. He didn't feel bad. He washed up, got dressed, put on a Panama hat, grabbed his camera, and left the consul's house without seeing him or the servants. Outside, the sun was starting to shine in a cloudless sky and it was beginning to get hot. By noon, Iquitos would be like an oven. There were people on the streets and the small, noisy tram, painted red and blue, was already circulating. From time to time.

Indian street vendors with Asian features, yellowish skin, and faces and arms painted with geometric figures offered him fruits, drinks, live animals—monkeys, macaws, and small lizards—or arrows, clubs, and blowguns. Many bars and restaurants remained open but with few customers. There were drunks sprawled under the thatched roofs of palm leaves and dogs rummaging through the trash. "This city is a vile and pestilent hole," he thought. He took a long walk along the dusty streets, crossing Plaza de Armas where he recognized the Prefectura, and ended up at a boardwalk with stone railings, a nice promenade from which the enormous river with its floating islands could be seen, and, far away, glimmering in the sun, the row of tall trees on the other shore. At the end of the boardwalk, where it disappeared into a thicket and a slope with trees at the foot of which there was a dock, he saw some barefoot boys wearing only short pants driving stakes into the ground. They had put on paper hats to protect themselves from the sun.

They did not appear to be Indians, but rather cholos. One of them, who could not have been older than twenty years, had a harmonious torso, with muscles that stood out with each hammer strike. After hesitating for a moment, Roger approached him, showing him the camera.

—May I take your photograph? —he asked him in Portuguese—. I can pay.

The young man looked at him, not understanding.

He repeated the question twice in his poor Spanish, until the young man smiled. He chatted with the others about something that Roger could not guess. And finally, he turned to Roger and asked, snapping his fingers: «How much?». Roger rummaged through his pockets and pulled out a handful of coins. The young man's eyes examined them, counting.

He took several pictures, amid the laughter and teasing of his friends, making him remove the paper hat, raise his arms, show his muscles, and adopt the posture of a discobolus. For the latter, he had to briefly touch the boy's arm. He felt his hands were drenched with nerves and heat. He stopped taking photographs when he noticed he was surrounded by ragged children who were watching him like a strange bug. He handed the coins to the boy and hurried back to the consulate.

His friends from the Commission, seated at the table, were having breakfast with the consul. He joined them, explaining that every day he started his day with a good walk. While they had a cup of watery and sweet coffee, with pieces of fried cassava, Mr. Stirs explained who the Barbadians were. He started by warning them that the three of them had worked in Putumayo, but had ended on bad terms with the Arana Company. They felt deceived and cheated by the Peruvian Amazon Company and therefore their testimony would be filled with resentment. He suggested that the Barbadians should not appear before all the members of the Commission at once because they would feel intimidated and would not speak up. They decided to split into groups of two or three for the appearance.

Roger Casement partnered with Seymour Bell, who, as expected, shortly after the interview with the first Bajan, citing his dehydration problem, said he was not feeling well and left, leaving him alone with that old foreman from Casa Arana.

His name was Eponim Thomas Campbell and he was unsure of his age, although he believed he was no more than thirty-five years old. He was a Black man with long, curly hair that had some gray strands shining in it. He wore a faded shirt open at the chest down to his navel, and pants made of coarse fabric that only reached his ankles, held up with a piece of rope around his waist. He was barefoot and his enormous feet, with long nails and many calluses, looked like stone. His English was full of colloquial expressions that Roger found difficult to understand. Sometimes it mixed with Portuguese and Spanish words.

Using simple language, Roger assured him that his testimony would be confidential and that it would never be compromised by what he stated. He wouldn't even take notes; he would just listen. He only asked for truthful information about what was happening in Putumayo.

They were seated on the small terrace overlooking Casement's bedroom, and on the little table in front of the bench they shared, there was a pitcher of papaya juice and two glasses. Eponim Thomas Campbell had been hired seven years earlier in Bridgetown, the capital of Barbados, along with eighteen other Barbadians by Mr. Lizardo Arana, brother of Don Julius Caesar, to work as a foreman in one of the

stations in Putumayo. And right there the deception began because, when he was hired, they never told him that he would have to devote a good part of his time to the "raids."

—Explain to me what the "raids" are —said Casement.

Going out to hunt Indians in their villages so that they would come to collect rubber on the Company's lands. Those who were outside: huitotos, ocaimas, muinanes, nonuyas, andoques, rezigaros, or boras. Any of those who were in the region. Because all, without exception, were reluctant to gather jebe. They had to be forced. The "raids" required very long expeditions and sometimes, for nothing. They arrived and the villages were deserted. Their inhabitants had fled. Other times, fortunately, no. They fired shots to scare them and to prevent them from defending themselves, but they did, with their blowpipes and clubs. A fight would break out. Then the ones who were able to walk, both men and women, had to be herded, tied by the neck. The oldest and the newborns were abandoned so they wouldn't slow down the march. Eponim never committed the gratuitous cruelties of Armando Normand, despite having worked under his orders for two years in Matanzas, where Mr. Normand was the administrator.

— Gratuitous cruelties? —interrupted Roger—. Give me some examples.

Eponim shifted uncomfortably on the bench. His large eyes danced in their white orbits.

— Mr. Normand had his eccentricities —he murmured, averting his gaze—. When someone misbehaved. Rather, when they didn't behave as he expected. He drowned his children in the river, for example. By himself. With his own hands, I mean.

He paused and explained that Mr. Normand's eccentricities made him nervous. From such a strange person, anything could be expected, even that one day he would feel the whim to empty his revolver into the person closest to him. That's why he requested a transfer to another station. When he was moved to Ultimo Retiro, where the administrator was Mr. Alfredo Montt, Eponim slept more soundly.

—Did you ever have to kill Indians in the exercise of your duties?

Roger saw that the eyes of the Bajan were looking at him, slipping away, and then looking at him again.

—It was part of the job—he admitted, shrugging his shoulders—. Of the foremen and the "boys," whom they also call "rational." In Putumayo, a lot of blood flows. People eventually get used to it. Over there, life is about killing and dying.

—Would you tell me how many people you had to kill, Mr. Thomas?

—I never kept track—Eponim replied promptly—. I did the work I had to do and tried to turn the page. I fulfilled my duty. That's why I maintain that the Company treated me very poorly.

He became engrossed in a long and confusing monologue against his former employers. They accused him of being involved in the sale of around fifty huitotos to a rubber plantation owned by Colombians, the Iriartes, with whom the Company of Mr. Arana was always at odds over the laborers. It was a lie. Eponim swore and re-swore that he had nothing to do with the disappearance of those huitotos from Ultimo Retiro, who, it was later known, reappeared working for the Colombians. The one who had sold them was the station's own manager, Alfredo Montt. A greedy and miserly man. To hide his guilt, he accused Eponim and Dayton Cranton and Simbad Douglas. Pure slander. The Company believed him, and the three foremen had to flee. They endured terrible hardships to reach Iquitos. The Company's bosses, back in Putumayo, had ordered the "rational" to kill the three Barbadians wherever they found them. Now, Eponim and his two companions lived by begging and doing odd jobs. The Company refused to pay for their return tickets to Barbados. They had reported them for abandoning their work, and the judge in Iquitos ruled in favor of Casa Arana, of course.

Roger promised him that the Government would take care of repatriating him and his two colleagues, as they were British citizens.

Exhausted, he went to lie down on his bed just after saying goodbye to Eponim Thomas Campbell. He was sweating, his body ached, and he felt a wandering discomfort that tormented him gradually, organ by organ, from head to toe. The Congo. The

Amazon. Were there no limits to human suffering? The world was filled with those enclaves of savagery that awaited him in Putumayo. How many? Hundreds, thousands, millions? Could that hydra be defeated? One head was cut off in one place and it reappeared in another, more bloodthirsty and horrific. He fell asleep.

He dreamed of his mother, in a lake in Wales. A dim and elusive sun shone through the leaves of the tall oaks, and, agitated, with palpitations, he saw the muscular young man whom he had photographed that morning on the malecón in Iquitos. What was he doing in that Welsh lake? Or was it an Irish lake, in Ulster? The slender silhouette of Anne Jephson disappeared. His unease did not stem from the sadness and pity that the enslaved humanity in Putumayo aroused in him, but from the feeling that, although he couldn't see her, Anne Jephson was lurking nearby, watching him from that circular grove. The fear, however, did not diminish the growing excitement with which he saw the boy from Iquitos approaching. His torso was soaked with water from the lake, from which he had just emerged like a lake god. With each step, his muscles stood out, and there was a smug smile on his face that made him shudder and moan in his sleep. When he woke up, he realized with disgust that he had ejaculated. He washed and changed his pants and underwear. He felt embarrassed and insecure.

He found the members of the Commission overwhelmed by the testimonies they had just received from the Barbadian Dayton Cranton and Simbad Douglas. The former foremen had been as blunt in their declarations as Eponim had been with Roger Casement. What frightened them the most was that both Dayton and Simbad seemed particularly obsessed with denying that they had 'sold' those fifty huitotos to the Colombian rubber workers.

—They were not the least bit concerned about the floggings, mutilations, or murders —repeated the botanist Walter Folk, who did not seem to suspect the evil that greed can incite—. Such horrors seem completely natural to them.

—I could not endure all of Simbad's declaration — confessed Henry Fielgald—. I had to step outside to vomit.

—You have read the documentation that the Foreign Office gathered —Roger Casement reminded them—. Did you think

that the accusations from Saldaña Roca and Hardenburg were mere fantasies?

—Fantasies, no —replied Walter Folk—. But yes, exaggerations.

—After this appetizer, I wonder what we will find in Putumayo —said Louis Barnes.

—They must have taken precautions —suggested the botanist—. They will show us a very made-up reality.

The consul interrupted them to announce that lunch was served. Except for him, who ate a fish prepared with chonta salad and wrapped in corn leaves with appetite, the commissioners barely took a bite. They remained silent and absorbed in their memories of the recent interviews.

—This journey will be a descent into hell — predicted Seymour Bell, who had just reintegrated into the group. He turned to Roger Casement—. You have already been through this. You survive, then.

—The wounds take time to heal —Roger nuanced.

—It's not that bad, gentlemen —Mr. Stirs, who was eating in a very good mood, tried to lift their spirits—. A good loretana nap and you would feel better. You'll fare better with the authorities and the heads of the Peruvian Amazon Company than with the blacks, you'll see.

Instead of taking a nap, Roger, sitting at the small table that served as a nightstand in his bedroom, wrote in his notebook everything he recalled from the conversation with Eponim Thomas Campbell and made summaries of the testimonies that the commissioners had gathered from the other two Barbadians. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, he noted the questions he would ask that afternoon of prefect Rey Lama and the manager of the Company, Pablo Zumaeta, who, Mr. Stirs had revealed to him, was the brother-in-law of Julio C. Arana.

The prefect received the Commission in his office and offered them glasses of beer, fruit juices, and cups of coffee. He had brought in chairs and distributed some straw fans for them to cool off. He was still wearing the riding pants and boots he had displayed the previous day, but he no longer wore the embroidered vest; instead, he had on a white linen jacket and a shirt buttoned up to the collar, resembling Russian blouses. He had a distinguished air with his graying temples and elegant manners. He made it known that he was a career diplomat.

He had served several years in Europe and took on this prefecture at the demand of the president of the Republic himself—he pointed to the photograph on the wall, of a small, elegant man, dressed in tails and a tongo, with a sash across his chest—, Augusto B. Leguía.

—Who sends you my warmest regards—he added.

—It's great that you speak English and we can do without the interpreter, prefect—Casement replied.

—My English is very bad—Rey Lama interrupted him coyly—. You will have to be indulgent.

—The British Government regrets that your requests for President Leguía's Government to initiate an investigation into the allegations in Putumayo have been futile.

—There is a legal action underway, Mr. Casement—the prefect interjected—. My Government did not need Her Majesty to initiate it. For that, a special judge has been appointed who is already on his way to Iquitos. A distinguished magistrate: Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel. You know that the distances between Lima and Iquitos are enormous.

—But in that case, why send a judge from Lima—interjected Louis Barnes—. Aren't there judges in Iquitos? Yesterday, at the dinner you offered us, you introduced us to some magistrates.

Roger Casement noticed that Rey Lama was casting a compassionate look at Barnes, the kind one gives a child who has not reached the age of reason or a foolish adult.

—This conversation is confidential, isn't it, gentlemen?—he finally asked.

All the heads nodded. The prefect still hesitated before responding.

—That my Government sends a judge from Lima to investigate is a sign of its good faith—he explained—. It would have been much easier to ask a local investigating judge to do it. But then...

He fell silent, uncomfortable.

—To a good listener, few words are needed—he added.

—Do you mean to say that no judge in Iquitos would dare to confront the Company of Mr. Arana?—asked Roger Casement, softly.

—This is not cultured and prosperous England, gentlemen — murmured the prefect, disheartened. He had a glass of water in hand and drank it in one gulp—. If a person takes months to come here from Lima, the emoluments of magistrates, authorities, military personnel, and officials take even longer. Or, they simply never arrive. And how can those people survive while waiting for their salaries?

—From the generosity of the Peruvian Amazon Company? —suggested the botanist Walter Folk.

—Don't put words in my mouth that I haven't said — interjected Rey Lama, raising a hand—. The Company of Mr. Arana advances salaries to officials as a loan. Those sums must be repaid, in principle, with a modest interest. It's not a gift. There's no bribery. It's an honorable agreement with the State. But, still, it's natural for magistrates who live off those loans not to be entirely impartial when it comes to the Company of Mr. Arana. Do you understand, right? The Government has sent a judge from Lima to conduct an absolutely independent investigation. Isn't that the best demonstration that it is committed to discovering the truth?

The commissioners sipped from their glasses of water or beer, confused and demoralized. "How many of them are already looking for an excuse to return to Europe?" Roger thought. They certainly did not foresee any of this. With perhaps the exception of Louis Barnes, who had lived in Africa, the others did not imagine that in the rest of the world, not everything functioned the same way as in the British Empire.

—Are there authorities in the region we are going to visit? —asked Roger.

—Other than inspectors who pass through there at the death of a bishop, none —said Rey Lama—. It is a very remote region. Until a few years ago, it was virgin jungle, inhabited only by wild tribes. What authority could the Government send there? And for what? To be eaten by cannibals?

If there is now commercial life there, work, and a beginning of modernity, it is due to Julio C. Arana and his brothers. They must also consider that. They were the first to conquer those Peruvian lands for Peru. Without the Company, all of Putumayo would have already been occupied by Co-

Colombia, which is eager to seize that region. You cannot overlook this aspect, gentlemen. Putumayo is not England. It is an isolated, remote world of pagans who, when they have twins or children with any physical deformity, drown them in the river. Julio C. Arana has been a pioneer, bringing ships, medicines, the Catholic religion, clothing, and Spanish to that place. Abuses must certainly be punished. But, do not forget, it is a land that awakens greed. Isn't it strange that in Mr. Hardenburg's accusations all Peruvian rubber dealers are monsters while Colombians are archangels full of compassion for the indigenous people? I have read the articles in the magazine *Truth*. Did it not seem odd to you? What a coincidence that Colombians, eager to seize those lands, found a supporter like Mr. Hardenburg who only saw violence and abuses among Peruvians, and not a single similar case among Colombians. He worked before coming to Peru on the railways of Cauca, remember. Could he not be an agent?

He groaned, exhausted, and chose to take a drink of beer. He looked at them, one by one, with a gaze that seemed to say: "One point in my favor, right?"

"Flagellations, mutilations, rapes, murders—" murmured Henry Fielgald. "Is this what you call bringing modernity to Putumayo, Mr. Prefect? Not only has Hardenburg given testimony. Saldaña Roca, your compatriot, also has. Three foremen from Barbados, whom we questioned this morning, have confirmed these horrors. They themselves admit to having committed them."

—They must be punished, then —the prefect stated—. And they would have been if there were judges, police, and authorities in Putumayo. For now, there is nothing but barbarism. I do not defend anyone. I do not excuse anyone. Go. See with your own eyes. Judge for yourselves. My Government could have prohibited your entry into Peru, as we are a sovereign country and Great Britain has no reason to interfere in our affairs. But it has not done so. On the contrary, it has instructed me to grant you all the facilities. President Leguía is a great admirer of England, gentlemen. He wishes for Peru to one day become a great country like yours. That is why you are here, free to go anywhere and find out everything.

It started to rain heavily. The light diminished, and the sound of the water hitting the corrugated metal was so loud that it seemed the roof would collapse and torrents of water would fall on them. Rey Lama had adopted a melancholic expression.

—I have a wife and four children whom I adore—he said with a sad smile—. It has been a year since I last saw them, and only God knows if I will see them again. But when President Leguía asked me to come serve my country, in this remote corner of the world, I did not hesitate. I am not here to defend criminals, gentlemen. On the contrary. I only ask you to understand that it is not the same to work, trade, or set up an industry in the heart of the Amazon, than it is to do so in England. If one day this jungle reaches the living standards of Western Europe, it will be thanks to men like Julio C. Arana.

They were still a long time in the prefect's office. They asked him many questions and he answered all of them, sometimes evasively and sometimes bluntly. Roger Casement could not quite form a clear idea of the character. At times he seemed like a cynical person playing a role, and at others, a good man, trying to manage an overwhelming responsibility with as much grace as he could. One thing was certain: Rey Lama knew that those atrocities existed and did not like it, but his job required him to downplay them as best he could.

When they said goodbye to the prefect, it had stopped raining. In the street, the roofs of the houses were still dripping, there were puddles everywhere where the frogs were splashing, and the air had filled with horseflies and mosquitoes that were biting them relentlessly. With their heads down and quiet, they went towards the Peruvian Amazon Company, a large mansion with a tiled roof and tiles on the facade where the general manager, Pablo Zumaeta, was waiting for them for the last interview of the day. They had a few minutes left and took a walk around the large open space that was the Plaza de Armas. They curiously observed the metal house of engineer Gustave Eiffel, its iron vertebrae displayed to the elements like the skeleton of a prehistoric animal. The bars and restaurants in the area were already open, and the music and noise were booming in the sunset of Iquitos.

The Peruvian Amazon Company, on Peru Street, a few meters from the Plaza de Armas, was the largest and most solid building in Iquitos. Two stories high, built with cement and metal sheets, it had its walls painted light green and in the small room adjacent to its office, where Pablo Zumaeta received them, there was a fan with wide wooden blades suspended from the ceiling, still, waiting for electricity. Despite the intense heat, Mr. Zumaeta, who had to be nearing fifty, wore a dark suit with a fancy vest, a bow tie, and shiny boots. He ceremoniously shook hands with each one and asked them all, in a Spanish marked by the melodic Amazonian accent that Roger Casement had learned to identify, if they were well accommodated, if Iquitos was hospitable to them, if they needed anything. He repeated to everyone that he had received cable orders from London from Mr. Julio C. Arana himself to provide them with all the facilities for the success of their mission. Upon mentioning Arana, the manager of the Peruvian Amazon Company bowed to the large portrait that hung on one of the walls.

While some domestic Indians, barefoot and wearing white tunics, passed around bowls of drinks, Casement gazed for a while at the serious, square, dark face with penetrating eyes of the owner of the Peruvian Amazon Company. Arana wore a French beret (*le béret*) and his suit seemed tailored by one of the good tailors from Paris or perhaps from Savile Row in London. Was it true that this all-powerful king of rubber, with palaces in Biarritz, Geneva, and the gardens of Kensington Road in London, started his career selling straw hats in the streets of Rioja, the lost village in the Amazon jungle where he was born? His gaze revealed a clear conscience and great self-satisfaction.

Pablo Zumaeta, through the interpreter, announced to them that the best ship of the Company, the *Liberal*, was ready for them to embark. He had assigned the most experienced captain on the rivers of the Amazon and the best crew. Even so, navigating to Putumayo would require sacrifices from them. It took between eight to ten days, depending on the weather. And before any of the members of the Commission had time to ask him a question, he hurried to reach Roger Casement with a stack of papers in a folder:

surged to reach Roger Casement a stack of papers, in a folder:

—I have prepared this documentation, anticipating some of your concerns —he explained—. It contains the provisions of the Company for the administrators, heads, deputy heads, and foremen of stations regarding the treatment of personnel.

Zumaeta concealed his nervousness by raising his voice and gesturing. While displaying the papers filled with inscriptions, stamps, and signatures, he listed what they contained with the tone and gestures of a street orator:

—Strict prohibition on administering physical punishments to the Indigenous people, wives, and children, and of offending them verbally or in deed. They should be reprimanded and advised in a severe manner when they have committed a verified offense. Depending on the severity of the offense, they may be fined or, in cases of very serious offenses, dismissed. If the offense has criminal implications, transfer them to the nearest competent authority.

He took time summarizing the instructions, which were aimed —he repeated incessantly— at preventing "abuses against the natives." He would pause to explain that, "being what humans are," sometimes the employees violated those regulations. When it happened, the Company sanctioned the responsible party.

—What's important is that we do everything possible and impossible to prevent abuses in the rubber plantations. If they happened, it was exceptional, the work of some rogue who did not respect our policy towards the indigenous people.

He took a seat. He had spoken a lot and with such energy that he appeared exhausted. He wiped the sweat from his face with a handkerchief that was already soaked.

—Will we find in Putumayo the station chiefs implicated by Saldaña Roca and Engineer Hardenburg, or will they have fled?

—None of our employees have fled —the manager of the Peruvian Amazon Company said indignantly—. Why would they have done that? Because of the slanders from two blackmailers who, unable to extort money from us, made up those lies?

—Mutilations, murders, floggings —recited Roger Casement—. Of dozens, perhaps hundreds of per-

sonas. These are accusations that have shaken the entire civilized world.

—I would be moved too if it had happened — protested Pablo Zumaeta indignantly—. What moves me now is that cultured and intelligent people like you give credence to such nonsense without prior investigation.

—We will do it on the ground —Roger Casement reminded him—. Very serious, rest assured.

—Do you believe that Arana, that I, that the administrators of the Peruvian Amazon Company are suicidal enough to kill indigenous people? Don't you know that the number one problem for rubber dealers is the lack of collectors? Every worker is precious to us. If those killings were true, there wouldn't be a single Indian left in Putumayo. They would all have run away, wouldn't they? No one wants to live where they are beaten, mutilated, and killed. That accusation is of limitless stupidity, Mr. Casement. If the Indigenous people flee, we go bankrupt and the rubber industry collapses. Our employees know this, and that's why they strive to keep the savages happy.

He looked at the members of the Commission, one by one. He was always indignant, but now, he was also saddened. He made faces that seemed like pouty expressions.

—It is not easy to treat them well, to keep them satisfied —he confessed, lowering his voice—. They are very primitive. Do you know what that means? Some tribes are cannibals. We cannot allow it, right? It is neither Christian nor humane. We prohibit it, and sometimes they get angry and act like what they are: savages. Should we let them drown children born with deformities? Like a cleft lip, for example. No, because infanticide is also not Christian, right? Anyway. You will see it with your own eyes. Then, you will understand the injustice England is committing against Mr. Julio C. Arana and a company that, at the cost of enormous sacrifices, is transforming this country.

Roger Casement thought that Pablo Zumaeta was going to shed some tears. But he was mistaken. The manager gave them a friendly smile.

—I have talked a lot, and now it's your turn—he apologized—. Ask me anything you wish, and I will answer you honestly. We have nothing to hide.

For nearly an hour, the members of the commission interrogated the general manager of the Peruvian Amazon Company. He answered with lengthy responses that sometimes confused the interpreter, who would ask him to repeat words and phrases. Roger did not intervene in the interrogation and was often distracted. It was clear that Zumaeta would never tell the truth; he would deny everything and repeat the arguments that the Arana Company had used in London to respond to newspaper criticisms. There were, perhaps, occasional excesses committed by intemperate individuals, but it was not the policy of the Peruvian Amazon Company to torture, enslave, or even kill the indigenous people. The law prohibited it, and it would have been madness to terrify the laborers who were so scarce in Putumayo. Roger felt transported in space and time to the Congo. The same horrors, the same disdain for the truth. The difference was that Zumaeta spoke in Spanish while the Belgian officials spoke in French. They denied the obvious with the same ease because both believed that collecting rubber and making money was an ideal of Christians that justified the worst crimes against those pagans who, of course, were always cannibals and murderers of their own children.

When they left the premises of the Peruvian Amazon Company, Roger accompanied his colleagues to the small house where they had been hosted. Instead of going directly back to the home of the British consul, he took a walk through Iquitos, aimlessly. He had always enjoyed walking, either alone or in the company of a friend, at the start and end of the day. He could do it for hours, but on the unpaved streets of Iquitos, he often stumbled over holes and puddles full of water, where frogs croaked. The noise was enormous. Bars, restaurants, brothels, dance halls, and gambling dens were filled with people drinking, eating, dancing, or arguing. And at every door, groups of half-naked children spied. He saw the last colors of twilight disappear on the horizon and made the rest of the walk in the dark, along streets lit in stretches by the lamps of the bars. He realized he had arrived at that square-shaped field that had the pompous name of Plaza.

de Armas. He turned around and suddenly felt that someone, sitting on a bench, greeted him in Portuguese: «*Good evening*, Mr. Casement». It was Father Ricardo Urrutia, superior of the Augustinians in Iquitos whom he had met at the dinner offered by the prefect. He sat down next to him on the wooden bench.

—When it doesn't rain, it's nice to go out and see the stars *and* breathe a bit of fresh air —said the Augustinian, in Portuguese—. As long as one covers their ears, to avoid that infernal noise. They must have already told you about this iron house that a half-crazy rubber dealer bought in Europe *and* that they're building on that corner. It was exhibited in Paris, at the Exposition Universelle 1889, it seems. They say it will be a social club. Can you imagine that furnace, a metal house in the climate of Iquitos? For now, it's a bat cave. Dozens of them sleep there, hanging by one leg.

Roger Casement told him to speak in Spanish, as he understood it. But Father Urrutia, who had spent more than ten years of his life among the Augustinians of Ceará, in Brazil, preferred to continue speaking in Portuguese. He had been in the Peruvian Amazon for less than a year.

—I already know that you have never been to Mr. Arana's Gaucherías. But surely, you know a lot about what happens there. May I ask for your opinion? Could those accusations from Saldaña Roca, from Walter Hardenburg, be true?

The priest sighed.

—Unfortunately, they may be, Mr. Casement—he murmured—. We are very far from Putumayo. At least a thousand, twelve hundred kilometers. If, despite being in a city with authorities, prefect, judges, military, police, the things we know are happening, what will not happen where only the employees of The Company exist?

He sighed again, now with anguish.

—Here, the major problem is the buying and selling of indigenous girls—he said, with a pained voice—. No matter how hard we strive to find a solution, we cannot come up with one.

«The Congo, once again. The Congo, everywhere.»

—You have heard of the famous "raids"—the Augustinian added—. These assaults on Indigenous villages to capture gatherers. The attackers not only steal the men.

They also take the boys *and* girls. To sell them here. Sometimes they take them all the way to Manaus, where, apparently, they fetch a better price. In Iquitos, a family buys a little maid for twenty or thirty soles at most. All of them have one, two, five little maids. Slaves, in reality. Working day *and* night, sleeping with animals, receiving beatings for any reason, and of course, serving for the sexual initiation of the family's children.

He sighed again *and* was left gasping.

—Can't anything be done with the authorities?

—In principle, it could be —said Father Urruti—. Slavery has been abolished in Peru for over half a century. One could turn to the police and the judges. But all of them also have their little servants bought. Besides, what would the authorities do with the girls they rescue? Keep them or sell them, of course. And not always to families. Sometimes, to the brothels, for what you can imagine.

—Is there no way for them to return to their tribes?

—The tribes around here hardly exist anymore. The parents were kidnapped and herded to the rubber plantations. There is nowhere to take them. What is the point of rescuing those poor creatures? Under those conditions, perhaps the lesser evil is for them to stay with their families. Some treat them well, grow fond of them. Does that seem monstrous to you?

—Monstrous —Roger Casement repeated.

—To me, to us, it also seems that way —Father Urrutia said—. We spend hours at the mission, racking our brains. What solution can we provide? We can't find one. We have made an effort in Rome to see if some nuns can come and open a little school here for those girls. At least they should receive some education. But will the families agree to send them to school? Very few, in any case. They consider them little animals.

He sighed again. He had spoken with such bitterness that Roger, affected by the religious man's gloom, felt a desire to return to the British consul's house. He stood up.

—You can do something, Mr. Casement —Father Urrutia said to him as a farewell, shaking his hand—. It's a sort of miracle what has happened. I mean, those reports, the scandal in Europe. The arrival of this Commission in Loreto. If anyone can help those poor

people, it is you. I will pray that you return safe and sound from Putumayo.

Roger walked back slowly, not looking at what was happening in the bars and brothels from where the voices, songs, and strumming of guitars emerged. He thought of those children torn from their tribes, separated from their families, bundled in the bilge of a boat, brought to Iquitos, sold for twenty or thirty soles to a family where they would spend their lives sweeping, scrubbing, cooking, cleaning toilets, washing dirty clothes, insulted, beaten, and sometimes raped by the boss or the boss's children. The same old story. The story that never ends.

When the door of the cell opened and he saw the thick silhouette of the *sheriff*, Roger Casement thought he had a visitor —Gee or Alice, perhaps—, but the jailer, instead of indicating that he should get up and follow him to the visiting room, just stared at him strangely, saying nothing. "They rejected the request," he thought. He remained lying down, sure that if he stood up, the trembling in his legs would cause him to collapse to the ground.

—Do you always want a shower? —asked the cold, slow voice of the *sheriff*.

«My last wish?», he thought. «After the bath, the executioner.»

—This goes against the rules —murmured the *sheriff*, with some emotion—. But today marks the first anniversary of my son's death in France. I want to offer an act of compassion in his memory.

—I appreciate it —said Roger, standing up. What had bitten the *sheriff*? Since when did he show such kindness to him?

He felt that the blood in his veins, halted at the sight of the jailer appearing in the doorway of his cell, began to flow again through his body. He stepped into the long, scorched hallway and followed the obese jailer to the bathroom, a dark space with chipped toilets lined up against one wall, a row of showers on the opposite wall, and some unplastered cement containers with rusty pipes pouring water. The *sheriff* stood at the entrance of the place while Roger undressed, hanging his blue uniform and prison cap on a hook in the wall before stepping into the shower. The stream of water sent a shiver from head to toe and, at

the same time, a feeling of joy and gratitude. He closed his eyes and, before lathering up with the bar of soap he picked from one of the rubber boxes hanging on the wall, he felt the cold water slide down his body as he rubbed his arms and legs. He was happy and elated. With that stream of water, not only did the dirt accumulated on his body over so many days disappear, but also worries, anxieties, and regrets. He soaped up and rinsed for a good while until the *sheriff* signaled to him from afar with a clap to hurry up. Roger dried himself with the same clothes he put on top. He had no comb and smoothed his hair with his hands.

—He doesn't know how grateful I am for this bath, *sheriff*—he said, while they returned to the cell—. It has restored my life, my health.

The jailer replied with an unintelligible mumble.

As he lay back down on his cot, Roger tried to resume reading the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, but he couldn't concentrate and returned the book to the floor.

He thought of Captain Robert Monteith, his assistant and friend for the last six months he spent in Germany. What a magnificent man! Loyal, efficient, and heroic. He was his travel companion and fellow adventurer on the German submarine U-19 that brought them, along with Sergeant Daniel Julian Bailey, also known as Julian Beverly, to the shores of Tralee, in Ireland, where the three of them nearly drowned due to their inability to row. Due to not knowing how to row! Such was the case: small trivialities could intertwine with significant matters and ruin them. He remembered the gray, rainy dawn, the choppy sea, and the thick fog of Good Friday, April 21, 1916, and the three of them, in the unsteady boat with three oars left for them by the German submarine before disappearing into the mist. "Good luck," Captain Raimund Weissbach shouted to them as a farewell. He again felt the horrible sense of helplessness, trying to steady that boat bucking in the waves and the clumsiness of the makeshift rowers to straighten it toward the coast, which no one knew where it was. The vessel spun, heaved, dipped, jumped, traced circles of varying radii, and, since none of the three could manage to handle it, the waves, crashing against the side of the boat, tossed it about so that it would capsize at any moment.

Indeed, it capsized. For a few minutes, the three were on the brink of drowning. They splashed, swallowed saltwater, until they managed to right the boat and, helping each other, climb back onto it. Roger remembered the brave Monteith, with his hand infected from the accident he had in Germany, at the port of Heligoland, trying to learn how to operate a motorboat. They docked there to change submarines because the U-2 they boarded in Wilhelmshaven had a malfunction. That wound had tormented him throughout the week-long journey between Heligoland and Tralee Bay. Roger, who made the crossing with excruciating seasickness and vomiting, hardly tasting food or getting off the narrow bunk, remembered Monteith's stoic patience with the swelling of his injury. The anti-inflammatories that the German sailors of the U-19 applied were useless. His hand continued to ooze, and Captain Weissbach, commander of the U-19, predicted that if he was not treated immediately upon disembarking, that wound would become gangrenous.

The last time he saw Captain Robert Monteith was in the ruins of McKenna's Fort, that same dawn of April 21, when his two companions decided that Roger would stay hidden there while they went to seek help from the Volunteers of Tralee. They decided this because he was the one who ran the greatest risk of being recognized by the soldiers — the most coveted prey for the Empire's guard dogs — and because Roger could no longer endure. Sick and weakened, he had fallen to the ground twice, exhausted, and the second time remained unconscious for several minutes. His friends left him among the ruins of McKenna's Fort with a revolver and a small bundle of clothes, after shaking his hands. Roger remembered how, upon seeing the larks fluttering around him and hearing their song and discovering that he was surrounded by wild violets blooming among the sands of Tralee Bay, he thought that he had finally arrived in Ireland. His eyes filled with tears. Captain Monteith, upon leaving, gave him a military salute. Small, strong, agile, tireless, an Irish patriot to the marrow of his bones, in the six months they had lived together in Germany, Roger did not hear a complaint from him nor notice the slightest sign of weakness in his companion, despite the failures he had faced in the Limburg camp due to the resistance — when

not the open hostility—from the prisoners to enlist in the Irish Brigade that Roger wanted to form to fight alongside Germany (“but not under its orders”) for the independence of Ireland.

He was soaked from head to toe, with his hand swollen and bleeding, poorly wrapped in a cloth that had come loose, and wearing an expression of great fatigue. Walking with vigorous strides, Monteith and Sergeant Daniel Bailey, who was limping, disappeared into the fog in the direction of Tralee. Had Robert Monteith arrived there without being captured by the officers of the Royal Irish Constabulary? Had he managed to make contact in Tralee with the people of the IRB (Irish Republican Brotherhood) or the Volunteers? He never knew when and where Sergeant Daniel Bailey was captured. His name was never mentioned in the lengthy interrogations that Roger underwent, first at the Admiralty, by the heads of British intelligence, and then by Scotland Yard. The sudden appearance of Daniel Bailey at the treason trial as a prosecution witness for the Attorney General left Roger stunned. In his statement, filled with lies, Monteith was not named even once. Was he still free, or had he been killed? Roger prayed to God that the captain was safe and sound, hiding in some corner of Ireland. Or had he participated in the Easter Rising and perished there like so many anonymous Irishmen fighting in that adventure as heroic as it was mad? This was the most likely scenario. That he had been at the Dublin Post Office, shooting alongside his admired Tom Clarke, until an enemy bullet ended his exemplary life.

His had also been a crazy adventure. To think that by coming to Ireland from Germany, he could single-handedly stop the Easter Rising, planned so secretly by the Military Council of the Irish Volunteers—Tom Clarke, Sean McDermott, Patrick Pearse, Joseph Plunkett, and a few others—that even the president of the Irish Volunteers, Professor Eoin MacNeill, had not been informed about the Rising, was it not another delusional fantasy? “Reason does not convince mystics or martyrs,” he thought. Roger had participated in and witnessed long and intense discussions within the Irish Volunteers about his thesis.

That the only way an armed action by the Irish nationalists against the British Empire would succeed was if it coincided with a German military offensive that immobilized the bulk of their military power. On this, he and the young Plunkett had debated for many hours in Berlin, without reaching an agreement. Was it because the military council leaders never shared this conviction of his that the IRB and the Volunteers preparing for the insurrection had hidden their plans from him until the last moment? When, at last, information reached Berlin, Roger already knew that the German Admiralty had ruled out a naval offensive against England. When the Germans agreed to send weapons to the insurgents, he insisted on going to Ireland in person with the armaments, secretly intending to persuade the leaders that without a simultaneous German military offensive, the uprising would be a futile sacrifice. In that, he was not mistaken. According to all the news he had been able to gather here and there since the days of his trial, the Rising was a heroic gesture but resulted in the slaughter of the most daring leaders of the IRB and the Volunteers and the imprisonment of hundreds of revolutionaries. The repression would now be endless. The independence of Ireland had regressed once more. A sad, sad story!

He had a bitter taste in his mouth. Another serious mistake: placing too many hopes in Germany. He recalled the discussion with Herbert Ward in Paris the last time he saw him. His best friend in Africa since they met, both young and eager for adventures, distrusted all nationalisms. He was one of the few cultured and sensitive Europeans on African soil, and Roger learned a lot from him. They exchanged books, held reading sessions, talked and debated about music, painting, poetry, and politics. Herbert already dreamed of becoming just an artist someday, dedicating all the time he could steal from his work to sculpting African human figures in wood and clay. Both had been severe critics of the abuses and crimes of colonialism, and when Roger became a public figure and became a target for attacks due to his *Report on the Congo*, Herbert and Sarita, his wife, already settled in Paris, with Herbert turning into a prestigious sculptor now primarily casting bronzes, always inspired by Africa, were his most

enthusiastic defenders. They were also when his *Report on the Putumayo*, denouncing the crimes committed by the rubber dealers of the Putumayo against the Indigenous people, caused another scandal around Casement's figure. Herbert had even initially shown sympathy for Roger's nationalist conversion, although in his letters he often joked about the dangers of "patriotic fanaticism" and reminded him of the phrase by Doctor Johnson which states, "patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels." Their coincidences found a limit with the topic of Germany. Herbert always energetically rejected Roger's positive, romanticized view of Chancellor Bismarck, the unifier of the German states, and the "Prussian spirit," which he found rigid, authoritarian, coarse, at odds with imagination and sensitivity, more akin to barracks and military hierarchies than to democracy and the arts. When, during the war, he learned from the denunciations of English newspapers that Roger Casement had gone to Berlin to conspire with the enemy, he sent a letter through his sister Nina, ending their friendship of many years. In it, he let him know that his and Sarita's eldest son, a nineteen-year-old young man, had just died on the front.

How many more friends had he lost, people who, like Herbert and Sarita Ward, appreciated and admired him, and now considered him a traitor? Even Alice Stopford Green, his teacher and friend, had objected to his trip to Berlin, although since he was captured, she never mentioned that disagreement again. How many more people would now feel disgust for him because of the vile accusations made by the English press? A cramp in his stomach forced him to curl up on his cot. He remained like that for a good while until that feeling of having a stone in his belly that crushed his insides began to pass.

During those eighteen months in Germany, he often wondered if he had made a mistake. No, on the contrary, the facts had confirmed all his theses when the German government made that declaration public—largely drafted by him—expressing its solidarity with the idea of Irish sovereignty and its willingness to help the Irish recover the independence taken by the British Empire. However, later, during the long waits in

Unter den Linden to be received by the authorities in Berlin, the unfulfilled promises, his illnesses, and his failures with the Irish Brigade had begun to cause him to doubt.

He felt his heart pounding strongly, just as every time he recalled those icy days, filled with storms and swirling snow, when, finally, after many efforts, he managed to address the 2,200 Irish prisoners in the Limburg camp. He explained to them carefully, repeating a speech he had rehearsed in his mind for months, that it was not about "switching sides to the enemy," far from it. The Irish Brigade would not be part of the German Army. It would be an independent military body, with its own officers, and it would fight for the independence of Ireland against its colonizer and oppressor, "alongside, but not within," the German Armed Forces. What hurt him the most, a burning acid that relentlessly corroded his spirit, was not that only fifty or so out of 2,200 prisoners had signed up for the Brigade. It was the hostility that his proposal had earned, the shouts and whispers in which he distinctly detected the words "traitor," "yellow," "sold out," "cockroach," with which many prisoners showed their contempt, and, finally, the spitting and attempts of aggression he suffered the third time he tried to speak to them. (He tried, because he could only pronounce the first sentences before being silenced by whistling and insults.) And the humiliation he felt when he was rescued from a potential aggression, perhaps a lynching, by the German soldiers of the escort, who ran him out of the place.

He had been an idealist and a naive person thinking that the Irish prisoners would enlist in that Brigade, which was equipped, dressed—even though the uniform had been designed by Roger Casement himself—, fed and advised by the German Army against which they had just fought, which had gassed them in the trenches of Belgium, that had killed, maimed, and wounded so many of their comrades, *and* that now had them among barbed wire. One had to understand the circumstances, be flexible, remember what those Irish prisoners had suffered *and* lost, *and* not hold a grudge against them. But that brutal clash with a reality he did not expect was very hard for Roger Casement. It affected his body at the same time as his spirit because, immediately, he

was struck by the fevers that kept him in bed for such a long time, nearly terminal.

During those months, the loyalty and solicitous affection of Captain Robert Monteith were a balm without which he likely would not have survived. Without the difficulties and frustrations they encountered everywhere taking a toll—at least visibly—on his conviction that the Irish Brigade conceived by Roger Casement would eventually become a reality and recruit the majority of Irish prisoners, Captain Monteith enthusiastically dedicated himself to leading the training of the approximately fifty volunteers to whom the German Government provided a small camp in Zossen, near Berlin. He even managed to recruit a few more. They all wore the uniform of the Brigade designed by Roger, including Monteith. They lived in tents, conducted marches, drills, and target practice with rifles and pistols, but using blank cartridges. The discipline was strict, and in addition to the exercises, military training, and sports, Monteith insisted that Roger Casement continuously give talks to the brigadiers about the history of Ireland, its culture, its idiosyncrasy, and the prospects that would open up for Eire once it achieved its independence.

What would Captain Robert Monteith have said if he had seen that handful of former Irish prisoners from the Limburg camp—released thanks to a prisoner exchange—march in as witnesses for the prosecution, including none other than Sergeant Daniel Bailey himself, at the trial? All, responding to the questions of the Attorney General, swore that Roger Casement, surrounded by officers of the German Army, had urged them to join the enemy's ranks, dazzling them with the prospect of freedom, a salary, and future farms as bait. And they all corroborated that blatant lie: that the Irish prisoners who succumbed to his pressure and enlisted in the Brigade immediately received better rations, more blankets, and a more flexible leave schedule. Captain Robert Monteith would not have been outraged with them. He would have said, once again, that those compatriots were blind, or rather, blinded by the bad education, ignorance, and confusion in which the Empire kept Eire, placing a veil over their eyes.

about their true condition as an occupied and oppressed people for three centuries. There was no need to despair; everything was changing. And perhaps, as he had done many times in Limburg and in Berlin, he would tell Roger Casement, to uplift his spirits, about the enthusiasm and generosity with which young Irish—farmers, workers, fishermen, artisans, students—had enlisted in the ranks of the Irish Volunteers since this organization was founded, at a large rally in the Dublin Rotunda on November 25, 1913, in response to the militarization of the Ulster unionists, led by sir Edward Carson, who openly threatened not to respect the law if the British Parliament approved Home Rule, Autonomy for Ireland. Captain Robert Monteith, a former officer of the British Army, for whom he had fought in the Boer War, in South Africa, where he was wounded in two battles, was one of the first to enlist in the Volunteers. He was entrusted with the military training of the recruits. Roger, who attended that thrilling rally at the Rotunda and was one of the treasurers of the funds for the purchase of weapons, chosen for this highly trusted position by the leaders of the Irish Volunteers, did not remember having met Monteith at that time. But he claimed to have shaken his hand and told him that he was proud that it was an Irishman who reported to the world the crimes being committed against the natives in the Congo and in the Amazon.

He remembered the long walks he took with Monteith around the Limburg camp or through the streets of Berlin, sometimes in the pale and cold dawns, sometimes at twilight with the first shadows of night, obsessively talking about Ireland. Despite the friendship that developed between them, he never managed to have Monteith treat him with the informality that friends use with each other. The captain always addressed him as his political and military superior, yielding him the right of way on paths, opening doors for him, pulling out chairs, and greeting him, either before or after shaking his hand, clicking their heels and bringing his hand to his cap in a martial manner.

Captain Monteith first heard about the Irish Brigade that Roger Casement was trying to form in Germany from Tom Clarke, the secretive leader of the IRB and the Irish Volunteers,

and he immediately offered to work with him. Monteith was then confined in Limerick by the British Army as punishment for having been discovered giving clandestine military instruction to the Volunteers. Tom Clarke consulted with the other leaders and his proposal was accepted. His journey, which Monteith recounted to Roger in great detail as soon as they met in Germany, encountered as many mishaps as an adventure novel. Accompanied by his wife to disguise the political nature of his trip, Monteith departed from Liverpool to New York in September 1915. There, the Irish nationalist leaders handed him over to the Norwegian Eivind Adler Christensen (recalling this, Roger felt his stomach tighten), who secretly introduced him in Hoboken to a ship that would soon set sail for Christiania, the capital of Norway. Monteith's wife stayed in New York. Christensen had him travel as a stowaway, often changing cabins and spending long hours hidden in the ship's hold, where the Norwegian brought him water and food. The ship was stopped by the Royal Navy in mid-journey. A squad of English sailors invaded and checked the documentation of crew and passengers in search of spies. During the five days the English sailors took to search the ship, Monteith jumped from one hiding place to another—sometimes as uncomfortable as crouching in a closet under heaps of clothing, at other times diving into a tar barrel—without being discovered. Finally, he disembarked clandestinely in Christiania. His crossing of the Swedish and Danish borders to enter Germany was no less novelistic, forcing him to use various disguises, one of them as a woman. When he finally arrived in Berlin, he discovered that the chief he had come to serve, Roger Casement, was ill in Bavaria. Without hesitation, he immediately took the train and upon arriving at the Bavarian hotel where Casement was recovering, tapping his heels and touching his head, he introduced himself with the phrase: "This is the happiest moment of my life, sir Roger."

The only time Casement remembered disagreeing with Captain Robert Monteith was one afternoon at the military camp of Zossen, after a talk by Casement to the members of the Irish Brigade. They were having a cup of tea in the canteen when Roger, for some reason he

could not recall, mentioned Eivind Adler Christensen. The captain's face contorted into a grimace of disgust.

—I see you don't have fond memories of Christensen — he joked—. Do you hold a grudge for making him travel as a stowaway from New York to Norway?

Monteith was not smiling. He had become very serious.

—No, sir —he muttered through gritted teeth—. Not for

that.

—Why, then?

Monteith hesitated, uncomfortable.

—Because I have always believed that the Norwegian is a spy for British intelligence.

Roger recalled that that phrase had hit him like a punch in the stomach.

—Do you have any evidence of such a thing?

—None, sir. Just a pure hunch.

Casement scolded him and ordered him not to make such a conjecture again without evidence. The captain stammered an apology. Now, Roger would have given anything to see Monteith, even for a moment, to apologize for reprimanding him that time: "You were completely right, my good friend. Your intuition was spot on. Eivind is something worse than a spy: a true demon. And I, a fool and naïve for believing in him."

Eivind, one of his major mistakes in this final stage of his life. Anyone who was not that "big child" that he was, as Alice Stopford Green and Herbert Ward had once told him, would have noticed something suspicious about the way that embodiment of Lucifer entered his life. Roger did not. He had believed in the chance encounter, in a twist of fate.

It happened in July 1914, the same day he arrived in New York to promote the Irish Volunteers among the Irish communities of the United States, to gain support and weapons, and to meet with the nationalist leaders of the North American branch of the IRB, known as Clan na Gael, the veteran fighters John Devoy and Joseph McGarrity. He had gone out for a walk around Manhattan, escaping the damp and sweltering hotel room scorched by the New York summer, when he was approached by a young blond man handsome as a Viking god, whose sympathy, charm, and flamboyance immediately seduced him. Eivind was tall,

athletic, with a somewhat feline walk, a deep blue gaze and a smile that was both angelic and rogue. He had not a cent and made this clear to him with a comedic grimace, showing him the linings of his empty pockets. Roger invited him to have a beer and eat something. And he believed everything the Norwegian told him: he was twenty-four years old and had run away from home in Norway at the age of twelve. Traveling as a stowaway, he managed to reach Glasgow. Since then, he had worked as a fireman on Scandinavian and English ships across all the oceans of the world. Now, stranded in New York, he survived as best he could.

And Roger had believed it! In his narrow cot, he curled up, in pain, with another one of those stomach cramps that took his breath away. They struck him at moments of great nervous tension. He held back tears. Every time it happened that he felt pity and shame for himself to the point of filling his eyes with tears, he subsequently felt depressed and disgusted. He had never been a sentimental person prone to displaying his emotions; he always knew how to hide the turmoil that shook his feelings behind a mask of perfect serenity. But his character had changed since he arrived in Berlin accompanied by Eivind Adler Christensen on the last day of October 1914. Had being already ill, broken, and on edge contributed to the change? In the last months in Germany especially, when, despite the injections of enthusiasm Captain Robert Monteith wanted to instill in him, he understood that his project for the Irish Brigade had failed, he began to feel that the German government was suspicious of him (perhaps believing him to be a British spy) and he knew that his denunciation of the alleged conspiracy of the British consul Findlay in Norway to kill him did not have the international repercussions he hoped for. The final blow was discovering that his companions in the IRB and the Irish Volunteers in Ireland had kept their plans for the Easter Rising from him until the last moment. ('They had to take precautions for security reasons,' Robert Monteith reassured him.) Furthermore, they insisted he remain in Germany and forbade him from joining them. ('They care about your health, sir,' Monteith excused them.) No, they were not thinking about his health. They too were wary of him because they knew he was against an armed action if

it did not coincide with a German military offensive. The *and* Monteith took the German submarine in violation of the orders from the nationalist leaders.

But of all his failures, the greatest had been to trust so blindly and stupidly in Eivind/Lucifer. He accompanied him to Philadelphia to visit Joseph McGarrity. And he was by his side in New York at the rally organized by John Quinn, where Roger spoke before an audience filled with members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and also at the parade of more than a thousand Irish Volunteers in Philadelphia on August 2, which Roger inspired amidst thunderous applause.

From the very first moment, he noticed the distrust that Christensen inspired in the nationalist leaders of the United States. But he was so forceful in assuring them that they should trust in Eivind's discretion and loyalty as much as in his own, that the leaders of the IRB/Clan na Gael eventually accepted the presence of the Norwegian in all of Roger's public activities (not in private political meetings) in the United States. And they agreed to allow him to travel with him as his assistant to Berlin.

What was extraordinary was that not even the strange episode in Christiania raised suspicions in Roger. They had just arrived in the Norwegian capital, heading to Germany, when, on the very day of their arrival, Eivind, who had gone out for a walk alone, was—as he recounted—approached by strangers, kidnapped, and forcibly taken to the British consulate at 79 Drammensveien. There, he was interrogated by the consul himself, Mr. Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay. He offered Eivind money to reveal the identity and intentions with which his companion had come to Norway. Eivind swore to Roger that he hadn't disclosed anything *and* that he had been released after promising the consul to find out what they wanted to know about that gentleman, of whom he knew nothing, whom he was merely accompanying as a guide through a city—through a country—that the latter did not know.

And Roger had swallowed that fantastic lie without thinking for a second that he was the victim of an ambush! He had fallen for it like an idiot child!

Was Eivind Adler Christensen already working for the British services back then? Captain Reginald Hall, head of British Naval Intelligence, and Basil Thom-

son, head of the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard, his interrogators since he was brought detained to London—he had lengthy and cordial exchanges with them—, gave him contradictory indications about the Scandinavian. But Roger was under no illusions about it. Now he was sure it was absolutely false that Eivind had been kidnapped on the streets of Christiania and forcibly taken to where the consul with the pompous surname: Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay. The interrogators showed him, undoubtedly to demoralize him—he had realized how fine psychologists both were—, the report from the British consul in the Norwegian capital to his boss at the Foreign Office regarding the untimely arrival at the consulate at 79 Drammensveien of Eivind Adler Christensen, demanding to speak with the consul in person. And how he revealed to him, when the diplomat agreed to meet him, that he was accompanying an Irish nationalist leader traveling to Germany with a false passport under the assumed name of James Landy. He asked for money in exchange for this information, and the consul handed him twenty-five crowns. Eivind offered to continue providing private and secret material about the incognito character as long as the English Government generously rewarded him.

On the other hand, Reginald Hall and Basil Thomson informed Roger that all his movements in Germany—interviews with high-ranking officials, military personnel, and ministers of the Government at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wilhelmstrasse, as well as his meetings with Irish prisoners in Limburg—had been meticulously recorded by British intelligence. Consequently, while Eivind pretended to conspire with Roger, setting a trap for consul Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay, he continued to relay everything he said, did, wrote, and about whom he received and whom he visited during his stay in Germany to the English Government. "I have been a fool and I deserve my fate," he repeated for the umpteenth time.

At that moment, the door of the cell opened. They were bringing him lunch. Was it already noon? Lost in his memories, the morning had passed without him noticing. If only every day could be like this, how wonderful. He barely tasted a few bites of the bland soup and the cabbage stew with pieces of fish. When the guard came to take away the plates, Roger asked for permission

to go clean the bucket of excrement and urine. Once a day, he was allowed to go to the latrine to empty and rinse it out. When he returned to the cell, he lay down again on his cot. The cheerful and beautiful face of the mischievous child, Eivind/Lucifer, came back to his memory and, along with it, the discouragement and pangs of bitterness. He heard him whisper "I love you" in his ear, and it felt as if he was getting tangled up in it and squeezing him. He heard himself moan.

He had traveled extensively, lived through intense experiences, met all kinds of people, and investigated atrocious crimes against primitive peoples and indigenous communities across two continents. And was it possible that he was still left astonished by a personality of such duplicity, unscrupulousness, and vileness as that of the Scandinavian Lucifer? He had lied to him, systematically deceived him while, appearing cheerful, helpful, and affectionate, he accompanied him like a faithful dog, served him, showed concern for his health, went to buy him medicine, called the doctor, and took his temperature. Yet he also extracted as much money as he could from him. Then he concocted trips to Norway under the pretext of visiting his mother or sister, rushing off to the consulate to report on the conspiratorial, political, and military activities of his boss and lover. He also got paid for those informants. And he, who thought he was in control of the plot! Roger had instructed Eivind, as the British wanted to kill him—according to the Norwegian, consul Mansfeldt de Cardonnel Findlay had assured him literally—to go along with it until he obtained evidence of the criminal intentions of British officials against him. Eivind had also communicated this to the consul—for how many crowns or pounds sterling? And for this reason, what Roger thought would be a devastating publicity operation against the British Government—publicly accusing it of orchestrating homicides against its violent opponents while violating the sovereignty of third countries—had no repercussions whatsoever. His public letter to sir Edward Grey, of which he had sent a copy to all the Governments represented in Berlin, did not even receive an acknowledgment from a single embassy.

But the worst—Roger felt that twist in his stomach again—came afterwards, at the end of the long interrogations at Scotland Yard, when he believed that Eivind/Lucifer would not infiltrate these dialogues again. The final blow! The name of Roger Casement was in all the

newspapers across Europe and the world—a decorated British diplomat ennobled by the Crown was going to be tried for treason against the homeland—and the news of his impending trial was announced everywhere. Then, at the British consulate in Philadelphia, Eivind Adler Christensen presented himself proposing, through the consul, to travel to England to testify against Casement, as long as the English Government covered all his travel and accommodation expenses "and received an acceptable remuneration." Roger had no doubt for a second that the report from the British consul in Philadelphia shown to him by Reginald Hall and Basil Thomson was authentic. Fortunately, the ruddy face of the Scandinavian Lucifer never appeared in the witness stand during the four days of the trial at Bailey's Hearing. Because upon seeing him, Roger might not have been able to contain his anger and desire to squeeze his neck.

Was that the face, the mind, the viper-like twist of original sin? In one of his conversations with Edmund D. Morel, when they both questioned how it was possible that people who had received a Christian education, cultured and civilized, could perpetrate and be complicit in those horrifying crimes that they had both documented in the Congo, Roger said: "When historical, sociological, psychological, cultural explanations are exhausted, there still remains a vast field in the darkness to reach the root of human wickedness, *Bulldog*. If you want to understand it, there is only one way: stop reasoning and turn to religion: that is original sin." "That explanation explains nothing, *Tiger*." They discussed for a long time, without reaching any conclusion. Morel asserted: "If the ultimate reason for wickedness is original sin, then there is no solution. If men are made for evil and carry it in their souls, why then struggle to remedy what is unremediable?"

One should not fall into pessimism; the *Bulldog* was right. Not all human beings were Eivind Adler Christensen. There were others, noble, idealistic, good, and generous, like Captain Robert Monteith and Morel himself. Roger felt sad. The *Bulldog* had not signed any of the petitions in his favor. Undoubtedly, he disapproved of his friend (or ex-friend, now, like Herbert Ward?) taking a stance for Germany. Although he was against the

war and campaigned for peace and had been prosecuted for it, without a doubt Morel did not forgive him for his allegiance to the Kaiser. Perhaps he also considered him a traitor. Like Conrad.

Roger sighed. He had lost many admirable and dear friends, like those two. How many more would have turned their backs on him! Yet, despite all this, he had not changed his way of thinking. No, he had not been mistaken. He continued to believe that in this conflict, if Germany won, Ireland would be closer to independence. And further away if victory favored England. He had done what he did, not for Germany, but for Ireland. Couldn't men as clear-headed and intelligent as Ward, Conrad, and Morel understand that?

opiniones de los creadores de su país, el de George Bernard Shaw era el más importante de todos. Sin embargo, la impresión que le causaba el dramaturgo era de rechazo, de incomodidad, como si cualquier postura que tomara hacia él obligara a una aclaración. ¿Qué podía decir? Que su obra era sustancial, que su escritura no solo importaba, sino que estaba llena de verdad y belleza. Todo esto era cierto. Así, Roger anhelaba estar en un lugar donde pudiera caminar libremente por las avenidas de Dublín, sintiendo que la historia de Irlanda lo abrazaba con la calidez de sus cielos grises. La obra de Shaw, sorprendentemente humorística y trágica, siempre le pareció una paradoja de la identidad irlandesa. Pero incluso así, la admiración que sentía por ese hombre nunca podía ser igualada por la devoción que tenía por Yeats y su amor por la tierra irlandesa, un amor que se expresaba de forma visceral en cada verso.

great intellectual figures of London, despite their skepticism and their chronicles against nationalism, no one had expressed themselves more explicitly and bravely in defense of Roger Casement than the playwright. He advised a line of defense to his lawyer which, unfortunately, the poor Serjeant A. M. Sullivan, that greedy nullity, did not accept, and after the sentence, George Bernard Shaw wrote articles and signed manifestos in favor of commuting the sentence. It was not essential to be a patriot and nationalist to be generous and brave.

memory, was not present to witness such a disgraceful performance. The trial lasted for four days, during which the prosecution painted Roger as a traitor who conspired against the king. Many witnesses testified against him, detailing his trips to Germany and his involvement in the attempt to secure arms for the Irish rebels. Roger, for his part, remained silent, refusing to take the stand and speak on his own behalf. Despite the overwhelming evidence against him, he maintained his dignity throughout the proceedings. The trial concluded with the judges retiring to deliberate. After what felt like an eternity, they returned with their verdict: guilty of high treason. Roger was sentenced to death, and the news of his conviction sent shockwaves throughout Ireland and beyond.

final exposition, he could assume his own defense, declaring himself a rebel, defending the Easter Rising, asking for the independence of his homeland and saying that he was proud to have served it. That text made him proud and, he thought, would justify him before future generations.

What time was it? He had not been able to get used to not knowing the hour in which he was. What thick walls there were in Pentonville Prison; for all he strained his ears, he never managed to hear the sounds of the street: bells, engines, shouts, voices, whistles. Did he truly hear the bustling market of Islington or was he imagining it? He no longer knew. Nothing. A strange, sepulchral silence in this moment, which seemed to suspend time, life. The only noises that filtered into his cell came from inside the prison: muffled footsteps in the adjoining corridor, metal doors opening and closing, the hoarse voice of the *sheriff* giving orders to a guard. Now, not even a sound from within Pentonville Prison reached him. The silence was distressing, preventing him from thinking. He tried to resume reading the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, but he could not concentrate and placed the book back on the floor. He attempted to pray, but the prayer felt so mechanical that he interrupted it. He remained still for a long time, tense, unsettled, his mind blank and his gaze fixed on a point on the ceiling that seemed damp, as if it were receiving leaks, until he fell asleep.

He had a peaceful dream that took him to the Amazon rainforests on a bright, sunny morning. The breeze flowing over the ship's bridge eased the harshness of the heat. There were no mosquitoes, and he felt good, free from the stinging in his eyes that had tormented him so much in recent times, an infection that seemed invulnerable to all the eye drops and rinses prescribed by the ophthalmologists, without the muscle pain from arthritis or the fiery sensation from hemorrhoids that sometimes felt like a burning iron in his gut, nor the swelling of his feet. He did not suffer from any of those ailments, illnesses, or complaints, the aftereffects of his twenty years in Africa. He felt young again and was eager to do one of those crazy things he had done so many times in Africa: strip off and dive from the ship's railing into those waters.

greenish with grasses and foam spots. He would feel the impact of the warm, thick water on his whole body, a good, purifying sensation as he pushed himself to the surface, emerged, and began to swim, gliding with the ease and elegance of a river dolphin alongside the ship. From the deck, the captain and some passengers would make exaggerated gestures for him to come back on board, warning him not to risk drowning or being devoured by some yacumama, those river snakes that sometimes reached ten meters in length and could swallow a whole man.

Was it near Manaus? Near Tabatinga? Near the Putumayo? Near Iquitos? Was the river going upstream or downstream? What did it matter. The important thing was that he felt better than he had remembered in a long time, and as the boat glided slowly over that greenish surface, the hum of the engine cradling his thoughts, Roger reviewed once again what his future would be, now that he had finally renounced diplomacy and regained total freedom. He would return his London apartment on Ebury Street and go to Ireland. He would divide his time between Dublin and Ulster. He would not commit his whole life to politics. He would set aside an hour a day, one day a week, one week a month for study. He would resume learning Irish and one day he would surprise Alice by speaking to her in fluent Gaelic. And the hours, days, weeks dedicated to politics would focus on the great politics, the one that related to the priority and central design—the independence of Ireland and the fight against colonialism—and he would avoid wasting his time on the intrigues, rivalries, emulations of the political hacks eager to gain small bits of power, in the party, in the cell, in the brigade, even if it meant forgetting and even sabotaging the primary task. He would travel a lot through Ireland, long excursions through the *glens* of Antrim, Donegal, through Ulster, through Galway, through remote and isolated places like the region of Connemara and Tory Island where the fishermen did not speak English and only spoke Gaelic, and he would get along well with those peasants, artisans, fishermen who, with their stoicism, their hardworking nature, their patience, had resisted the overwhelming presence of the colonizer, preserving their language, their customs, their beliefs. He would listen to them, learn from them, and write essays and poems about the silent and heroic feat of so many centuries of these people.

humble thanks to which Ireland had not disappeared and was still a nation.

A metallic noise pulled him out of that pleasant dream. He opened his eyes. The jailer had entered and handed him a bowl with semolina soup and a piece of bread, which was his dinner every night. He was about to ask him the time, but he held back because he knew he wouldn't answer. He tore the bread into small pieces, added it to the soup, and took it in spaced-out spoonfuls. Another day had passed, and maybe tomorrow would be the decisive one.

On the eve of departing in the *Liberal* towards Putumayo, Roger Casement decided to speak frankly with Mr. Stirs. In the thirteen days he had spent in Iquitos, he had had many conversations with the English consul, but he hadn't dared to touch on the subject. He knew that his mission had earned him many enemies, not only in Iquitos but throughout the Amazon region; it was absurd that he would also alienate a colleague who might be of great help in the coming days and weeks if he found himself in serious trouble with the rubber dealers. Better not to mention that delicate issue.

And yet, that night, while he and the consul were having their usual port in Mr. Stirs' small sitting room, listening to the rain pounding on the metal roof and the torrents of water hitting the windows and the terrace railing, Roger abandoned caution.

—What do you think of Father Ricardo Urrutia, Mr. Stirs?

—The superior of the Augustinians? I have dealt with him little. In general, good. You have seen him a lot these days, haven't you?

Did the consul sense they were stepping into quicksand? There was a restless glint in his bulging eyes. His bald head shone under the reflections of the oil lamp that crackled on the small table in the center of the room. The fan in his right hand had stopped moving.

—Well, Father Urrutia has only been here for a year and hasn't left Iquitos —Casement said—. So, regarding what is happening in the rubber plantations of Putu-May, he doesn't know much. Instead, he has spoken to me a lot about another human drama in the city.

The consul savored a sip of port. He resumed fanning himself, and Roger had the feeling that his round face had reddened somewhat. Outside, the storm roared with some

long, dull thunder, and occasionally a lightning bolt would briefly illuminate the darkness of the forest.

—The case of the girls and boys stolen from the tribes —Roger continued—. Brought here and sold for twenty or thirty soles to families.

Mr. Stirs remained silent, watching him. He was now fanning himself furiously.

—According to Father Urrutia, almost all the servants of Iquitos were stolen and sold —Casement added. And, looking the consul squarely in the eyes—: Is that so?

Mr. Stirs let out a long sigh and shifted in his rocking chair, not concealing a look of disgust. His face seemed to say: «You have no idea how glad I am that you leave for Putumayo tomorrow. Hopefully, we won't have to see each other again, Mr. Casement.»

—Did those things not happen in the Congo? —he replied, evasively.

—They did happen, yes, although not in the widespread manner seen here. Allow me an impertinence. The four servants you have, did you hire them or buy them?

—I inherited them —said the British consul dryly—. They were part of the household when my predecessor, Consul Cazes, left for England. It cannot be said that I hired them because, here in Iquitos, that is not customary. The four of them are illiterate and could not read or sign a contract. They sleep and eat at my home, I clothe them, and I also give them tips, something that, I assure you, is not common in these lands. The four of them are free to leave whenever they wish. Talk to them and ask them if they would like to look for work elsewhere. You will see their reaction, Mr. Casement.

He nodded and took a sip of his port wine glass.

—I did not mean to offend you —he apologized—. I am trying to understand in what country I am, the values and customs of Iquitos. I have no intention of you seeing me as an inquisitor.

The consul's expression was now hostile. He was fanning himself slowly, and his gaze held apprehension in addition to hatred.

—Not as an inquisitor, but as a justiciero —he corrected, making another grimace of displeasure—. Or, if you prefer, a hero. I already told you that I don't like heroes. Don't take my frankness badly. Besides, don't be

under any illusions. You are not going to change what happens here, Mr. Casement. And neither is Father Urrutia. In a certain sense, what happens to these children is a stroke of luck. To be servants, I mean. It would be a thousand times worse for them to grow up in the tribes, eating lice, dying of tertians and any plague before reaching ten years, or working like animals in the rubber plantations. They live better here. I know that this pragmatism of mine will shock you.

Roger Casement said nothing. He already knew what he wanted to know. And, he also knew that from now on, the British consul in Iquitos would probably be another enemy he needed to watch out for.

—I have come here to serve my country in a consular task —Mr. Stirs added, looking at the fiber mat on the floor—. I fulfill it diligently, I assure you. I know the British citizens, who are not many, I defend them and serve them in everything they need. I do everything I can to encourage trade between the Amazon and the British Empire. I keep my Government informed about the trade movement, the ships that come and go, and the border incidents. Combatting slavery or the abuses committed by the mixed-race and white people of Peru against the Amazon Indians is not among my obligations.

—I regret having offended you, Mr. Stirs. Let's not speak of this matter anymore.

Roger stood up, wished good night to the homeowner, and retired to his room. The storm had subsided, but it was still raining. The terrace adjacent to the bedroom was soaked. There was a dense smell of plants and damp earth. The night was dark, and the sound of the insects was intense, as if they were not just in the forest but inside the room. Along with the storm, another rain had fallen: that of the dark beetles known as vinchucas. Tomorrow, their corpses would carpet the terrace and, if he stepped on them, they would crunch like nuts and stain the ground with dark blood. He undressed, put on his pajamas, and got into bed under the mosquito net.

It had been imprudent, of course. To offend the consul, a poor man, perhaps a good man, who only hoped to reach retirement without getting into trouble, return to England, and bury himself tending to his garden in the *cottage* in Surrey that he would have paid for little by little with his savings. That was what he should have done, and then, he would have had

fewer illnesses in his body and fewer anxieties in his soul.

He recalled his violent discussion on the *Huayna*, the boat on which he traveled from Tabatinga, the border between Peru and Brazil, to Iquitos, with the rubber dealer Víctor Israel, a Jew from Malta who had settled many years ago in the Amazon and with whom he had had long and extremely entertaining dialogues on the boat's terrace. Víctor Israel dressed in a flamboyant manner, always seeming to be in disguise, spoke impeccable English, and charmingly recounted his adventurous life that seemed straight out of a picaresque novel, while they played poker, sipping little glasses of cognac, which the rubber dealer loved. He had the horrible habit of shooting at the pink herons that flew over the boat with a large old-fashioned pistol, but fortunately, he rarely hit anything. Until one fine day, Roger couldn't recall what it was about, Víctor Israel had made a plea in favor of Julio C. Arana. The man was taking the Amazon out of savagery and integrating it into the modern world. He defended the "raids," thanks to which, he said, there were still arms available to collect rubber. Because the great problem of the jungle was the lack of workers to gather this precious substance that the Maker had wanted to endow this region with and bless the Peruvians. This "manna from heaven" was being wasted due to the laziness *and* stupidity of the savages who refused to work as latex collectors *and* forced the rubber dealers to go to the tribes to bring them by force. This meant a great loss of time and money for the companies.

—Well, that is one way to see things —Roger Casement interrupted him, with deliberation—. There is also another.

Victor Israel was a tall, very thin man, with white strands in his long, straight hair that reached down to his shoulders. He had several days' worth of stubble on his large bony face and small, triangular dark eyes, somewhat Mephistophelean, that were fixed on Roger Casement, bewildered. He wore a red vest and, on top of that, suspenders, as well as a fancy scarf over his shoulders.

—What do you mean?

—I mean from the perspective of those you call savages —explained Casement, in a trivial tone, as if he were talking about the weather or mosquitoes—. Put yourself in their place for a

moment. They are there, in their villages, where they have lived for years or centuries. One fine day, some white gentlemen or mixed-race individuals arrive with shotguns and revolvers and demand that they abandon their families, their crops, their homes, to go harvest rubber dozens or hundreds of kilometers away, for the benefit of strangers, whose only claim is the power they possess. Would you willingly go to collect the famous latex, Mr. Víctor?

—I am not a savage who lives naked, worships the yacumama, and drowns his children in the river if they are born with a cleft lip —replied the rubber dealer, with a sardonic laugh that highlighted his disgust—. Do you place the cannibals of the Amazon on the same level as the pioneers, entrepreneurs, and merchants who work under heroic conditions and risk our lives to turn these forests into civilized land?

—Perhaps you and I have a different concept of what civilization is, my friend —said Roger Casement, always with that tone of bonhomie that seemed to irritate Victor Israel considerably.

At the same poker table were the botanist Walter Folk and Henry Fielgald, while the other members of the Commission had laid down in their hammocks to rest. It was a serene, warm night, and a full moon illuminated the waters of the Amazon with a silvery glow.

—I would like to know what your idea of civilization is —said Victor Israel. His eyes and voice were sparkling. His irritation was so great that Roger wondered if the rubber dealer would suddenly pull out the ancient revolver he carried in his holster and shoot him.

—It could be summarized by saying that it's about a society where private property and individual freedom are respected —he explained, very calmly, his senses fully alert in case Victor Israel tried to attack him—. For example, British laws prohibit settlers from occupying the lands of Indigenous people in the colonies. They also prohibit, under penalty of jail, using force against natives who refuse to work in the mines or fields. You don't think that civilization is that. Or am I mistaken?

The thin chest of Victor Israel rose and fell, shaking the strange blouse with puffed sleeves that he wore

buttoned up to the neck and the red vest. He had both thumbs tucked into the straps, and his triangular little eyes were bloodshot as if they were bleeding. His open mouth revealed a row of uneven teeth stained with nicotine.

—According to that criteria —he asserted, mocking and biting—, Peruvians would have to let the Amazon remain in the Stone Age for ages to come. To avoid offending the pagans or occupying those lands with which they don't know what to do because they are lazy and don't want to work. Wasting a wealth that could raise the standard of living for Peruvians *and* make Peru a modern country. Is that what the British Crown proposes for this country, Mr. Casement?

—The Amazon is a great repository of wealth, without a doubt —Casement nodded, unflustered—. It is only fair that Peru takes advantage of it. But without abusing the natives, without hunting them like animals *and* without forced labor. Rather, incorporating them into civilization through schools, hospitals, and churches.

Victor Israel burst out laughing, shaking like a spring-loaded toy.

—In what world do you live, Mr. Consul! —he exclaimed, raising his long, skeletal-fingered hands theatrically—. It's clear you've never seen a cannibal in your life. Do you know how many Christians have been eaten by those here? How many whites *and* mestizos have been killed with their spears *and* poisoned darts? How many have had their heads taken as the shapras do? We will talk more once you have a bit more experience of barbarism.

—I lived in Africa *and* near twenty years and I know something about those things, Mr. Israel —Casement assured him—. By the way, I met many whites there who thought like you.

To prevent the discussion from becoming even more bitter, Walter Folk and Henry Fielgald diverted the conversation to less contentious topics. That night, in his insomnia, after ten days in Iquitos interviewing people from all walks of life, taking notes of dozens of opinions collected here and there from authorities, judges, soldiers, restaurant owners, fishermen, pimps, drifters, prostitutes, and waiters from brothels and bars, Roger Casement said to himself that the immense

majority of whites and mixed-race people in Iquitos, both Peruvian and foreign, thought like Víctor Israel. To them, the Amazonian indigenous people were not, strictly speaking, human beings, but rather an inferior and contemptible form of existence, closer to animals than to the civilized. Therefore, it was legitimate to exploit them, whip them, abduct them, take them to the rubber plantations, or, if they resisted, to kill them like a dog that contracts rabies. It was such a widespread view of the indigenous that, as Father Ricardo Urrutia said, no one was surprised that the domestic workers in Iquitos were girls and boys who had been stolen and sold to the families from Loreto for the equivalent of one or two pounds sterling. The anguish forced him to open his mouth and take a deep breath until the air reached his lungs. If he had seen and known these things without leaving this city, what would he not see in Putumayo?

The members of the Commission departed from Iquitos on September 14, 1910, in the late morning. Roger had contracted Frederick Bishop, one of the Barbadians he interviewed, as an interpreter. Bishop spoke Spanish and claimed he could understand and make himself understood in the two most spoken indigenous languages in the rubber plantations: bora and huitoto. The *Liberal*, the largest of the fifteen ships in the Peruvian Amazon Company fleet, was well-maintained. It had small cabins where travelers could accommodate themselves two by two. There were hammocks in the bow and at the rear for those who preferred to sleep outdoors. Bishop feared returning to Putumayo and requested a written assurance from Roger Casement that the Commission would protect him during the journey and that he would later be repatriated to Barbados by the British Government.

The journey from Iquitos to La Chorrera, the capital of the vast territory between the Napo and Caquetá rivers where the Peruvian Amazon Company of Julio C. Arana operated, lasted eight days of heat, clouds of mosquitoes, boredom, and monotony of landscape and noises. The boat descended down the Amazon, whose width starting from Iquitos grew until its shores became invisible, crossed the border into Brazil at Tabatinga, and continued to descend down the Yavarí, before re-entering Peru via the Igaraparaná. In this stretch, the shores drew closer, and sometimes the vines and branches of the towering trees hovered over the deck of the vessel. Flocks of parrots were heard and seen zigzagging.

and screaming among the trees, or leisurely pink herons sunbathing on an islet and balancing on one leg, turtle shells whose brown color stood out from somewhat paler waters, and sometimes the bristled back of a caiman dozing in the mud of the shore, which was shot at with shotgun blasts or revolver shots from the boat.

Roger Casement spent much of the journey organizing his notes and notebooks from Iquitos and drafting a work plan for the months he would spend in the domains of Julio C. Arana. According to the instructions from the Foreign Office, he was to interview only the Barbadians working at the stations because they were British citizens, and leave the Peruvian and other national employees alone to avoid offending the Government of Peru. However, he did not intend to respect those limits. His investigation would be one-eyed, handicapped, and crippled if he did not also gather information from the station chiefs, their "boys" or "rationales" —Castilianized indigenous people in charge of overseeing the work and administering punishments— and from the indigenous people themselves. Only in this way would he have a complete view of how the Company of Julio C. Arana violated laws and ethics in its relations with the natives.

In Iquitos, Pablo Zumaeta warned the members of the Commission that, under instructions from Arana, the Company had sent one of its main chiefs, Mr. Juan Tizón, ahead to Putumayo to receive them and facilitate their movements and work. The commissioners assumed that the true reason for Tizón's trip to Putumayo was to conceal the traces of the abuses and present them with a polished image of reality.

They arrived at La Chorrera at noon on September 22, 1910. The name of the place was due to the torrents and waterfalls caused by a sudden narrowing of the riverbed, a noisy and magnificent spectacle of foam, noise, wet rocks, and whirlpools that broke the monotony with which the Igaraparaná, the tributary by whose banks the headquarters of the Peruvian Amazon Company was located, flowed. To reach the offices and residences of La Chorrera from the dock, one had to climb a steep slope of mud and underbrush. The travelers' boots sank into the muck, and they sometimes had to lean on the carriers to avoid falling.

Indigenous people who were carrying the luggage. While greeting those who had come to welcome them, Roger, with a slight shudder, noticed that one in every three or four semi-nude Indigenous people carrying the bundles or looking at them curiously from the shore, slapping their arms with open hands to ward off mosquitoes, had on their backs, buttocks, and thighs scars that could only be from whippings. The Congo, yes, the Congo everywhere.

Juan Tizón was a tall man, dressed in white, with aristocratic manners, very courteous, and spoke enough English to communicate with him. He was around fifty and it was evident from his clean-shaven face, his trimmed mustache, his delicate hands, and his outfit that he did not belong here in the middle of the jungle; he was a man of office, salons, and the city. He welcomed them in English and Spanish and introduced his companion, whose mere name inspired revulsion in Roger: Víctor Macedo, chief of La Chorrera. At least this one had not fled. The articles by Saldaña Roca and Hardenburg in the magazine *Truth* from London designated him as one of Arana's most bloodthirsty lieutenants in Putumayo.

As they climbed the slope, he observed him. He was a man of indeterminate age, strong-built, shorter than tall, a light-skinned cholo but with somewhat Oriental features of an indigenous woman, a flattened nose, and very wide lips always parted to reveal two or three gold teeth, the hard expression of someone hardened by the elements. Unlike the newcomers, he ascended the steep incline with ease. He had a somewhat oblique gaze, as if looking sideways to avoid the sunlight's glare or because he feared facing people. Tizón was unarmed, but Víctor Macedo displayed a revolver in the belt of his pants.

In the clearing, very large, there were wooden structures on stilts—thick tree trunks or cement columns—with railings on the second floor, roofs made of corrugated metal for the larger ones or, for the smaller ones, woven palm leaves. Tizón was explaining to them while pointing out—"There are the offices," "Those are rubber depots," "You all will stay in this house"—but Roger could barely hear him. He was observing the groups of indigenous people, semi or totally naked, who looked at them with indifference or

avoided looking at them: frail men, women, and boys, some with paint on their faces and chests, with legs as thin as reeds, pale, yellowish skin, and sometimes with incisions and ornaments in their lips and ears that reminded him of the African natives. But there were no black people here. The few mulatto and dark-skinned individuals he spotted were wearing pants and boots and were undoubtedly part of the contingent from Barbados. He counted four. He recognized the "boys" or "rational ones" immediately, as, although they were Indians and barefoot, they had cut their hair, styled it like the "Christians," wore pants and shirts, and carried sticks and whips hanging from their waists.

While the other members of the Commission had to share rooms two by two, Roger Casement had the privilege of having one all to himself. It was a small room, with a hammock instead of a bed and a piece of furniture that could serve both as a trunk and a desk. On a small table, there was a washbasin, a water pitcher, and a mirror. They explained to him that, on the first floor, near the entrance, there was a septic tank and a shower. As soon as he settled in and put away his things, before sitting down to lunch, Roger told Juan Tizón that he wanted to start interviewing all the Barbadians in La Chorrera that very afternoon.

By then, that rancid and penetrating odor, oily and reminiscent of rotting plants and leaves, had already gotten into his nose. It permeated every corner of La Chorrera and would accompany him tomorrow, afternoon, and night for the three months his journey to Putumayo lasted, a smell to which he never grew accustomed, that made him vomit and caused him retching, a pestilence that seemed to come from the air, the earth, objects, and human beings and that, from then on, would become for Roger Casement the symbol of the evil and suffering exacerbated to dizzying extremes by the rubber extracted from the trees of the Amazon. "It's curious," he remarked to Juan Tizón on the day of his arrival. "In the Congo, I was often in rubber plantations and depots. But I don't remember the Congolese latex emitting such a strong and unpleasant odor." "They are different varieties," Tizón explained. "This one smells more and is also more resilient than the African. In the bales sent to Europe, talcum powder is added to reduce the pestilence."

Although the number of Barbadians throughout the Putumayo region was 196, there were only six in La Chorrera. Two of them immediately refused to speak with Roger, even though he, through Bishop, assured them that their testimony would be private, that they would not be prosecuted for what they said, and that he would personally arrange for their transport to Barbados if they did not want to continue working for the Arana Company.

The four who agreed to testify had been in Putumayo for nearly seven years and had worked for the Peruvian Amazon Company at various stations as foremen, an intermediate position between the bosses and the "boys" or "rational ones." The first one he spoke to, Donal Francis, a tall and strong black man who limped and had a clouded eye, was so nervous and appeared so distrustful that Roger immediately suspected he wouldn't get much from him. He replied with monosyllables and denied all the accusations. According to him, in La Chorrera, bosses, employees, and "even savages" got along very well. There were never any problems and certainly no violence. He had been well instructed on what to say and do in front of the Commission.

Roger sweated profusely. He drank water in small sips. Were the other interviews with the Barbadians from Putumayo as useless as this one? They were not. Philip Bertie Lawrence, Seaford Greenwich, and Stanley Sealy, especially the latter, after overcoming an initial reluctance and receiving Roger's promise, on behalf of the British Government, that they would be repatriated to Barbados, eagerly began to speak, sharing everything and sometimes frantically incriminating themselves, as if impatient to relieve their consciences. Stanley Sealy illustrated his testimony with such details and examples that, despite his long experience with human atrocities, Casement occasionally experienced dizziness and a distress that barely allowed him to breathe. By the time the Bajan finished speaking, night had fallen. The buzzing of nocturnal insects seemed deafening, as if thousands of them were swirling around. They were sitting on a wooden bench on the terrace that overlooked Roger's bedroom. Between the two of them, they had smoked a pack of cigarettes. In the growing darkness, Roger could no longer see the features of the small mulatto that was Stanley Sealy, only the outline of his head.

and his muscular arms. He had been in La Chorrera for a short time. He had worked for two years at the Abyssinia station, as the right-hand man of chiefs Abelardo Agüero and Augusto Jiménez, *and*, before that, in Matanzas, with Armando Normand. They remained silent. Roger felt the mosquito bites on his face, neck, and arms, but he had no energy to swat them away.

Suddenly he realized that Sealy was crying. He had brought his hands to his face and was sobbing quietly, with breaths that swelled his chest. Roger saw the glimmer of tears in his eyes.

—Do you believe in God? —he asked—. Are you a religious person?

—I was as a child, I think —the mulatto whimpered, with a broken voice—. My godmother used to take me to church on Sundays, back in St. Patrick, the town where I was born. Now, I don't know.

—I ask you because maybe talking to God will help you. I'm not saying to pray, but to talk to him. Try it. With the same openness with which you have spoken to me. Tell him what you feel, why you are crying. He can help you more than I can, in any case. I don't know how to do it. I feel as messed up as you do, Stanley.

Like Philip Bertie Lawrence and Seaford Greenwich, Stanley Sealy was willing to repeat his testimony before the members of the Commission and even in front of Mr. Juan Tizón, as long as he remained with Casement and traveled with him to Iquitos and then to Barbados.

Roger entered his room, lit the oil lamps, took off his shirt, and washed his chest, armpits, and face with water from the basin. He would have liked to take a shower, but he would have had to go downstairs and do it outdoors, and he knew that his body would be devoured by mosquitoes that multiplied in number and ferocity at night.

He went down to dinner on the ground floor, in a dining room also illuminated by oil lamps. Juan Tizón and his travel companions were drinking warm, watered-down whiskey. They were conversing while three or four indigenous servants, semi-naked, brought fried and baked fish, boiled cassava, sweet potatoes, and corn flour with which they sprinkled the food just as the Brazilians did with the *farinha*. Others waved palm fronds to shoo away the flies.

—How did it go with the Barbadians? —Juan Tizón asked, handing him a glass of whiskey.

—Better than I expected, Mr. Tizón. I was afraid they would be reluctant to speak. But, on the contrary. Three of them have spoken to me with complete frankness.

—I hope they share with me the complaints they receive —Tizón said, half jokingly, half seriously—. The Company wants to correct whatever is necessary and improve. That has always been Mr. Arana's policy. Well, I imagine you must be hungry. To the table, gentlemen!

They sat down and began to serve themselves from the various dishes. The members of the Commission had spent the afternoon touring the facilities of La Chorrera and, with Bishop's help, talking to the administration and warehouse employees. Everyone appeared tired and with little desire to speak. Had their experiences on this first day been as depressing as his?

Juan Tizón offered them wine, but, as he warned them that with the transportation and climate the French wine arrived here shaken and sometimes sour, everyone preferred to stick with whiskey.

During lunch, Roger commented, glancing at the Indians who were serving:

—I have seen that many Indian men and women from La Chorrera have scars on their backs, buttocks, and thighs. That girl, for example. How many whippings do they normally receive when they are punished?

There was a general silence, in which the crackling of the oil lamps and the humming of the insects increased. Everyone looked at Juan Tizón very seriously.

—Most of the time, those scars are made by themselves —this one stated, uncomfortable—. In their tribes, they have quite barbaric initiation rites, you know, like making holes in their faces, lips, ears, and noses to insert rings, teeth, and all kinds of trinkets. I do not deny that some may have been made by foremen who did not respect the Company's regulations. Our regulations categorically prohibit physical punishments.

—My question was not about that, Mr. Tizón —Casement apologized—. But rather that, although so many ci-

tattoos are seen, I have not seen any Indian with the Company's mark on their body.

—I don't know what that means —Tizón replied, lowering the fork.

—The Barbadians have explained to me that many indigenous people are marked with the initials of the Company: CA, that is, Casa Arana. Like cows, horses, and pigs. So they do not escape or get stolen by Colombian rubber workers. They themselves have marked many. Sometimes with fire and sometimes with a knife. But I haven't seen anyone with those marks yet. What has happened to them, sir?

Juan Tizón lost his composure and his elegant manners all at once. He had become flushed and was trembling with indignation.

—I won't allow you to speak to me in that tone —he exclaimed, mixing English with Spanish—. I am here to facilitate your work, not to receive your sarcasm.

Roger Casement nodded, without becoming agitated.

—I apologize, I did not mean to offend you—he said, calmly—. It happens that, although I witnessed unspeakable cruel- ties in the Congo, I had not yet seen the marking of human beings with fire or knife. I am sure that you are not responsible for this atrocity.

—Of course I am not responsible for any atrocity!— Tizón shouted again, gesticulating. His eyes were rolling in their sockets, out of control—. If they are committed, it is not the Company's fault. Don't you see what kind of place this is, Mr. Casement? There is no authority here, nor police, nor judges, or anyone. Those who work here, as bosses, foremen, and assistants, are not educated people, but in many cases, illiterates, adventurers, rough men, hardened by the jungle. Sometimes they commit abuses that horrify a civilized person. I know this very well. We do what we can, believe me. Mr. Arana agrees with you. All who have committed abuses will be fired. I am not an accomplice to any injustice, Mr. Casement. I have a respectable name, a family that means a lot in this country, and I am a catholic who fulfills his religion.

Roger thought that Juan Tizón probably believed in what he said. A good man who, in Iquitos, Manaus, Lima, or London, neither knew nor wanted to know what was happening here.

He must curse the hour when Julio C. Arana decided to send him to this corner of the world to fulfill this unpleasant task and to endure a thousand discomforts and bad moments.

—We must work together, collaborate —repeated Tizón, somewhat calmer, gesturing with his hands—. What is wrong will be corrected. Employees who have committed atrocities will be sanctioned. My word of honor! All I ask is that you see me as a friend, someone who is on your side.

Shortly after, Juan Tizón said he was feeling somewhat unwell and preferred to leave. He wished them good night and departed.

Only the members of the Commission remained around the table.

—Marked like animals? —murmured the botanist Walter Folk, with a skeptical air—. Could that be true?

—Three of the four Barbadians I interrogated today assured me of it —nodded Casement—. Stanley Sealy claims to have done it himself at the station in Abyssinia, by order of his chief, Abelardo Agüero. But even the markings don't seem to me to be the worst. I have heard things even more terrible this afternoon.

They continued conversing, without tasting any food, until the two bottles of whiskey on the table were finished. The commissioners were struck by the scars on the backs of the Indigenous people and by the stocks or torture rack they had discovered in one of the warehouses in La Chorrera where the rubber was stored. In front of Mr. Tizón, who had endured a very difficult time, Bishop explained how that wooden structure and ropes worked, in which the indigenous person was introduced and compressed in a squatting position. They could not move their arms or legs. They were tormented by tightening the wooden bars or suspending them in the air. Bishop clarified that the stocks were always located in the center of the clearing of all the stations. They asked one of the "rational" workers at the warehouse when the device had been brought to that location. The "boy" explained to them that it was only the day before their arrival.

They decided that the Commission would hear Philip Bertie Lawrence, Seaford Greenwich, and Stanley Sealy the following day. Seymour Bell suggested that Juan Tizón be present.

There were differing opinions, especially from Walter Folk, who feared that, in front of the high chief, the Barbadians would retract what was said.

That night, Roger Casement couldn't close his eyes. He spent time taking notes on his conversations with the Barbadians until the lamp went out because the oil had run out. He lay down in his hammock and remained awake, sleeping for moments and waking up from time to time with aching bones and muscles, unable to shake off the unease that overwhelmed him.

And the Peruvian Amazon Company was a British company! Its Board included respected figures from the business world and the City such as sir John Lister-Kaye, the Baron de Souza-Deiro, John Russell Gubbins, and Henry M. Read. What would those partners of Julio C. Arana say when they read, in the report he would present to the Government, that the company they had legitimized with their name and money practiced slavery, obtaining rubber collectors and servants through "raids" by armed ruffians who captured indigenous men, women, and children and took them to the rubber plantations where they were brutally exploited, hanging them in stocks, branding them with fire and knife, and whipping them until they bled if they didn't bring in the minimum quota of thirty kilos of rubber every three months. Roger had been in the offices of the Peruvian Amazon Company in Salisbury House, E.C., in the financial center of London. A spectacular location, with a Gainsborough landscape on the walls, uniformed secretaries, carpeted offices, leather sofas for visitors, and a swarm of *clerks*, with their striped trousers, black frock coats, and white hard-collared shirts with cravats, keeping accounts, sending and receiving telegrams, and selling and collecting the fragrant talc rubber remittances in all the industrial cities of Europe. And, at the other end of the world, in Putumayo, huitotos, ocaimas, muinanes, nonuyas, andoques, rezígaros, and boras were slowly becoming extinct without anyone lifting a finger to change that situation.

«Why haven't these indigenous people tried to rebel?», the botanist Walter Folie had asked during dinner. And he added: «It's true they don't have firearms. But they are many; they could rise up and, even if some died,

dominate their executioners by their number.» Roger replied that it wasn't that simple. They didn't rebel for the same reasons the Congolese had not done so in Africa. It only occurred exceptionally, in localized and sporadic cases, acts of suicide by an individual or a small group. Because, when the system of exploitation was so extreme, it destroyed spirits before bodies. The violence they were victims of annihilated the will to resist, the instinct to survive, turning the indigenous people into automatons paralyzed by confusion and terror. Many didn't understand what was happening to them as a consequence of the malice of specific individuals, but rather as a mythical cataclysm, a curse from the gods, a divine punishment from which they had no escape.

Although here, in Putumayo, Roger discovered in the documents about the Amazon he consulted that a few years ago there was an attempt at rebellion at the Abyssinia station, where the boras lived. It was a topic that no one wanted to discuss. All the Barbadians had avoided it. The young bora chief of the area, named Katenere, one night, supported by a small group from his tribe, stole the rifles from the leaders and "rational" people, killed Bartolomé Zumaeta (a relative of Pablo Zumaeta), who in a drunkenness had violated his wife, and disappeared into the jungle. The Company put a price on his head. Several expeditions went in search of him. For almost two years, they could not catch him. Finally, a group of hunters, guided by a treacherous Indian, surrounded the hut where Katenere was hiding with his wife. The chief managed to escape, but the woman was captured. Chief Vásquez himself raped her in public and put her in the stocks without water or food. He kept her like that for several days. From time to time, he had her whipped. Finally, one night, the chief appeared. He had undoubtedly been spying on the tortures of his wife from the thicket. He crossed the clearing, threw down the carbine he was carrying, and went to kneel submissively by the stocks where his wife was agonizing or already dead. Vásquez shouted orders to the "rational" people not to shoot him. He himself gouged out Katenere's eyes with a wire. Then he had him burned alive, along with the woman, before the surrounding indigenous people who had formed a circle. Had things happened this way? The history had a romantic ending that he thought

Roger, he had probably been altered to appeal to the widespread taste for gruesomeness in these warm lands. But, at least, there remained the symbol and the example: a native had rebelled, punished a torturer, and died as a hero.

As soon as the light of dawn emerged, he left the house where he was staying and walked down the slope toward the river. He bathed naked after finding a small pool where he could withstand the current. The cold water felt like a massage. When he dressed, he felt fresh and rejuvenated. On his return to La Chorrera, he took a detour to explore the area where the huitoto huts were located. The cabins, scattered among fields of cassava, corn, and plantains, were round, with walls made of chonta wood held together with vines and protected by roofs of woven yarina leaves that reached the ground. He saw skeletal women carrying babies—none of them responded to the greetings he offered—but no men. When he returned to the cabin, an indigenous woman was putting the clothes he had given her to wash in his bedroom. He asked her how much he owed, but the woman—a young one with green and blue stripes on her face—looked at him without understanding. He had Frederick Bishop ask her how much he owed. He did so in huitoto, but the woman appeared not to understand.

—She owes him nothing —Bishop said—. Money doesn't circulate here. Besides, she is one of the women of the chief of La Chorrera, Víctor Macedo.

—How many does he have?

—Now, five —explained the Bajan—. When I worked here, he had at least seven. He has changed them. That's what everyone does.

He laughed and made a joke that Roger Casement didn't appreciate:

—With this climate, women wear out very quickly. They need to be renewed all the time, like clothes.

The following two weeks they spent in La Chorrera, until the members of the Commission moved to the Occidente station, Roger Casement would remember as the busiest and most intense of the trip. Their entertainments included swimming in the river, the fords, or the less torrential waterfalls, long walks in the forest, taking many photos, and, late at night, some games of

bridge with his companions. In truth, he spent most of the day and afternoon investigating, writing, questioning the local people, or exchanging impressions with his companions.

Contrary to what they feared, Philip Bertie Lawrence, Seaford Greenwich, and Stanley Sealy were not intimidated in front of the full Commission and the presence of Juan Tizón. They confirmed everything they had told Roger Casement and expanded their testimonies, revealing new facts of blood and abuses. Sometimes, during the interrogations, Roger saw some of the commissioners pale as if they were about to faint.

Juan Tizón remained silent, sitting behind them without saying a word. He took notes in small notebooks. In the first few days following the interrogations, he tried to downplay and question the testimonies regarding torture, murders, and mutilations. However, starting on the third or fourth day, a transformation occurred in him. He stayed quiet during mealtimes, barely tasted any food, and responded with monosyllables and murmurs when spoken to. On the fifth day, while having a drink before dinner, he exploded. With bloodshot eyes, he addressed everyone present: "This goes beyond anything I could have ever imagined. I swear by the soul of my holy mother, my wife, and my children, whom I love most in the world, that this is an absolute surprise to me. I feel a horror as great as yours. I am sickened by the things we heard. It is possible that there are exaggerations in the reports from these Barbadians, who might want to ingratiate themselves with you. But even so, there is no doubt, intolerable and monstrous crimes have been committed here that must be denounced and punished. I swear to you that...".

become a man burdened by his thoughts and concerns. He felt the weight of the decisions to be made and the responsibilities he held. The conversations he had previously engaged in now seemed distant, replaced by a growing sense of urgency. He realized that the situation demanded immediate action, and he could no longer remain passive. With a deep breath, he resolved to confront the challenges ahead and to fight for the changes that were necessary.

become a member of the Commission. He collaborated with them with zeal and diligence, often bringing them new data. And all the time he demanded that they take precautions. He had filled himself with suspicion, spying on the surroundings full of doubts. Knowing what was happening here, everyone's life was in danger, especially that of the consul general. He lived in constant alarm. He feared that the Barbadians would reveal to Víctor Macedo what they had confessed. If they did, it could not be ruled out that this individual, before being taken to the tribunals or handed over to the police, would set up an ambush and then claim that they had perished at the hands of savages.

The situation changed one dawn when Roger Casement noticed someone knocking at his door with their knuckles. It was still dark. He went to open it and through the crack saw a silhouette that was not Frederick Bishop's. It was Donal Francis, the Bajan who had insisted that everything was normal here. He spoke in a very low, frightened voice. He had reflected and now wanted to tell him the truth. Roger let him in. They sat on the floor to talk because Donal was afraid they might be overheard if they went out to the terrace.

He assured him that he had lied out of fear of Víctor Macedo. He had threatened him: if he revealed to the English what was happening here, he would never set foot in Barbados again, and once those men left, after castrating him, he would tie him naked to a tree for the fire ants to eat him. Roger reassured him. He would be repatriated to Bridgetown, just like the other Barbadians. However, he did not want to hear this new confession in private. Francis had to speak in front of the commissioners and Tizón.

He testified that same day, in the dining room, where they held the work sessions. He showed a lot of fear. His eyes darted around, he bit his thick lips, and sometimes he couldn't find the words. He spoke for about three hours. The most dramatic moment of his confession occurred when he said that, a couple of months ago, to two huitotos who claimed to be sick to justify the ridiculous amount of rubber they had gathered, Víctor Macedo ordered him and a "boy" named Joaquín Piedra to tie their hands and feet, submerge them in the river, and keep them underwater until they drowned. Then he had the "rational" people drag the bodies into the forest to be eaten.

the animals. Donal offered to take them to the place where some members and bones of the two huitotos could still be found.

On September 28, Casement and the members of the Commission left La Chorrera on the boat *Veloz* of the Peruvian Amazon Company, heading to Occidente. They ascended the Igaraparaná River for several hours, stopped at the rubber collection points of Victoria and Nai-menes to eat something, slept on the same boat, and the next day, after another three hours of navigation, docked at the Occidente wharf. They were received by the station chief, Fidel Velarde, with his assistants Manuel Torrico, Rodríguez, and Acosta. "They all have the faces and attitudes of bullies and outlaws," thought Roger Casement.

They were armed with pistols and Winchester rifles. Surely following instructions, they acted subserviently to the newcomers. Juan Tizón, once again, asked them for caution. In no way should they reveal to Velarde *and his "boys"* the things they had discovered.

Occidente was a smaller camp than La Chorrera, surrounded by a palisade of wooden stakes sharpened like spears. "Rational" men armed with carbines guarded the entrances.

"Why is the station so well protected?" Roger asked Juan Tizón. "Are they expecting an attack from the indigenous people?"

"Not from the indigenous people. Although you never know if another Katenere will appear one day. More likely from the Colombians, who covet these territories."

Fidel Velarde had 530 indigenous people in Occidente, most of whom were now in the forest collecting rubber. They brought back what they had gathered every fifteen days and then returned to the jungle for another two weeks. Their women and children stayed here in a village that extended along the river slopes, outside the palisade. Velarde added that the indigenous people would hold a party for the "visiting friends" that afternoon.

They took him to the house where they would stay, a square construction built on stilts, two stories high, with doors and windows covered by mosquito screens. In Occidente, the smell of rubber coming from the depots and permeating the air was as strong as that of La Chorrera. Roger was pleased to discover that, here, he would sleep in

a bed instead of a hammock. A cot, rather, with a mattress made of seeds, where he could at least maintain a flat posture. The hammock had aggravated his muscle pains and sleeplessness.

The celebration took place in the early afternoon, in a clearing near the huitoto village. A swarm of Indigenous people had brought tables, chairs, and pots filled with food and drinks for the outsiders. They were waiting for them, formed in a circle, very serious. The sky was clear and there was not the slightest hint of rain. But neither the good weather nor the sight of the Igaraparaná cutting through the plain of dense forests and winding around it could cheer Roger Casement. He knew that what they were about to witness would be sad and depressing. Three or four dozen men and women—those being very old or children and these generally quite young—some naked and others clad in the *cushma* or tunic that Roger had seen many Indigenous people wear in Iquitos, danced in a circle, moving to the sounds of the manguaré, drums made from hollowed-out tree trunks, which the huitotos struck with wooden sticks tipped with rubber, producing deep and prolonged sounds that, it was said, carried messages and allowed them to communicate over great distances. The lines of dancers had seed rattles on their ankles and arms, which jingled with the irregular jumps they made. At the same time, they hummed some monotonous melodies, tinged with bitterness that matched their serious, sullen, fearful, or indifferent expressions.

Later, Casement asked his companions if they had noticed the large number of Indians whose backs, buttocks, and legs were covered in scars. There was a brief discussion among them about what percentage of the huitotos who danced bore marks from whippings. Roger claimed it was eighty percent, while Fielgald and Folk thought it was no more than sixty percent. However, they all agreed that what had impressed them the most was a boy who was nothing but skin and bones with burns all over his body and part of his face. They asked Frederick Bishop to find out whether those marks were due to an accident or to punishments and torture.

They had set out to discover in this station, in great detail, how the exploitation system operated.

They began the next morning, very early, after breakfast. As soon as they started visiting the rubber depots, guided by Fidel Velarde himself, they casually discovered that the scales used to weigh the rubber were rigged. Seymour Bell had the idea to step on one of them, as he was a hypochondriac and believed he had lost weight. He was startled. How was it possible! He had lost nearly ten kilos! However, he didn't feel it in his body; his pants would fall down and his shirts would slip off. Casement weighed himself too and encouraged his companions and Juan Tizón to do the same. Everyone was several kilos below their normal weight. During lunch, Roger asked Tizón if he thought all the scales of the Peruvian Amazon Company in Putumayo were rigged like those in Occidente to make the Indians believe they had collected less rubber. Tizón, who had lost all capacity for disguise, simply shrugged: 'I don't know, gentlemen. All I know is that anything is possible here.'

Unlike La Chorrera, where they had hidden him in a warehouse, in Occidente the stocks were located at the very center of the vacant lot around which the houses and storage depots were situated. Roger asked Fidel Velarde's assistants to put him inside that torture device. He wanted to know what it felt like in that narrow cage. Rodríguez and Acosta hesitated, but since Juan Tizón authorized it, they indicated to Casement to crouch down and, pushing him with their hands, they secured him inside the stocks. It was impossible to close the wood that held his arms and legs because his limbs were too thick, so they limited themselves to bringing them together. However, they were able to fasten the catchers around his neck, which, while not completely choking him, made it nearly impossible for him to breathe. He felt a sharp pain throughout his body and it seemed impossible that a human being could endure that position and pressure on his back, stomach, chest, legs, neck, and arms for hours. When he came out, before regaining movement, he had to lean for quite a while on Louis Barnes's shoulder.

—What kind of offenses do they put the Indians in stocks for? —he asked the chief of the Occidente at night.

Fidel Velarde was a somewhat stocky mixed-race man, with a large seal-like mustache and big, bulging eyes. He wore a wide-brimmed hat, high boots, and a belt full of bullets.

—When they commit very serious offenses—he explained, lingering over each phrase—. When they kill their children, disfigure their wives in a drunkenness, or commit thefts and refuse to confess where they have hidden what they stole. We don't use the stocks very often. Only rarely. The Indians here generally behave well.

He said it with a tone that was both cheerful and mocking, looking at each of the commissioners with a fixed and disdainful gaze, as if to say, "I feel compelled to say these things, but please, do not believe me." His attitude displayed such superiority and contempt towards the rest of humanity that Roger Casement tried to imagine the paralyzing fear that the thuggish character must inspire in the indigenous people, with his pistol at his side, his rifle slung over his shoulder, and his belt full of bullets. Shortly after, one of the five Barbadians from Occidente testified before the Commission that he had seen, one night during a drunken spree, Fidel Velarde and Alfredo Montt, then the chief of the Ultimo Retiro station, bet on who could more quickly and cleanly cut off the ear of a huitoto punished in the stocks. Velarde succeeded in severing the indigenous man's ear with a single swipe of his machete, but Montt, who was hopelessly drunk and had trembling hands, instead of removing the other ear, struck the machete against his skull. At the end of this session, Seymour Bell had a crisis. He confessed to his colleagues that he could not take it anymore. He had lost his voice and his eyes were watery and bloodshot. They had seen and heard enough to know that the most brutal barbarism reigned here. It made no sense to continue investigating in this world of inhumanity and psychopathic cruelties. He proposed that they end the journey and return to England immediately.

Roger replied that he would not oppose the others leaving. But he would remain in Putumayo, according to the planned schedule, visiting a few more stations. He wanted his report to be thorough and well-documented, so it would have a greater impact. He reminded them that all these crimes were committed by a British company, whose board included highly respected English personalities, and that the shareholders of the Peruvian Amazon Company were lining their pockets with what was happening here. It was necessary to put an end to this scandal and sanction those responsible. To achieve this, his report needed to be exhaustive and forceful. His reasons

they convinced the others, including the demoralized Seymour Bell.

To shake off the impression that Fidel Velarde and Alfredo Montt's bet had left on everyone, they decided to take a day off. The next morning, instead of continuing with interviews and investigations, they went to swim in the river. They spent many hours catching butterflies with a net while the botanist Walter Folk explored the forest in search of orchids. Butterflies and orchids were abundant in the area, as were the mosquitoes and bats that came at night, silently flying to bite the dogs, chickens, and horses at the station, sometimes infecting them with rabies, which forced them to be killed and burned to prevent an epidemic.

Casement and his companions were amazed by the variety, size, and beauty of the butterflies fluttering around the river. They came in all shapes and colors, and their graceful flutters and the spots of light they emitted when resting on any leaf or plant seemed to enchant the air with notes of delicacy, a reprieve against the moral ugliness they discovered at every turn, as if there were no depth in this wretched land for evil, greed, and pain.

Walter Folk was surprised by the number of orchids hanging from the large trees, with their elegant and exquisite colors illuminating their surroundings. He did not cut them nor did he allow his companions to do so. He spent a long time contemplating them with a magnifying lens, taking notes and photographing them.

In Occidente, Roger Casement came to have a fairly complete understanding of the system that made the Peruvian Amazon Company operate. Perhaps in its beginnings, there was some kind of agreement between the rubber dealers and the tribes. But that was already history as, now, the indigenous people did not want to go into the jungle to collect rubber. Hence, everything began with the “raids” perpetrated by the chiefs and their “boys.” No salary was paid, nor did the indigenous people see a single cent. They received from the warehouse the collection tools — knives for the incisions in the trees, cans for the latex, baskets to accumulate the leaves or rubber balls — as well as household items like seeds, clothing, lamps, and some food. Prices were determined by the Company, so the indigenous person was always in debt and worked the rest of his life to pay off what he owed. Since the chiefs had no salaries but commissions for the rubber they gathered at each station, their demands to get the maximum latex were relentless. Each collector would go deep into the jungle for fifteen days, leaving his wife and children as hostages. The chiefs and “rational” people had absolute discretion over them, for domestic service or for their sexual appetites. They all had real harems — many girls who had not reached puberty — whom they exchanged at will, though sometimes, out of jealousy, there were settling of scores with gunfire and stabbings. Every fifteen days, the collectors returned to the station to bring the rubber. This was weighed on the rigged scales. If after three months they did not complete thirty kilos, they received punishments ranging from whippings to stocks, cutting of ears and noses, or, in extreme cases, the tor

tura and the murder of the woman and children and of the same collector. The corpses were not buried but dragged into the forest for the animals to eat. Every three months, the boats and steamers of the Company came in search of the rubber that, meanwhile, had been smoked, washed, and powdered. The ships sometimes carried their load from Putumayo to Iquitos and at other times directly to Manaus to be exported from there to Europe and the United States.

Roger Casement confirmed that a large number of "rational" individuals were not doing the slightest productive work. They were merely jailers, torturers, and exploiters of the Indigenous people. They spent the whole day lying around, smoking, drinking, having fun, kicking a ball, telling jokes, or giving orders. All the work fell on the Indigenous people: building housing, repairing roofs damaged by the rain, fixing the path to the dock, washing, cleaning, loading, cooking, carrying things back and forth, and, in the little free time they had left, tending to their crops without which they would not have had anything to eat.

Roger understood the mood of his companions. If he, after twenty years in Africa, thought he had seen it all, was disturbed by what was happening here, with his nerves frayed, experiencing moments of total despondency, how would it be for those who had spent most of their lives in a civilized world, believing that this was how the rest of the Earth was, societies with laws, churches, Police, customs, and a morality that prevented human beings from acting like beasts.

Roger wanted to stay in Putumayo so that his report would be as complete as possible, but that wasn't the only reason. Another reason was his curiosity to meet that character who, according to all the testimonies, was the epitome of cruelty in this world: Armando Normand, the chief of Matanzas.

From Iquitos, I heard anecdotes, comments, and references to this name always associated with such evils and ignominies that I had become obsessed with it, to the point of having nightmares from which I would wake up drenched in sweat and with my heart racing. I was sure that many things I had heard from the Barbadians about Normand were exaggerations fueled by the fevered imagination so common among the people of these lands. However, even so, the fact that this individual

could generate such a mythology indicated that he was a being who, although he seemed impossible, surpassed even the savagery of scoundrels like Abelardo Agüero, Alfredo Montt, Fidel Velarde, Elias Martinengui, and others of his kind.

No one knew for sure his nationality—it was said that he was Peruvian, Bolivian, or English— but everyone agreed that he was not yet thirty years old and that he had studied in England. Juan Tizón had heard it said that he held an accounting degree from an institute in London.

He appeared to be short, thin, and very ugly. According to the Bajan Joshua Dyal, from his insignificant little person radiated a "malevolent force" that made anyone who approached him tremble, and his gaze, penetrating and icy, resembled that of a viper. Dyal claimed that not only the Indians, but also the "boys" and even the foremen themselves felt insecure around him. Because at any moment Armando Normand could order or carry out a horrifying ferocity without altering his disdainful indifference toward everything around him. Dyal confessed to Roger and the Commission that, at the Matanzas station, Normand once ordered him to murder five andoques, punished for not meeting the rubber quotas. Dyal shot the first two, but the boss ordered him to first crush the testicles of the next two with a yucca rolling stone and then finish them off with a club. For the last one, he was told to strangle him with his hands. Throughout the entire operation, he sat on a tree trunk, smoking and observing, without altering the indifferent expression on his plump little face.

Another Bajan, Seaford Greenwich, who had worked for a few months with Armando Normand in Matanzas, recounted that the gossip among the "rational" members of the station was the boss's habit of putting ground chili or powder into the sex of his young concubines to hear them scream with the burn. According to Greenwich, that was the only way he got excited and could have sex with them. At one time, the Bajan added, Normand, instead of putting the punished ones in stocks, would raise them with a chain tied to a tall tree and let them go to see how, when they crashed to the ground, they would break their heads and bones or cut their tongues against their teeth. Another foreman who had served under Normand assured the Commission that

more fear than this the andoques Indians had of his dog, a mastiff he had trained to sink its jaws and tear apart the flesh of the Indian it was thrown against.

Could all those monstrosities be true? Roger Casement found himself saying, while reviewing his memory, that among the vast collection of evildoers he had encountered in the Congo—beings whom power and impunity had turned into monsters—none reached the extremes of this individual. He had a somewhat perverse curiosity to meet him, hear him speak, see him act, and find out where he came from. And what could he say about the misdeeds attributed to him.

From Occidente, Roger Casement and his friends transferred, always on the speedboat *Veloz*, to the Ultimo Retiro station. It was smaller than the previous ones and also resembled a fortress, with its palisade and armed guards surrounding the small cluster of homes. The Indians seemed more primitive and surly than the huitotos. They wandered semi-naked, with loincloths that barely covered their genitals. Here, Roger spotted for the first time two natives with the Company's brand on their buttocks: CA. They appeared older than most of the others. He tried to talk to them, but they did not understand Spanish or Portuguese, nor Frederick Bishop's huitoto. Later, while exploring Ultimo Retiro, they discovered other marked Indians. An employee at the station informed them that at least one third of the indigenous people living here bore the CA mark on their bodies. The practice had been suspended a few weeks earlier when the Peruvian Amazon Company accepted the Commission's arrival in Putumayo.

To get from the river to Ultimo Retiro, one had to climb up a muddy slope from the rain where the legs sank up to the knees. When Roger was able to take off his shoes and lie down on his cot, all his bones hurt. His conjunctivitis had returned. The burning and tearing of one eye were so severe that, after applying eye drops, he bandaged it. He went several days like a pirate, with one eye bandaged and protected by a damp cloth. Since these precautions were not enough to stop the inflammation and tearing, from then on and until the end of his journey, whenever he was not working—which was rare—he would rush to lie down in his hammock or cot and

he remained with both eyes bandaged with warm cloths. This alleviated the discomfort. During these periods of rest and at night—he slept only four or five hours—he tried to mentally organize the report that he would write for the Foreign Office. The general outlines were clear. First, a picture of the conditions in Putumayo when the pioneers came to settle, invading the lands of the tribes, about twenty years ago. And how, desperate for manpower, they initiated the "raids," unafraid of being sanctioned because there were no judges or police in these places. They were the only authority, based on their firearms, against which slings, spears, and blowguns proved futile.

It should clearly describe the rubber exploitation system based on slave labor and the mistreatment of Indigenous people fueled by the greed of the bosses who, as they worked for a percentage of the collected rubber, resorted to physical punishments, mutilations, and murders to increase collection. Impunity and their absolute power had developed sadistic tendencies in these individuals, which, here, could be freely expressed against those Indigenous people deprived of all rights.

Would his report be useful? At least for the Peruvian Amazon Company to be sanctioned, undoubtedly. The British Government would ask the Peruvian Government to take the responsible parties to court for the crimes. Would President Augusto B. Leguía dare to do it? Juan Tizón said yes, that, just like in London, a scandal would erupt in Lima when the truth of what was happening here became known. Public opinion would demand punishment for the guilty. But Roger doubted. What could the Peruvian Government do in Putumayo, where it had not a single representative and where the Julio C. Arana Company rightly boasted that it was the one, with its bands of killers, who maintained Peru's sovereignty over these lands? Everything would remain as mere rhetorical displays. The martyrdom of the indigenous communities in the Amazon would continue, until their extinction. This perspective depressed him. But instead of paralyzing him, it encouraged him to work harder, investigating, interviewing, and writing. He already had a stack of notebooks and cards written in his clear and hurried handwriting.

From Ultimo Retiro they moved to Entre Ríos, in a displacement by river and land that took them to immerse themselves in the underbrush for an entire day. The idea delighted Roger Casement: in that bodily contact with the wild nature he would relive his youthful years, the long expeditions of his youth across the African continent. But, although during those twelve hours of travel through the jungle, sometimes sinking up to his waist in the mud, slipping in bushes that concealed slopes, navigating certain stretches in canoes that, propelled by the poles of the indigenous people, slid along some very thin "water pipes" over which descended a foliage that darkened the sunlight, he felt

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Sometimes the excitement and joy of yesteryear served him primarily to verify the passage of time, the wear and tear of his body. It was not only the pain in his arms, back, and legs, but also the invincible fatigue against which he had to struggle with determined efforts so that his companions would not notice. Louis Barnes and Seymour Bell became so exhausted that, from the halfway point of the journey, they had to be carried in hammocks, each by four indigenous people from the twenty that were escorting them. Roger observed, impressed, how these Indians with such thin legs and skeletal build moved with ease, carrying their luggage and provisions on their shoulders, without eating or drinking for hours. During one of the breaks, Juan Tizón accepted Casement's request and ordered that several cans of sardines be distributed among the indigenous people.

During the journey, they saw flocks of parrots and those playful monkeys with bright eyes called "frailecillos," many types of birds, and iguanas with sleepy eyes whose rough skins blended with the branches and trunks where they were flattened. And, likewise, a Victoria Regia, those enormous circular leaves that floated in the lagoons like rafts.

They arrived in Entre Ríos at sunset. The station was in turmoil because a jaguar had eaten an indigenous woman who had strayed from the camp to give birth, alone, as the natives usually did, by the riverbank. A group of hunters had set out in search of the jaguar, led by the chief, but they returned, already at nightfall, without having found the beast. The chief of Entre Ríos was named Andrés O'Donnell. He was young and handsome and claimed that his father was Irish, but Roger, after questioning him, noticed such a substantial confusion regarding his ancestors and Ireland that it was likely O'Donnell's grandfather or great-grandfather was the first Irish person in the family to set foot on Peruvian soil. It saddened him that a descendent of the Irish was one of Arana's lieutenants in Putumayo, although, according to testimonies, he seemed less bloodthirsty than other chiefs: he had been seen whipping Indigenous people and stealing their women and daughters for his personal harem — he had seven women living with him and a cloud of children — but his record did not show that he had killed anyone with his own hands or ordered any murders. However, in a visible place in Entre Ríos, the stocks stood tall and all the "boys" and Barbadians wore whips at their waists (some used them as belts for their pants). A large number of Indigenous men and women bore scars on their backs, legs, and buttocks.

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Although his official mission required him to question only the British citizens working for the Arana Company, that is, the Barbadians, Roger began interviewing the "rational" individuals willing to answer his questions from Occidente as well. In Entre Ríos, this practice extended to the entire Commission. During the days they were there, in addition to the three Barbadians who served Andrés O'Donnell as foremen, the same boss and a good number of his "boys" testified before them.

Almost always the same thing happened. At first, everyone was reluctant, evasive, and lied brazenly. But it only took a slip, an unintentional mistake that revealed the world of truths they were hiding for them to suddenly start talking and sharing more than what was asked, implicating themselves as proof of the veracity of what they were saying. Despite several attempts he made, Roger could not gather direct testimony from any Indian.

On October 16, 1910, when he and his companions from the Commission, accompanied by Juan Tizón, three Barbadians, and about twenty muinanes, led by their curaca, who were carrying the cargo, were making their way through the forest, along a small path, from the Entre Ríos station to the Matanzas station, Roger Casement noted in his diary an idea that had been taking shape in his mind since he landed in Iquitos: "I have come to the absolute conviction that the only way the Putumayo indigenous people can escape the miserable condition to which they have been reduced is by rising up in arms against their masters. It is an illusion devoid of all reality to believe, like Juan Tizón, that this situation will change when the State arrives here."

Peruvian and there are authorities, judges, police who enforce the laws that prohibit servitude and slavery in Peru since 1854. Will they enforce them like in Iquitos, where families buy for twenty or thirty soles the girls and boys stolen by traffickers? Will these authorities, judges, and police enforce the laws that receive their salaries from Casa Arana because the State does not have the means to pay them or because the thieves and bureaucrats steal the money along the way? In this society, the State is an inseparable part of the machine of exploitation and extermination. Indigenous people should expect nothing from such institutions. If they want to be free, they have to conquer their freedom with their arms and courage. Like the bora chief Katenere. But without sacrificing themselves for sentimental reasons, like him. Fighting until the end." Meanwhile, absorbed by these phrases that he had stamped in his diary, he walked at a good pace, making his way with a machete through the vines, underbrush, trunks, and branches that obstructed the path, one afternoon he thought: "The Irish are like the huitotos, the boras, the andoques, and the muinanes of Putumayo. Colonized, exploited, and condemned to always be so if we continue to trust in the laws, institutions, and Governments of England, to achieve freedom. They will never give it to us. Why would the Empire that colonizes us do it if it does not feel an irresistible pressure that forces it to do so? That pressure can only come from weapons." This idea that, in the days, weeks, months, and years to come, he would refine and strengthen— that Ireland, like the Indians of Putumayo, if it wanted to be free, would have to fight to achieve it— absorbed him so much during the eight hours it took for the journey, that he even forgot to think that very soon he would meet in person the chief of Matanzas: Armando Normand.

Situated on the banks of the Cahuinari River, a tributary of the Caquetá, reaching the Matanzas station required climbing a steep slope that the heavy rain, which had begun shortly before their arrival, had turned into a muddy torrent. Only the muinanes were able to climb it without falling. The others slipped, rolled down, and got up covered in mud and bruises. In the open area, also protected by a fence of canes, some indigenous people splashed the travelers to remove the mud.

The chief was not present. He was leading a "raid" against five fleeing indigenous people who, apparently, had managed to cross the nearby Colombian border. There were five Barbadians in Matanzas, and all five treated the "lord consul" with great respect, being fully aware of his arrival and mission. They took them to the houses where they would stay. Roger Casement, Louis Barnes, and Juan Tizón were housed in a large wooden house with a yarina roof and barred windows, which they were told was the home of Normand and his women when they were in Matanzas. However, his usual residence was in La China, a small camp a couple of kilometers upstream, where the Indians were forbidden to approach. There lived the chief, surrounded by his armed "rational" men, as he feared being the victim of an assassination attempt by Colombians, who accused him of disregarding the border and crossing it during his "raids" to kidnap porters or capture deserters. The Barbadians explained to them that Armando Normand always carried his young women from his harem with him because he was very jealous.

In Matanzas, there were boras, andoques, and muinanes but no huitotos. Almost all the Indigenous people had scars from whips, and at least a dozen of them bore the mark of Casa Arana on their buttocks. The stocks were in the center of the clearing, beneath that tree full of boils and parasitic plants called lupuna, which all the tribes of the region held in reverence mixed with fear.

In his room, which was undoubtedly Normand's own, Roger saw yellowed photographs featuring that boyish face, a diploma from The London School of Bookkeepers from the year 1903, *and* another, earlier one, from a Senior School. It was true: he had studied in England and had a degree in accounting.

Armando Normand entered Matanzas at dusk. Through the barred little window, Roger saw him pass in the glow of the lanterns, short, slight, and almost as lanky as an Indigenous man, followed by "boys" with criminal faces armed with winchesters and revolvers, and by about eight or ten women squeezed into the *cushma* or Amazon tunic, as they entered the neighboring house.

During the night, Roger woke up several times, distressed, thinking about Ireland. He felt nostalgic for his country.

He had lived so little in it and yet felt increasingly in solidarity with its fate and suffering. Since he had been able to see up close the via crucis of other colonized peoples, the situation in Ireland pained him like never before. He felt an urgency to put an end to all this, finish the Report on the Putumayo, deliver it to the Foreign Office, and return to Ireland to work, now without any distractions, with those idealistic compatriots committed to the cause of their emancipation. He would recover lost time, immerse himself in Eire, study, act, write, and by all means possible try to convince the Irish that if they wanted freedom, they would have to conquer it with courage and sacrifice.

The next morning, when he went down to have breakfast, there was Armando Normand, sitting at a table with fruits, pieces of cassava that served as bread, and cups of coffee. Indeed, he was very short and thin, with a childlike, aged face and a hard, fixed blue gaze that appeared and vanished with his constant blinking. He was wearing boots, blue overalls, a white shirt, and on top, a leather vest with a pen and a notepad sticking out of one of his pockets. He carried a revolver at his waist.

He spoke perfect English, with a strange accent that Roger could not identify the origin of. He greeted him with a nearly imperceptible nod, without saying a word. He was very reserved, almost monosyllabic, when asked about his life in London, as well as confirming his nationality — 'let's say I am Peruvian' — and responded with a certain arrogance when Roger told him that he and the members of the Commission were shocked to see how indigenous people were being treated inhumanely in the domains of a British company.

—If they lived here, they would think differently — he commented dryly, without the slightest hint of being intimidated. And after a brief pause, he added—: Animals cannot be treated like human beings. A yacumama, a jaguar, a puma, do not understand reason. The savages do not either. Well, I know, outsiders who are only passing through cannot be convinced.

—I lived twenty years in Africa and I didn't become a monster — Casement said—. Which is what you have turned into, Mr. Normand. Your reputation has overshadowed us throughout the journey.

The horrors that are told about you in Putumayo surpass all imagination. Did you know that?

Armando Normand was not moved at all. Always looking at him with that blank and expressionless gaze, he merely shrugged and spit on the ground.

—May I ask you how many men and women you have killed? —Roger shot out bluntly.

—All those who were needed —replied the chief of Matanzas, without changing his tone and getting up—. Excuse me. I have work.

The displeasure that Roger felt towards that little man was so great that he decided not to interview him personally and to leave the task to the members of the Commission. That murderer would only tell them a torrent of lies. He focused on listening to the Bajan and 'rational' witnesses who agreed to testify. He did this in the mornings and afternoons, dedicating the rest of the day to developing the notes he took during the interviews more carefully. In the mornings, he would go for a swim in the river, take some photos, and then kept working until dusk. He would collapse on his cot, his sleep was restless and feverish. He noticed how he was getting thinner day by day.

He was tired and fed up. As he had experienced at some point in the Congo, he began to fear that the maddening succession of crimes, violence, and horrors of all kinds he was discovering daily would affect his mental balance. Would his spirit's sanity withstand all this daily horror? It demoralized him to think that in civilized England, few would believe that the "whites" and "mixed-race" people of Putumayo could sink to such extremes of savagery. Once again, he would be accused of exaggeration and prejudice, of inflating abuses to add more drama to his report. It wasn't just the wicked mistreatment of the indigenous people that had him in this state. It was also knowing that, after seeing, hearing, and witnessing what was happening here, he would never again have the optimistic outlook on life that he had in his youth.

When he learned that an expedition of porters was about to leave Matanzas carrying the rubber collected over the last three months to the station at Entre Ríos and then to Puerto Peruano to be shipped abroad, he announced to his companions that he would go with them. The Commission could remain

here until completing the inspections and the interviews. His friends were as exhausted and discouraged as he was. They told him that Armando Normand's insolent behavior had suddenly changed when they informed him that the "Mr. consul" had received the mission to come investigate the atrocities of Putumayo from none other than sir Edward Grey, the chancellor of the British Empire, and that the murderers and torturers, since they worked for an English company, could be brought to trial in England. Especially if they had English nationality or intended to acquire it, as could be his case. Or they could be handed over to the Peruvian or Colombian Governments to be judged here. Since hearing this, Normand maintained a submissive and servile attitude with the Commission. He denied his crimes and assured them that, from now on, the mistakes of the past would not be repeated: the indigenous people would be well fed, treated when they fell ill, paid for their work, and treated as human beings. He had posted a sign in the center of the open space stating these things. It was ridiculous, as the indigenous people, all illiterate, could not read it, nor could most of the "rational" people. It was meant solely for the commissioners to read.

The journey on foot, through the jungle, from Matanzas to Entre Ríos, accompanying the eighty indigenous people — boras, andoques, and muinanes— who carried on their shoulders the rubber collected by the people of Armando Normand, would be one of the most terrifying memories from Roger Casement's first trip to Peru. Normand was not leading the expedition but Negretti, one of his lieutenants, a mixed-race man with slanted eyes, gold teeth, who was always picking at his mouth with a toothpick and whose thunderous voice made the army of skeletons marked with sores and scars tremble, jump, and hurry, their faces distorted by fear, including many women and children, some only a few years old, from the expedition. Negretti carried a rifle over his shoulder, a revolver in his holster, and a whip at his waist. On the day of departure, Roger asked for permission to photograph him, and Negretti agreed, laughing. But his smile faded when Casement warned him, pointing at the whip:

—If I see him use that against the Indigenous people, I will personally hand him over to the Police of Iquitos.

Negretti's expression was one of complete bewilderment. After a moment, he murmured:

—Do you have any authority in the Company?

—I have the authority entrusted to me by the English Government to investigate the abuses taking place in Putumayo. You know that the Peruvian Amazon Company you work for is British, right?

The man, puzzled, ended up stepping aside. And Casement never saw him whip the loaders, only shouting at them to hurry or overwhelming them with curses and other insults when they dropped the rubber "chorizos" they carried on their shoulders and heads because they were overcome by fatigue or stumbled.

Roger had brought three Barbadians with him, Bishop, Sealy, and Lañe. The other nine who accompanied them stayed with the Commission. Casement advised his friends never to stray far from these witnesses, as they risked being intimidated or bribed by Normand and his accomplices to retract their testimonies, or even being killed.

The hardest part of the expedition was not the large, buzzing blue horseflies that relentlessly bit them day and night, nor the storms that sometimes poured down on them, soaking them and turning the ground into slippery streams of water, mud, leaves, and dead trees. It wasn't even the discomfort of the camps they set up at night to sleep poorly after eating a small can of sardines or soup and drinking a few sips of whiskey or tea from the thermos. The truly terrible part, a torture that brought guilt and bad conscience, was seeing these indigenous people naked, bent under the weight of the rubber "chorizos" that Negretti and his boys shouted to move forward, always hurrying them with very sparse breaks and without giving them a bite of food. When he asked Negretti why the rations were not also distributed to the indigenous people, the foreman looked at him as if he did not understand. When Bishop explained the question, Negretti shamelessly affirmed:

—They do not like what we Christians eat. They have their own food.

But they had none, because the handfuls of cassava flour they sometimes brought to their mouths could not be called food, nor the stems of plants and leaves they rolled.

With great care before swallowing them. What Roger found incomprehensible was how children aged ten or twelve could carry for hours those 'chorizos' that weighed—he had tested their weight—never less than twenty kilos and sometimes thirty or more. On the first day of the march, a bora boy suddenly fell face down, crushed by his load. He weakly complained when Roger tried to revive him by making him drink a small can of soup. The boy's eyes reflected an animal-like panic. Two or three times he attempted to stand up, failing to do so. Bishop explained to him, 'He is so afraid because if you weren't here, Negretti would finish him off with a bullet as a lesson so that no other pagan dares to faint.' The boy was in no condition to get up, so they left him in the woods. Roger left him two cans of food and his umbrella. He now understood why these frail beings could carry such weights: out of fear of being killed if they dared to faint. Terror multiplied their strength.

On the second day, an old woman suddenly fell dead while trying to climb a slope with thirty kilos of rubber on her back. Negretti, after verifying that she was lifeless, hurried to share the two 'chorizos' of the deceased among other Indigenous people, with a grimace of disgust and clearing his throat.

In Entre Ríos, after barely bathing and resting a little, Roger rushed to jot down in his notebooks the adventures and reflections of the journey. One idea kept returning to his mind, an idea that in the ensuing days, weeks, and months would obsessively return and begin to shape his behavior: 'We must not allow colonization to castrate the spirit of the Irish as it has castrated that of the Indigenous people of the Amazon. We must act now, once and for all, before it is too late and we become automatons.'

While waiting for the arrival of the Commission, he did not waste time. He conducted some interviews, but above all, he reviewed the records, accounting books of the warehouse, and the administration logs. He wanted to determine how much the Julio C. Arana Company marked up the prices of food, medicines, clothing, weapons, and tools that were advanced to the Indigenous people as well as to the foremen and the "boys." The percentages varied from product to

product, but the constant factor was that in all its sales material, the warehouse doubled, tripled, and sometimes even quintupled the prices. He bought himself two shirts, a pair of trousers, a hat, and a pair of field boots, and he could have acquired all of that in London for a third of its price. Not only were the Indigenous people exploited, but also those poor wretches, lazy and thugs who were in Putumayo to carry out the orders of the bosses. It was not uncommon for both groups to always be in debt to the Peruvian Amazon Company and remain tied to it until their death or until the company deemed them useless.

It was more difficult for Roger to form an approximate idea of how many Indigenous people were in Putumayo around 1893, when the first rubber camps were established in the region and the "raids" began, and how many remained in that year of 1910. There were no serious statistics, and what had been written about it was vague; the figures varied greatly from one source to another. The one who seemed to have made the most reliable calculation was the unfortunate explorer and French ethnologist Eugène Robuchon (who mysteriously disappeared in the Putumayo region in 1905 while surveying the entire domain of Julio C. Arana), according to whom the seven tribes of the area—huitotos, ocaimas, muinanes, nonuyas, andoques, rezígaros, and boras—should total about a hundred thousand before rubber attracted the "civilized" to Putumayo. Juan Tizón considered this figure highly exaggerated. He maintained, based on various analyses and comparisons, that about forty thousand was closer to the truth. In any case, by now there were no more than about ten thousand survivors left. Thus, the regime imposed by the rubber dealers had already wiped out three quarters of the Indigenous population. Many had undoubtedly fallen victim to smallpox, malaria, beriberi, and other plagues. But the vast majority disappeared due to exploitation, hunger, mutilations, stocks, and murders. At that rate, all the tribes would face the same fate as the iquarasi, who had become completely extinct.

Two days later, his companions from the Commission arrived in Entre Ríos. Roger was surprised to see Armando Normand appear with them, followed by his harem of girls. Folk and Barnes warned him that, although the reason given by the chief of Matanzas for coming was that he needed to personally supervise the loading of rubber in Puerto

Peruano, he was doing so due to his fear regarding his future. As soon as he learned about the accusations from the Barbadians against him, he initiated a campaign of bribes and threats to get them to retract. He had succeeded in getting some, like Levine, to send a letter to the Commission (drafted no doubt by Normand himself) stating that they denied all statements, which were, "through deceit," extorted from them and that they wanted to make it clear in writing that at the Peruvian Amazon Company no harm had ever been done to the indigenous people and that employees and loaders worked in friendship for the greatness of Peru. Folk and Barnes thought that

Normand would attempt to bribe or intimidate Bishop, Sealy, and Lañe, and perhaps even Casement himself.

Indeed, early the next morning, Armando Normand came to knock on Roger's door and proposed to him "a frank and friendly conversation." The chief of Matanzas had lost his confidence and the arrogance he had shown to Roger the previous time. He appeared nervous, rubbing his hands and biting his lower lip as he spoke. They went to the rubber depot, an open area with bushes that the storm from the night had filled with puddles and toads. A pestilence of latex was emanating from the depot, and Roger thought that the odor did not come from the stored rubber "chorizos" in the large shed but rather from the ruddy little man who, beside him, resembled a dwarf.

Normand had his speech well prepared. The seven years he had spent in the jungle required tremendous sacrifices for someone who had received an education in London. He did not want misunderstandings and slanders from envious people to cut his life short with legal entanglements, preventing him from fulfilling his desire to return to England. He swore on his honor that he had no blood on his hands or on his conscience. He was strict but fair and was willing to implement all the measures that the Commission and the 'Mr. consul' suggested to improve the company's operations.

—Let the "raids" and the kidnapping of indigenous people cease —Roger listed, slowly, counting on his fingers—, let the stocks and whips disappear, let the Indians no longer work for free, and let the chiefs, foremen, and "boys" never again violate or steal the women.

Nor the daughters of the indigenous people, let physical punishments disappear and reparations be paid to the families of those murdered, burned alive, and to those who had their ears, noses, hands, and feet cut off. Let no more be stolen from the porters with rigged scales and prices inflated in the warehouse to keep them as eternal debtors of the Company. All of that is just to start. Because many more reforms would be needed for the Peruvian Amazon Company to deserve to be a British company.

Armando Normand was pale and looked at him without understanding.

—Do you want the Peruvian Amazon Company to disappear, Mr. Casement? —he stammered finally.

—Exactly. And that all of their murderers and torturers, starting with Mr. Julio C. Arana and ending with you, are judged for their crimes and spend their days in jail.

He quickened his pace and left the chief of Matanzas with a disfigured face, standing in place, not knowing what else to say. He immediately regretted having yielded in this way to the contempt that the character deserved. He had made a mortal enemy, who, now, could very well feel the temptation to eliminate him. He had warned him, and Normand, neither slow nor lazy, would act accordingly. He had made a serious mistake.

A few days later, Juan Tizón informed them that the chief of Matanzas had asked the Company for its settlements, in cash and not in Peruvian soles but in pounds sterling. He would travel back to Iquitos, on the *Liberal*, along with the Commission. What he intended was obvious: aided by his friends and accomplices, to mitigate the charges and accusations against him and secure an escape abroad — to Brazil, without a doubt — where he would have good savings waiting for him. The chances that he would go to jail had decreased. Juan Tizón informed them that Normand had been receiving for the past five years twenty percent of the rubber collected in Matanzas and a "bonus" of two hundred pounds sterling annually if the yield exceeded that of the previous year.

The following days and weeks were filled with an oppressive routine. Interviews with Barbadians and "rationalists" continued to reveal an impressive catalog of atrocities. Roger felt that his strength was waning. As he began to experience fever in the afternoons, he feared it was a recurrence of

malaria and increased the doses of quinine before bed. The fear that Armando Normand or any other chief might destroy the notebooks with the transcripts of the testimonies made him carry those papers with him at all stations — Entre Ríos, Athens, South, and La Chorrera — without letting anyone touch them. At night, he hid them under the cot or hammock where he slept, always keeping a loaded revolver within reach.

In La Chorrera, when they were packing bags for the return to Iquitos, Roger saw a group of about twenty Indians from the village of Naimenes arrive at the camp one day. They were carrying rubber. The loaders were young men, except for a skinny boy of about nine or ten years old, who had a piece of rubber on his head that was bigger than he was. Roger went with them to the scale where Víctor Macedo received the shipments. The boy's load weighed twenty-four kilos, while he, Omarino, weighed only twenty-five. How could he walk through the jungle for all those kilometers with such a weight on his head? Despite the scars on his back, he had bright, cheerful eyes and smiled often. Roger made him take a can of soup and another of sardines that he bought at the warehouse. From then on, Omarino never left his side. He followed him everywhere and was always ready to run any errand. One day, Víctor Macedo said to him, pointing at the boy:

—I see that you have become fond of him, Mr. Casement. Why don't you take him with you? He is an orphan. I gift him to you.

Later, Roger would think that the phrase "I gift him to you" with which Víctor Macedo had intended to ingratiate himself with him said more than any other testimony: that chief could "gift" any Indian under his control, as porters and collectors belonged to him just like the trees, the homes, the rifles, and the rubber chorizos. He asked Juan Tizón if there would be any objection to taking Omarino with him to London — the Society against Slavery would take him under their protection and would ensure he received an education — and Juan had no objections.

Arédomi, a teenager belonging to the andoques tribe, would join Omarino a few days later. He had arrived at La Chorrera from the South station, and the next day, while bathing in the river, Roger saw the naked boy splashing in the water with other Indigenous people. He was a handsome

young man, with a harmonious and agile body, moving with a natural elegance. Roger thought that Herbert Ward could create a beautiful sculpture of this teenager, the symbol of that Amazonian man stripped of his land, his body, and his beauty by the rubber dealers. He distributed cans of food among the andoques who were bathing. Arédomi kissed his hand in gratitude. He felt disgust and, at the same time, excitement. The boy followed him to the house, talking and gesturing passionately, but he did not understand him. He called Frederick Bishop, and he translated:

—Let him take it with you, wherever you go. It will serve him well.

—Tell him I can't, that I am going to take Omarino.

But Arédomi refused to give in. He remained immobilized next to the hut where Roger was sleeping or following him wherever he went, just a few steps away, with a silent plea in his eyes. He decided to consult the Commission and Juan Tizón. Did they consider it appropriate that, in addition to Omarino, Arédomi should also be taken to London? Perhaps the two children would lend greater persuasive power to his report: both had scars from whippings. On the other hand, they were young enough to be educated and integrated into a way of life that was not slavery.

On the eve of the departure in the *Liberal*, Carlos Miranda, head of the South station, arrived in La Chorrera. He brought with him around a hundred indigenous people with the rubber collected in that region over the last three months. He was a fat man in his forties and very light-skinned. By his way of speaking and behaving, he seemed to have received better education than other chiefs. Undoubtedly, he came from a middle-class family. But his record was no less bloody than that of his colleagues. Roger Casement and the other members of the Commission had received several testimonies about the episode of the old bora. A woman who, a few months earlier, in Sur, in a fit of desperation or madness, suddenly began shouting at the boras to fight and not to allow themselves to be humiliated any longer or treated like slaves. Her shouting paralyzed in terror the indigenous people surrounding her. Infuriated, Carlos Miranda lunged at her with the machete he seized from one of his "boys" and beheaded her. Wielding the head of the woman, which drenched him in blood, he explained to the Indians that this would happen to all of them if they did not fulfill their work and imitate the old woman. The

the decapitator was a cheerful and smiling man, talkative and outgoing, who tried to befriend Roger and his colleagues by telling them jokes and anecdotes about the extravagant and picturesque characters he had met in Putumayo.

On Wednesday, November 16, 1910, when he boarded the *Liberal* at the La Chorrera dock to begin his journey back to Iquitos, Roger Casement opened his mouth and took a deep breath. He felt an extraordinary sense of relief. It seemed to him that this departure was cleansing his body and spirit of a heavy anguish he had never felt before, not even during the most difficult moments of his life in the Congo. In addition to Omarino and Arédomi, he was bringing aboard the *Liberal* eighteen Barbadians, five indigenous women married to them, and the children of John Brown, Alian Davis, James Mapp, J. Dyall, and Philip Bertie Lawrence.

The presence of the Barbadians on the ship was the result of a difficult negotiation full of intrigue, concessions, and corrections, involving Juan Tizón, Víctor Macedo, the other members of the Commission, and the Barbadians themselves. All of them had requested guarantees before testifying, as they were well aware that they risked reprisals from the leaders who could send them to jail based on their testimony. Casement had committed to personally bringing them out of the Putumayo alive.

But, in the days leading up to the arrival of the *Liberal* in La Chorrera, the Company launched a cordial offensive to retain the overseers from Barbados, assuring them that they would not be victims of reprisals and promising them salary increases and better conditions to stay in their positions. Víctor Macedo announced that, regardless of their decision, the Peruvian Amazon Company had decided to discount twenty-five percent of the debt they had with the warehouse for the purchase of medicines, clothing, household utensils, and food. Everyone accepted the offer. And, in less than twenty-four hours, the Barbadians informed Casement that they would not leave with him. They would stay working at the stations. Roger knew what that meant: pressures and bribes would ensure that once he departed, they would retract their confessions and accuse him of having fabricated them or having imposed them through threats. He spoke with Juan Tizón. He reminded him that, although he was as affected as he was by the

things that were happening and determined to correct them, he continued to be one of the directors of the Peruvian Amazon Company and could not nor should he influence the Barbadians to leave if they wanted to stay. One of the commissioners, Henry Fielgald, supported Tizón with the same arguments: he also worked, in London, with Mr. Julio C. Arana, and, although he would demand profound reforms in the methods of work in the Amazon, he could not become the liquidator of the company that employed him. Casement felt that the world was crashing down around him.

However, much like one of those convoluted plot twists in French serialized stories, the entire scene transformed radically upon the arrival of the *Liberal* in La Chorrera at dusk on November 12. He brought correspondence and newspapers from Iquitos and Lima. The daily *El Comercio*, from the Peruvian capital, in a lengthy article published two months earlier, announced that the Government of President Augusto B. Leguía, responding to requests from Great Britain and the United States regarding alleged atrocities committed in the rubber plantations of Putumayo, had sent to the Amazon, with special powers, a standout judge of the Peruvian judiciary, Dr. Carlos A. Valcárcel. His mission was to investigate and immediately initiate the corresponding legal actions, bringing, if deemed necessary, police and military forces to Putumayo, so that those responsible for crimes would not escape justice.

This information had the effect of a bomb among the employees of Casa Arana. Juan Tizón informed Roger Casement that Víctor Macedo, very alarmed, had summoned all the station chiefs, even those farther away, to a meeting in La Chorrera. Tizón gave the impression of a man torn by an insoluble contradiction. He was pleased, for the honor of his country and an innate sense of justice, that the Peruvian Government had finally decided to act. On the other hand, he was not blind to the fact that this scandal could mean the ruin of the Peruvian Amazon Company, and, therefore, of himself. One night, over shots of warm whiskey, Tizón confided to Roger that all his assets, except for a house in Lima, were invested in shares of the Company.

The rumors, gossip, and fears generated by the news from Lima caused the Barbadians to once again...

...change their minds. Now, once again they wanted to leave. They feared that the Peruvian leaders would try to evade their responsibilities for the torture and murders of indigenous people by blaming them, the 'foreign blacks,' and they wanted to leave Peru as soon as possible and return to Barbados. They were overwhelmed with insecurity and fear.

Roger Casement, without telling anyone, thought that if the eighteen Barbadians arrived with him in Iquitos, anything could happen. For example, the Company could make them responsible for all the crimes and send them to jail, or attempt to bribe them to change their confessions and accuse Casement of having falsified them. The solution was for the Barbadians to disembark at one of the stops in Brazilian territory before reaching Iquitos and wait there for Roger to pick them up, on the ship *Atahualpa*, which would travel from Iquitos to Europe, with a stop in Barbados. He confided his plan to Frederick Bishop. Bishop agreed with the plan but told Casement that it would be best not to inform the Barbadians until the last minute.

There was a strange atmosphere at the La Chorrera dock when the *Liberal* departed. None of the chiefs went to say goodbye. It was said that several of them had decided to leave, heading to Brazil or Colombia. Juan Tizón, who would stay another month in Putumayo, hugged Roger and wished him good luck. The members of the Commission, who would also remain for a few more weeks in Putumayo, engaged in technical and administrative studies, bid him farewell at the bottom of the gangway. They agreed to meet in London to read Roger's report before he presented it to the Foreign Office.

That first night of traveling on the river, a full moon bathed in reddish light illuminated the sky. It reverberated in the dark waters with a crackling of little stars that looked like glowing fish. Everything was warm, beautiful, and serene, except for the smell of rubber that lingered there, as if it had permanently settled in their noses. Roger spent a long time leaning on the railing of the stern deck, contemplating the spectacle, and suddenly realized that his face was soaked with tears. What a wonderful peace, my God.

During the first days of navigation, fatigue and anxiety prevented him from working on reviewing his files *and* notebooks *and* making sketches for his report. He slept little, with

nightmares. Often he would get up in the night *and* go out on the bridge to observe the moon *and* the stars if it was clear. On the ship, there was a customs administrator from Brazil. He asked if the Barbadians could disembark at any Brazilian port from where they could travel to Manaus to meet him, and then continue together to Barbados. The official assured him that there was not the slightest difficulty. Nonetheless, Roger remained worried. He feared something would happen that might save the Peruvian Amazon Company from any sanction. Having seen the fate of the indigenous people of the Amazon so directly, it was urgent that the whole world knew and did something to remedy it.

Another source of anguish was Ireland. Since he had come to the conviction that only a decisive action, a rebellion, could free his homeland from "losing its soul" due to colonization, as had happened to huitotos, boras *and* other unfortunate ones from Putumayo, he burned with impatience to devote himself body and soul to preparing that insurrection to end so many centuries of servitude for his country.

The day the *Liberal* crossed the Peruvian border — already sailing on the Yavarí — and entered Brazil, the feeling of suspicion and danger that had plagued him disappeared. However, they would soon re-enter the Amazon and navigate it in Peruvian territory, where he was sure he would again feel the anxiety that some unforeseen disaster might come to thwart his mission and render the months spent in Putumayo futile.

On November 21, 1910, at the Brazilian port of La Esperança, on the Yavarí River, Roger disembarked fourteen Barbadians, the women of four of them, and four children. The day before, he had gathered them to explain the risk they faced if they accompanied him to Iquitos. Ever since the Company, colluding with the judges and the police, detained them to hold them responsible for all crimes, until they were subjected to pressure, grievances, and blackmail to retract their confessions that implicated Casa Arana.

Fourteen Barbadians accepted his plan to disembark in La Esperança and take the first ship to Manaus from there, where, protected by the British consulate, they would wait for Roger to pick them up on the *Atahualpa* from the

Booth Line, which operated the Iquitos-Manaus-Pará route. From this last city, another ship would take them home. Roger sent them off with ample provisions he had purchased for them, along with a certificate stating that their fare to Manaus would be covered by the British Government and a letter of introduction for the British consul in that city.

They continued their journey with him to Iquitos, in addition to Arédomi and Omarino, Frederick Bishop, John Brown with his wife and son, Larry Clarke, and Philip Bertie Lawrence, also with two small children. These Barbadians had things to collect and checks from the Company to cash in the city.

The four days remaining until they arrived, Roger spent working on his papers and preparing a memorandum for the Peruvian authorities.

On November 25, they disembarked in Iquitos. The British consul, Mr. Stirs, insisted once again that Roger stay at his house. He accompanied him to a neighboring boarding house where they found accommodation for the Barbadians, Arédomi, and Omarino. Mr. Stirs was anxious. There was great nervousness throughout Iquitos with the news that Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel would soon arrive to investigate the accusations from England and the United States against the Julio C. Arana Company. The fear was not only among employees of the Peruvian Amazon Company but also among the people of Iquitos in general, as everyone knew that the city's livelihood depended on the Company. There was great hostility toward Roger Casement, and the consul advised him not to go out alone as an attack on his life could not be ruled out.

When, after dinner and the customary glass of port, Roger summarized for him what he had seen and heard in Putumayo, Mr. Stirs, who had listened very seriously and silently, could only ask him:

—Is it as terrible as in the Congo of Leopold II, then?

—I'm afraid so, and perhaps worse —Roger replied—. Although I find it obscene to establish hierarchies among crimes of that magnitude.

In his absence, a new prefect had been appointed in Iquitos, a gentleman from Lima named Esteban Zapata. Unlike the previous one, he was not an employee of Julio C. Arana. Since his arrival, he maintained a certain distance.

from Pablo Zumaeta and the other executives of the Company. He knew that Roger was about to arrive and was waiting for him with impatience.

The interview with the prefect took place the following morning and lasted more than two hours. Esteban Zapata was a young man, very dark-skinned, with polite manners. Despite the heat—he was sweating continuously and wiping his face with a large purple handkerchief—he did not take off his woolen coat. He listened to Roger very attentively, astonished at times, interrupting him occasionally to ask for clarifications and with frequent exclamations of indignation ("How terrible! What a fright!"). From time to time, he offered him small glasses of fresh water. Roger told him everything, in great detail, names, numbers, places, focusing on the facts and avoiding comments, except at the end, when he concluded his account with these words:

—In summary, Mr. prefect, the accusations from journalist Saldaña Roca and Mr. Hardenburg were not exaggerated. On the contrary, everything that has been published in London by the magazine *Truth*, although it may seem incredible, is still below the truth.

Zapata, with a discomfort in his voice that seemed sincere, said he felt ashamed for Peru. This was occurring because the State had not reached those remote regions that were beyond the law and lacking any institution. The Government was determined to act. That is why he was here. That is why a reputable judge like Dr. Valcárcel would arrive soon. President Leguía himself wanted to restore Peru's honor by putting an end to these abominable abuses. He had told him so, with those very words. Her Majesty's Government would ensure that the guilty would be punished and the indigenous people protected from now on. He asked whether Roger Casement's report to his Government would be made public. When he replied that, in principle, the report was for internal use by the British Government and that, without a doubt, a copy would be sent to the Peruvian Government for it to decide whether to publish it or not, the prefect breathed a sigh of relief:

—Thank goodness—he exclaimed—. If all this becomes known, it would cause enormous damage to our country's image in the world.

Roger Casement was about to tell him that it would not be the report that would harm Peru the most, but that

things motivating him occurred on Peruvian soil. On the other hand, the prefect wanted to know if the Barbadians who had come to Iquitos—Bishop, Brown, and Lawrence—would confirm their testimonies about Putumayo. Roger assured him that he would send them to the Prefectura first thing tomorrow.

Mr. Stirs, who had served as an interpreter in this dialogue, left the meeting with his head down. Roger had noticed that the consul added many phrases—sometimes real comments—to what he said in English, and these interferences always tended to soften the harshness of the facts related to the exploitation and suffering of the indigenous people. All of this increased his distrust towards this consul, who, despite having been here for several years and knowing very well what was happening, had never informed the Foreign Office about it. The reason was simple: Juan Tizón had revealed to him that Mr. Stirs was doing business in Iquitos and, as such, was also dependent on the Company of Mr. Julio C. Arana. Without a doubt, his current concern was that this scandal would harm him. The consul had a small soul, and his value system was subordinated to his greed.

In the following days, Roger tried to see Father Urrutia, but at the mission, he was told that the superior of the Augustinians was in Pebas, where the yagua indigenous people—Roger had seen them during a stopover there while the *Liberal* was docking, and he had been impressed by the tunics made of spun fibers that these indigenous people used to cover their bodies—as he was going to inaugurate a school there.

So, during the remaining days before boarding the *Atahualpa*, which continued unloading at the port of Iquitos, Roger focused on working on the report. Then, in the afternoons, he would go out for strolls and, a couple of times, he went to the Alhambra cinema in the Plaza de Armas of Iquitos. It had been around for a few months, featuring silent films accompanied by a very out-of-tune orchestra of three musicians. The real spectacle for Roger was not the black-and-white figures on the screen, but the fascination of the audience, Indians from the tribes and mountain soldiers from the local garrison, who watched everything in wonder and confusion.

Another day, he took a walk to Punchana along a dirt path that had turned into a muddy swamp on the return trip.

due to the rain. But the landscape was very beautiful. One afternoon, he attempted to walk to Quistococha—he took Omarino and Arédomi with him—but an endless downpour caught them by surprise and they had to take refuge in the underbrush. When the storm stopped, the path was so full of puddles and mud that they had to hurry back to Iquitos.

The *Atahualpa* set sail towards Manaus and Pará on December 6, 1910. Roger traveled in first class *and* Omarino, Arédomi *and* the Barbadians in the common class. As the ship, on a clear *and* warm morning, moved away from Iquitos *and* the people *and* houses on the banks grew smaller, Roger felt once again in his chest that sense of freedom that comes with the disappearance of a great danger. Not a physical danger, but a moral one. He had the feeling that if he had remained in that terrible place longer, where so many people suffered so unjustly *and* cruelly, he too, simply by being a white *and* a European, would become contaminated, degraded. He thought that, fortunately, he would never set foot in these places again. That thought gave him courage and partly lifted him from the dejection and lethargy that prevented him from working with the focus and drive of the past.

When, on December 10, *dAtahualpa* docked at the port of Manaus at sunset, Roger had already moved past his discouragement and regained his energy and work capacity. The fourteen Barbadians were already in the city. Most had decided not to return to Barbados but to accept work contracts on the Madeira-Mamoré railway, which offered good conditions. The rest continued the journey with him to Pará, where the ship docked on December 14. Here, Roger sought a vessel going to Barbados and embarked the Barbadians, along with Omarino and Arédomi. He entrusted them to Frederick Bishop to take them to the Reverend Frederick Smith in Bridgetown, with instructions to enroll them in the Jesuit school where, before continuing their journey to London, they would receive minimal training to help them face life in the capital of the British Empire.

Then, he searched and found a ship to take him to Europe. He discovered the *SSAmbrose*, from the Booth Line. Since it would only set sail on December 17, he took advantage of these days to visit the places he frequented when he was the British consul in Pará: bars, restaurants, the Botanical Gardens, the immense

colorful and varied market of the port. He felt no nostalgia for Pará, as his time here had not been happy, but he acknowledged the joy exuding from the people, the appearance of the women and the idle boys who strolled by, showing off on the promenades that faced the river. Once again, he told himself that Brazilians had a healthy and happy relationship with their bodies, very different from that of Peruvians, for instance, who, like the English, always seemed uncomfortable with their physiques. In contrast, here, they flaunted it boldly, especially those who felt young and attractive.

On the 17th, the *SS Ambrose* set sail, and during the journey, it was decided that since this ship would arrive at the French port of Cherbourg in the last days of December, he would disembark there and take the train to Paris to spend the New Year with Herbert Ward and Sarita, his wife. He would return to London on the first business day of the following year. It would be a splendid experience to spend a couple of days with that cultured friend couple in their beautiful studio filled with sculptures and African memories, discussing beautiful and elevated things: art, books, theater, music, the best that this contradictory human being had produced, who was also capable of as much evil as that which reigned in the rubber plantations of Julio C. Arana in Putumayo.

When the *sheriff* entered and sat down silently in the corner of the cot where Roger Casement was lying, he was not surprised. Since the *sheriff* had allowed him to take a shower, violating the rules, he felt, without any words exchanged between them, a sense of closeness developing between him and the jailer, one that this man, perhaps without realizing it and perhaps despite himself, had begun to cease hating him and holding him responsible for the death of his son in the trenches of France.

It was twilight, and the small cell was nearly dark. Roger, from the cot, saw the shadowy silhouette of the *sheriff*, wide and cylindrical, very still. He felt it breathing heavily, as if exhausted.

—He had flat feet and could have escaped going to the front lines—he heard him chant, overwhelmed with emotion—. At the first recruitment center in Hastings, when his feet were examined, he was rejected. But he did not resign himself and returned to present himself at another center. He wanted to go to war. Have you ever seen such madness?

—He loved his country, he was a patriot —said Roger Casement, short in stature—. You should be proud of your son, *sheriff*

—What good does it do me to have been a hero, if now he is dead —the jailer replied, in a mournful voice—. He was the only thing I had in the world. Now, it is as if I have also ceased to exist. At times I think I have become a ghost.

It seemed to him that, in the shadows of the cell, the *sheriff* was moaning. But perhaps it was a false impression. Roger remembered

the fifty-three volunteers of the Irish Brigade who remained there, in Germany, at the small military camp of Zossen, where Captain Robert Monteith had trained them in the use of rifles, machine guns, tactics, and military maneuvers, seeking to keep their morale high despite the uncertain circumstances. And the questions he had asked himself a thousand times returned to torment him. What would they have thought when he disappeared without saying goodbye just like Captain Monteith and Sergeant Bailey? That they were traitors? That, after sending them off on that reckless adventure, they themselves were heading off to fight in Ireland, leaving them surrounded by barbed wire, in the hands of the Germans and hated by the Irish prisoners in Limburg, who considered them defectors and disloyal to their comrades who had died in the trenches of Flanders?

Once again, it was said that his life had been a permanent contradiction, a succession of confusions and

gruesome entanglements, where the truth of his intentions and behaviors was always obscured, distorted, and transformed into lies by chance or his own clumsiness. Those fifty-three patriots, pure and idealistic, who had the courage to confront over two thousand of their comrades from the Limburg camp and enlist in the Irish Brigade to fight "alongside, but not within" the German Army for the independence of Ireland, would never know of the titanic struggle that Roger Casement had waged with the German military high command to prevent them from being dispatched to Ireland in the *Aud* along with the twenty thousand rifles he was sending to the Volunteers for the Easter Rising.

—I have the responsibility for those fifty-three brigadiers —Roger told Captain Rudolf Nadolny, in charge of Irish affairs at the Military Headquarters in Berlin—. I urged them to desert from the British Army. According to English law, they are traitors. They will be hanged immediately if the Royal Navy captures them. Something that will happen, inevitably, if the Rising takes place without the support of a German military force. I cannot send those compatriots to death and dishonor. They will not go to Ireland with the twenty thousand rifles.

It had not been easy. Captain Nadolny and the officials of the German high military command tried to blackmail him into submission.

—Very well, we will immediately inform the leaders of the Irish Volunteers in Dublin and in the United States that, in light of Mr. Roger Casement's opposition to the Rising, the German Government is suspending the shipment of the twenty thousand rifles and the five million ammunitions.

It was necessary to discuss, negotiate, explain, while always maintaining calm. Roger Casement did not oppose the Rising; he only opposed the Volunteers and the Army of the People committing suicide by launching themselves to fight against the British Empire without the submarines, zeppelins, and commands of the Kaiser distracting the British Armed Forces and preventing them from brutally crushing the rebels, thus delaying the independence of Ireland for who knows how many years. The twenty thousand rifles were in-

dispensable, of course. He himself would take those weapons to Ireland and explain to Tom Clarke, Patrick Pearse, Joseph Plunkett, and other leaders of the Volunteers the reasons why, in his opinion, the Rising should be postponed.

In the end, he succeeded. The ship with the weaponry, the *Aud*, departed, and Roger, Monteith, and Bailey also set sail in a submarine toward Ireland. However, the fifty-three brigadiers remained in Zossen, not understanding anything, undoubtedly wondering why those liars went to fight in Ireland and left them here after having trained them for an action they were now being deprived of without any explanation.

—When the little one was born, his mother ran off and abandoned both of us —said suddenly the voice of the *sheriff* and Roger jumped on the cot—. I never heard from her again. So, I had to become both a mother and a father to the child. Her name was Hortensia and she was a bit crazy.

It had completely darkened in the cell. Roger could no longer see the silhouette of the jailer. His voice sounded very close and was more like the lament of an animal than a human expression.

—In the first years, almost all my salary went to payments for a woman to breastfeed and raise him —continued the *sheriff*—. I spent all my free time with him. He was always a *docile and* kind boy. Never one of *those* boys who commit misdeeds like stealing and getting drunk, driving their parents crazy. He was an apprentice at a tailor shop, well regarded by his boss. He could have made a career there if he hadn't set his mind on enlisting, despite his flat feet.

Roger Casement didn't know what to say to him. He was saddened by the suffering of the *sheriff* and wanted to comfort him, but what words could ease this poor man's primal pain? He wanted to ask him his name and that of his deceased son, in this way he would feel both of them closer, but he didn't dare interrupt him.

—I received two letters from him —he continued the *sheriff*—. The first one, during his training. He told me that he enjoyed life in the camp and that, after the war, he might stay in the Army. His second letter

was very different. Many paragraphs had been crossed out with black ink by the censor. He didn't complain, but there was a certain bitterness, even some fear, in what he wrote. I never heard from him again. Until a condolence letter arrived from the Army, informing me of his death. He had met a heroic end in the battle of Loos. I had never heard of that place. I went to see on a map where Loos was located. It must be an insignificant little town.

For the second time, Roger felt that moan, akin to the wailing of a bird. And he had the impression that the shadow of the jailer was trembling.

What would happen now with those fifty-three compatriots? Would the high German military command respect the commitments and allow the small Brigade to remain united and isolated in the Zossen camp? It was uncertain. In his discussions with Captain Rudolf Nadolny in Berlin, Roger noticed the disdain that the German military held for that ridiculous contingent of barely fifty men. How different their attitude was at the beginning when, persuaded by Casement's enthusiasm, they supported his initiative to gather all the Irish prisoners in the Limburg camp, assuming that once he spoke to them, hundreds would enlist in the Irish Brigade. What a failure and what disappointment! The most painful of his life. A failure that left him in ridicule and shattered his patriotic dreams. Where did he go wrong? Captain Robert Monteith believed that his mistake was speaking to the 2,200 prisoners all at once, instead of doing so in small groups. With twenty or thirty, a dialogue would have been possible, addressing objections and clarifying what was confusing to them. But in front of a mass of men pained by their defeat and the humiliation of feeling like prisoners—what could he expect? They only understood that Roger was asking them to ally with their enemies from yesterday and today, which is why they reacted so belligerently. There were many ways to interpret their hostility, undoubtedly. But no theory could erase the bitterness of being insulted, called a traitor, coward, cockroach, sellout, by those compatriots to whom he had sacrificed his time, honor, and future. He recalled Herbert Ward's jokes when, mocking his nationalism, he urged him to return to reality and leave that "dream of the Celt" he had entrenched himself in.

urged him to return to reality and leave that "dream of the Celt" he had entrenched himself in.

The day before his departure from Germany, on April 11, 1916, Roger wrote a letter to the imperial chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, reminding him of the terms of the agreement signed between him and the German government regarding the Irish Brigade. As agreed, the brigadiers could only be sent to fight for Ireland and could in no case be used as merely a support force for the German Army in other theaters of the war. It was also stipulated that if the conflict did not end with a victory for Germany, the soldiers of the Irish Brigade should be sent to the United States or to a neutral country that would welcome them, and in no way to Great Britain, where they would be summarily executed. Would the Germans adhere to these commitments? The uncertainty returned to his mind again and again since he had been captured. What if, as soon as he, Monteith, and Bailey set off to Ireland, Captain Rudolf Nadolny dissolved the Irish Brigade and sent its members back to the Limburg camp? They would live among insults, discriminated against by the other Irish prisoners, and facing the daily risk of being lynched.

—I would have liked to have his remains returned to me—the painful voice of the *sheriff* startled him again—. To give him a religious burial in Hastings, where my father and my grandfather were born, like me. They told me no. That, due to the circumstances of the war, the return of his remains was impossible. Do you understand this thing about "circumstances of the war"?

Roger did not respond because he understood that the jailer was not speaking to him, but to himself through him.

—I know very well what that means—the *sheriff* continued—. That there is no longer any trace of my poor son. That a grenade or a mortar pulverized him. In that condemned place, Loos. Or that he was thrown into a mass grave with other dead soldiers. I will never know where his grave is to go and lay some flowers and say a prayer from time to time.

—The main thing is not the tomb but the memory, *sheriff*—said Roger—. That is what matters. To his son, there

wherever he is now, what matters to him is knowing that you remember him with so much affection and nothing more.

The shadow of *sherijfh.2b-2i* made a surprised movement upon hearing Casement. Perhaps he had forgotten that he was in the cell and beside him.

—If I knew where your mother was, I would have gone to see her, to give her the news and to cry together — said the *sherijf* . I bear no grudge against Hortensia for having abandoned me. I don't even know if she is still alive. She never took the trouble to ask about the son she abandoned. She wasn't bad, just a bit crazy, as I told you.

Now, Roger wondered once again, as he had tirelessly done day and night since the dawn of his arrival at Banna Strand, in Tralee Bay, when he had heard the song of the larks and had seen near the beach the first wild violets, why the hell there had been no Irish boat or pilot waiting for the cargo ship *Aud* that was bringing the rifles, the machine guns, and the ammunition for the Volunteers and the submarine where he, Monteith, and Bailey were coming. What had happened? He read with his own eyes the urgent letter from John Devoy to Count Johann Heinrich von Bernstorff, which he forwarded to the German Chancellery, warning that the uprising would be between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. And that, therefore, the rifles should arrive without fail on April 20 at Fenit Pier, in Tralee Bay. There, an experienced pilot from the area and boats and ships with Volunteers would be waiting to unload the weapons. Such instructions were reconfirmed in the same urgent terms on April 5 by Joseph Plunkett to the German Chargé d'Affaires in Bern, who retransmitted the message to the Chancellery and the Military Headquarters in Berlin: the weapons had to arrive in Tralee Bay at dusk on the 20th, not before or after. And that was the exact date when both the *Aud* and the submarine U-19 arrived at the meeting place. What the hell happened that no one was waiting for them and the catastrophe that had buried him in jail occurred, contributing to the failure of the uprising? Because, according to the information given to him by his interrogators Basil Thomson and Reginald Hall, the *Aud* was caught by the Royal Navy.

in Irish waters quite after the agreed date for the landing — risking his safety he had continued waiting for the Volunteers—, which forced the captain of the *Aud* to sink his ship and send to the bottom of the sea the twenty thousand rifles, the ten machine guns, and the five million ammunitions that, perhaps, would have given a different direction to that rebellion that the English crushed with the ferocity that could be expected.

In truth, what had happened Roger Casement could have guessed: nothing grand or transcendental, one of those trivial stupidities, oversights, counter-orders, differences of opinion among the leaders of the Supreme Council of the IRB, Tom Clarke, Sean McDermott, Patrick Pearse, Joseph Plunkett, and a few others. Some of them, or perhaps all, may have changed their minds about the most suitable date for the arrival of *Aud* at Tralee Bay and sent the correction without considering that the counter-order to Berlin could get lost or arrive when the freighter and the submarine were already at sea and, due to the dreadful weather conditions of those days, practically disconnected from Germany. It must have been something like that. A little confusion, a miscalculation, a foolishness, and first-rate armament was now at the bottom of the sea instead of reaching the hands of the Volunteers who had been killed during the week of fighting in the streets of Dublin.

No had he erred thinking that it was a mistake to take up arms without a simultaneous German military action, but he was not happy about it. He would have preferred to be wrong. And to have been there, with those fools, the hundred Volunteers who at dawn on April 24 captured the Post Office on Sackville Street, or with those who tried to storm Dublin Castle, or with those who wanted to blow up the Magazine Fort in Phoenix Park. A thousand times preferable to die like them, with weapons in hand—a heroic, noble, romantic death— rather than in the indignity of the gallows, like murderers and rapists. No matter how impossible and unreal the design of the Volunteers, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and the People's Army may have been, it must have been beautiful and exhilarating—without a doubt, all those who

they were there cried and felt their hearts thundering—to hear Patrick Pearse reading the manifesto that proclaimed the Republic. Although only for a brief interval of seven days, the "dream of the Celt" became reality: Ireland, emancipated from the British occupier, was an independent nation.

—He didn't like that I did this job—the anguished voice of the *sheriff* startled him again—. He was embarrassed that the people in the neighborhood, in the tailor shop, knew that his father was a prison employee. People assume that, by associating day and night with criminals, the guards become infected and also turn into lawbreakers. Has there ever been something more unfair? As if someone didn't have to do this work for the good of society. I gave him the example of Mr. John Ellis, the executioner. He is also a barber in his town, Rochdale, and there, no one speaks ill of him. On the contrary, all the neighbors hold him in high regard. They line up to be served at his barbershop. I am sure that my son would not have allowed anyone to speak badly of me in front of him. Not only did he have a lot of respect for me, but I know he loved me.

Once again, Roger heard that muffled groan and felt the cot shake from the guard's tremor. Did it do him good to vent like this, or did it increase his pain? His monologue was a knife digging into a wound. He didn't know what attitude to take: should he talk to him? Try to comfort him? Listen to him in silence?

—He never stopped giving me something on my birthday—the *sheriff added*. The first salary he received from the tailoring shop, he handed it to me in full. I had to insist that he keep the money. What boy today shows such respect for his father?

The *sheriff* sank back into silence and immobility. There were not many things that Roger Casement had come to know about the Rising: the capture of the Post Office, the failed assaults on Dublin Castle and Magazine Fort, in Phoenix Park. And the summary executions of the main leaders, among them his friend Sean McDermott, one of the first contemporary Irish to have written prose and poetry in Gaelic. How many more

Would they have shot them? Would they have executed them in the same dungeons of Kilmainham Gaol? Or had they taken them to Richmond Barracks? Alice told him that they had confronted James Connolly, the great organizer of the unions, so badly injured that he could not stand, sitting in a chair before the firing squad. Barbarians! The fragmented data of the Rising that Roger had learned from his interrogators, the head of Scotland Yard, Basil Thomson, and the naval captain Reginald Hall of the Admiralty Intelligence Service, from his lawyer George Gavan Duffy, from his sister Nina, and Alice Stopford Green, did not give him a clear idea of what had happened, only of a great disorder with blood, bombs, fires, and gunfire. His interrogators were relaying the news that was arriving in London while the fighting was still going on in the streets of Dublin and the British Army was suppressing the last rebel strongholds. Fleeting anecdotes, loose phrases, scraps that he tried to place in context using his imagination and intuition. From Thomson's and Hall's questions during those interrogations, he discovered that the English Government suspected that he had come from Germany to lead the insurrection. This is how History was written! He, who came to try to put a stop to the Rising, turned into its leader by the British's misdirection. The Government had long attributed to him an influence among the nationalists that was far from reality. Perhaps that explained the campaigns of vilification by the English press when he was in Berlin, accusing him of selling himself to the Kaiser, of being a mercenary in addition to being a traitor, and, in these days, the vile things attributed to him by the London newspapers. A campaign to sink into ignominy a supreme leader who was never and did not want to be! That was history, a branch of fable that pretended to be science.

—Once he had a fever and the nurse's doctor said he was going to die —continued his monologue the *sheriff*—. But between Mrs. Cubert, the woman who loves him—maintained, and me, we took care of him, kept him warm and with love and patience we saved his life. I spent many sleepless nights rubbing his whole body with camphorated alcohol. It did him good. It broke my heart to see him so pe-

tiny, shivering with cold. I hope he did not suffer. I mean, there, in the trenches, in that place, Loos. That his death was quick, without realizing it. That God was not so cruel as to inflict a long agony on him, letting him bleed out slowly or suffocate with mustard gas. He always attended Sunday service and fulfilled his obligations as a Christian.

—What was your son's name, *sheriff*? —asked Roger Casement.

He thought he saw the jailer flinch again in the shadows, as if he had just rediscovered that he was there.

—His name was Alex Stacey —he finally said—. Like my father. And like me.

—I'm glad to know that —said Roger Casement—. When you know their names, you can imagine people better. You feel them, even if you don't know them. Alex Stacey is a name that sounds good. It gives the idea of a good person.

—Well-mannered and helpful —murmured the *sheriff*—. A bit shy, perhaps. Especially with women. I had observed him since he was a child. He was comfortable with boys, he interacted without difficulty. But with women, he became intimidated. He didn't dare to look them in the eyes. And if they spoke to him, he would start to stammer. That's why I'm sure that Alex died a virgin.

The *sheriff* fell silent again, sinking into his thoughts and total immobility. Poor boy! If what his father said was true, Alex Stacey had died without ever knowing the warmth of a woman. The warmth of a mother, the warmth of a wife, the warmth of a lover. Roger, at least, had known, albeit for a short time, the happiness of a beautiful, tender, delicate mother. He sighed. Some time had passed without him thinking of her, something that had never happened before. If there was an afterlife, if the souls of the dead watched from eternity over the fleeting lives of the living, it was certain that Anne Jephson would have been keeping an eye on him all this time, following his steps, suffering and worrying over the mishaps he had in Germany, sharing his disappointments, setbacks, and that dreadful feeling of having made a mistake, of—during his

naive idealism, in that romantic propensity that Herbert Ward mocked so much—having overly idealized the Kaiser and the Germans, believing that they would take on the Irish cause and become loyal and enthusiastic allies of their independent dreams.

Yes, it was certain that his mother had shared with him, during those five indescribable days, her pains, vomiting, dizziness, and cramps inside the submarine U-19 that was transporting him, Monteith, and Bailey from the German port of Heligoland to the shores of Kerry, Ireland. Never in his life had he felt so unwell, both physically and mentally. His stomach could not tolerate any food, except for sips of hot coffee and small bites of bread. The captain of the U-19, Kapitänleutnant Raimund Weissbach, made him take a sip of aguardiente which, instead of alleviating the dizziness, made him vomit bile. When the submarine was sailing on the surface at about twelve miles per hour, it was when it moved the most, and the dizziness caused him the greatest distress. When it submerged, it moved less, but its speed decreased. Neither blankets nor coats eased the cold that gnawed at his bones. Nor that constant feeling of claustrophobia, which had been a foretaste of what he would later feel in Brixton Prison, the Tower of London, or Pentonville Prison.

Without a doubt, due to the dizziness and horrible discomfort during the journey on the U-19, he forgot in one of his pockets the train ticket from Berlin to the German port of Wilhelmshaven. The police who detained him at McKenna's Fort discovered it while searching him at the Tralee station. The train ticket would be presented in his trial by the prosecutor as one of the pieces of evidence that he had come to Ireland from Germany, the enemy country. But even worse was that, in another of his pockets, the Royal Irish Constabulary police found the paper with the secret code given to him by the German Admiralty so that, in case of emergency, he could communicate with the military commands of the Kaiser. How was it possible that he had not destroyed such a compromising document before leaving the U-19 and jumping into the boat that would take them to the beach? It was a question that festered in his conscience like an infected wound. And yet, Roger remembered vividly

Before saying goodbye to the captain and the crew of submarine U-19, at the insistence of Captain Robert Monteith, he and Sergeant Daniel Bailey had checked their pockets one last time to destroy any compromising objects or documents regarding their identity and origin. How could he have been so careless as to have overlooked the train ticket and the secret code? He recalled the satisfied smile with which the prosecutor displayed that secret code during the trial. What harm could that information have caused to Germany if it had fallen into the hands of British intelligence?

What explained those very grave distractions was, without a doubt, his disastrous physical and psychological state, shattered by dizziness, the deterioration of his health in recent months in Germany, and above all, the worries and anxieties that political events — from the failure of the Irish Brigade to learning that the Volunteers and the IRB had decided on the military Rising for Holy Week even without simultaneous German military action — affected his lucidity, his mental balance, causing him to lose reflexes, concentration, and calm. Were these the first symptoms of madness? It had happened to him before, in the Congo and in the Amazon jungle, in the face of the spectacle of mutilations and other tortures and countless atrocities inflicted on the indigenous people by the rubber dealers. On three or four occasions, he had felt his strength abandon him, overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness in the face of the enormity of the evil he perceived around him, that siege of cruelty and ignominy so extensive and overwhelming that it seemed fantastical to confront it and try to overthrow it. Anyone who feels such profound demoralization can commit distractions as grave as those he committed. These excuses relieved him for a few moments; then he rejected them, and the feeling of guilt and remorse became worse.

—I have thought about taking my life —the voice of *sheriff* highlighted again—. Alex was my only reason to keep living. I have no other relatives. Nor friends. Barely acquaintances. My life was my son. Why continue in this world without him?

—I know that feeling, *sheriff*—Roger Casement murmured—. And yet, despite everything, life also has beautiful things. You will find other incentives. You are still a young man!

—I am forty-seven years old, although I may seem much older —the jailer replied—. If I haven't killed myself, it's because of religion. It prohibits it. But it's not excluded that I might do it. If I cannot overcome this sadness, this feeling of emptiness, that now nothing matters, I will do it. A man must live while he feels that life is worth it. If not, then no.

He spoke without drama, with calm certainty. He went back to being still and silent. Roger Casement tried to listen. He thought he heard echoes of a song coming from somewhere outside, perhaps from a choir. But the sound was so faint and so distant that he couldn't decipher the words or the tune.

Why did the leaders of the Rising want to prevent him from coming to Ireland and request the German authorities to keep him in Berlin with the ridiculous title of "ambassador" of the Irish nationalist organizations? He had seen the letters, read and reread the phrases that concerned him. According to Captain Monteith, because the leaders of the Volunteers and the IRB knew that Roger was opposed to a rebellion without a large-scale German offensive that would paralyze the Army and the British Royal Navy. Why hadn't they told him directly? Why send that decision to him through the German authorities? They were perhaps distrustful. Did they think he was no longer reliable? Perhaps they had given credence to those stupid and outrageous rumors spread by the English Government accusing him of being a British spy. He hadn't cared at all about those slanders; he always assumed that his friends and colleagues would understand that these were intelligence operations by the British secret services to sow suspicion and division among the nationalists. Perhaps some of his colleagues had been deceived by those tricks of the colonizer. Well, now they must have been convinced that Roger Casement

he continued to be a fighter faithful to the cause of the Independence of Ireland.

Would those who doubted his loyalty be some of the executed in Kilmainham Gaol? What did the understanding of the dead matter to him now?

He felt the jailer stand up and move toward the door of the cell. He heard his muffled and dragging footsteps, as if he were shuffling his feet. Upon reaching the door, he heard him say:

—What I have done is wrong. A violation of the regulations. No one should address you, and I, the *sheriff*, least of all. I came because I couldn't take it anymore. If I didn't talk to someone, I was going to explode my head or my heart.

—I'm glad you came, *sheriff*—Case-ment whispered—. In my situation, talking to someone is a great relief. The only thing I regret is not being able to comfort you for the death of your son.

The jailer grunted something that could be a farewell. He opened the door of the cell and left. From outside, he closed it again, locking it. The darkness was total once more. Roger turned to the side, closed his eyes, and tried to sleep, but he knew that sleep would not come this night either and that the hours until dawn would be incredibly slow, an endless wait.

He recalled the warden's phrase: "I'm sure Alex died a virgin." Poor boy. To reach the age of nineteen or twenty without having known pleasure, that feverish fainting, that suspension of the surrounding world, that instant feeling of eternity that lasted barely the time it took to ejaculate and yet was so intense, so profound that it swept away all the fibers of his body and made participate and animate even the last remnants of his soul. He could have also died a virgin if, instead of leaving for Africa upon turning twenty, he had stayed in Liverpool working for the Eider Dempster Line. His shyness with women had been the same—perhaps worse—than that of the flat-footed young man Alex Stacey. He recalled the jokes from his cousins, especially from Gertrude, the beloved Gee, when they wanted to make him blush. It was enough for them to talk about girls, to say, for example: "Have you seen how Dorothy looks at you?" "Have you noticed that Malina always manages to sit next to you at picnics?" "She likes you, cousin." "Do you like her too?" The discomfort these jests caused him! He would lose his composure and start to stammer, to mumble, to say silly things, until Gee and her friends, dying of laughter, reassured him: "It was just a joke, don't take it so hard."

have you realized that Malina always manages to sit next to you at picnics?» «She likes you, cousin.» «Do you like her too?» The discomfort these jests caused him! He lost his poise and began to stammer, to mumble, to say silly things, until Gee and her friends, dying of laughter, reassured him: «It was a joke, don't be like that».

However, from a very young age, he had a sharp aesthetic sense, capable of appreciating the beauty of bodies and faces, contemplating with delight and joy a harmonious silhouette, lively and mischievous eyes, a delicate waist, and muscles that denoted the unconscious strength exhibited by predatory animals in the wild. When did he realize that the beauty that exalted him most, adding a touch of unease and alarm, the impression of committing a transgression, was not that of girls but of boys? In Africa. Before stepping onto the African continent, his puritan education, the rigidly traditional and conservative customs of his paternal and maternal relatives, had suppressed any semblance of excitement of that kind in its infancy, remaining true to an environment where even the mere suspicion of sexual attraction between people of the same sex was considered an abominable aberration, rightly condemned by law and religion as an unjustifiable crime and sin with no mitigating factors. In Magherintemple, Antrim, at the home of great-uncle John, in Liverpool, where his uncles and cousins were, photography had been the pretext that allowed him to enjoy—only with his eyes and mind—those slender and beautiful male bodies to which he felt attracted, deceiving himself with the excuse that this attraction was merely aesthetic.

Africa, that atrocious but beautiful continent, of immense suffering, was also a land of freedom, where human beings could be treated unjustly but also express their passions, fantasies, desires, instincts, and dreams, without the reins and prejudices that stifled pleasure in Great Britain. He recalled that afternoon of sweltering heat and high noon sun in Boma, when it was not even a village but a tiny settlement. Suffocated and feeling that his body was catching

fire, he had gone to bathe in a stream on the outskirts, which, just before plunging into the waters of the Congo River, formed small lagoons among the rocks, with murmuring waterfalls, in a place of towering mangoes, coconuts, baobabs, and giant ferns. There were two young bakongos bathing, naked like him. Although they did not speak English, they responded to his greeting with smiles. They seemed to be playing with each other, but soon Roger noticed they were fishing with their bare hands. Their excitement and laughter were due to the difficulty they had in catching the slippery little fish that kept escaping their fingers. One of the boys was very handsome. He had a long, blue-toned body, harmonious, deep-set eyes with a vivid light, and moved in the water like a fish. With his movements, the muscles of his arms, back, and thighs glistened, shining from the water droplets clinging to his skin. On his dark face, with geometric tattoos and sparkling eyes, his very white teeth showed. When they finally caught a fish, amidst great noise, the other boy came out of the stream to the shore, where, as Roger thought, he started to cut and clean it and prepare a bonfire. The one who remained in the water looked him in the eyes and smiled. Roger, feeling a kind of fever, swam towards him, smiling back as well. When he reached his side, he didn't know what to do. He felt embarrassment, discomfort, and at the same time, limitless happiness.

—It's a pity you don't understand me —was heard saying, in a low voice—. I would have liked to take photos of you. To have a conversation. To become friends.

And then, he felt the boy, pushing with his feet and arms, closing the distance that separated them. Now he was so close to him that they could almost touch. At that moment, Roger felt the foreign hands searching for his belly, touching and caressing the erection he had maintained for a while. In the darkness of his cell, he sighed, filled with desire and anguish. Closing his eyes, he tried to resurrect that scene from so many years ago: the surprise, the indescribable excitement, which, nonetheless, did not lessen his apprehension and fear, while his body embraced that of the boy whose stiff penis he also felt rubbing against his legs and abdomen.

It had been the first time he made love, if one could call making love the act of getting excited and ejaculating in the water against the body of the boy who was masturbating him and who undoubtedly also ejaculated on him, although Roger did not notice that. When he emerged from the water and got dressed, the two bakongos offered him some bites of the fish they had smoked on a small bonfire by the edge of the pool created by the stream.

What shame he felt afterwards. The rest of the day, he was stunned, immersed in a sense of remorse that mingled with flashes of joy, the awareness of having crossed the boundaries of a jail and attained a freedom he had always desired, secretly, without ever daring to seek it. Did he have regrets, did he make a resolution to amend? Yes, yes. He had had them. He promised himself, for his honor, for the memory of his mother, for his religion, that it would not happen again, knowing very well that he was lying to himself, that now that he had tasted the forbidden fruit, feeling how his entire being transformed into a vertigo and a torch, he could no longer prevent it from happening again. This was the only, or, in any case, one of the very rare times that enjoyment had not cost him money. Had paying his fleeting lovers for a few minutes or a few hours liberated him, soon, from the charges of conscience that had initially plagued him after those adventures? Perhaps. As if, turned into a commercial transaction —you give me your mouth and your penis and I give you my tongue, my ass and some pounds— those swift encounters, in parks, dark corners, public restrooms, stations, filthy little hotels or right on the street —"like dogs," he thought— with men with whom he could often only communicate through gestures and movements because they did not speak his language, stripped those acts of all moral significance and turned them into a pure exchange, as neutral as buying an ice cream or a pack of cigarettes. It was pleasure, not love. He had learned to enjoy but not to love nor to be loved in return. Once in Africa, in Brazil, in Iquitos, in London, in Belfast or in Dublin, after a particularly intense encounter, some feeling had been added to the adventure and he had said to himself: "I am in love."

False: he was never in love. That didn't last. Not even with Eivind Adler Christensen, to whom he had come to have affection, but not as a lover, perhaps as an older brother or a father. What an unfortunate man. Also in this area, his life had been a complete failure. Many casual lovers —dozens, perhaps hundreds— and not a single loving relationship. Pure, hurried, animalistic sex.

For this reason, when Roger reflected on his sexual and emotional life, he told himself that it had been late and austere, made up of sporadic and always swift adventures, so fleeting, so without consequences, as that one by the stream with waterfalls and pools on the outskirts of what was still a somewhat lost camp in a place in the Lower Congo called Boma.

A deep sadness overwhelmed him, one that had almost always followed his furtive romantic encounters, usually outdoors, like the first one, with men and boys who were often foreigners whose names he barely knew or quickly forgot. They were fleeting moments of pleasure, nothing that could compare to that stable relationship, prolonged over months and years, in which passion was accompanied by understanding, complicity, friendship, dialogue, solidarity, that relationship he had always envied between Herbert and Sarita Ward. It was another of the great voids, the great nostalgias of his life.

He noticed that, where the doorframe of his cell should be, a beam of light was peeking through.

"I will leave my bones on that damned journey," Roger thought when Chancellor Sir Edward Grey told him that, given the contradictory news coming from Peru, the only way for the British Government to know what to expect regarding what was happening there was for Casement himself to return to Iquitos and see on the ground whether the Peruvian Government had done anything to put an end to the injustices in Putumayo or if it was using delaying tactics because it did not want to or could not confront Julio C. Arana.

Roger's health was getting worse. Since his return from Iquitos, even during the few days at the end of the year spent in Paris with the Wards, he was once again plagued by conjunctivitis and his paludism fevers resurfaced. Also, the

hemorrhoids were bothering him again, although without the hemorrhages of the past. As soon as he returned to London in the early days of January 1911, he went to see the doctors. The two specialists he consulted determined that his condition was a result of the immense fatigue and nervous tension from his Amazonian experience. He needed rest, a very peaceful vacation.

But he was unable to take them. The drafting of the report that the British Government urgently required and the multiple meetings of the Ministry where he had to inform about what he had seen and heard in the Amazon, as well as the visits to the Society against Slavery, consumed much of his time. He also had to meet with the English and Peruvian directors of the Peruvian Amazon Company, who, in the first meeting, after listening for nearly two hours to his impressions of Putumayo, were left speechless. Their long faces, open mouths, looked at him incredulously and horrified, as if the floor had started to crack beneath their feet and the ceiling was about to collapse on their heads. They did not know what to say. They said goodbye without asking him a single question.

At the second board meeting of the Peruvian Amazon Company, Julio C. Arana attended. It was the first and last time that Roger Casement saw him in person. He had heard so much about him, listened to such diverse people idolize him as one does with religious saints or political leaders (never with businessmen) or attribute to him horrors and heinous crimes—cynicism, sadism, greed, avarice, disloyalty, fraud, and monumental tricks—that he remained observing him for a long time, like an entomologist studying a mysterious insect still unclassified.

It was said that he understood English, but he never spoke it, due to shyness or vanity. Beside him was an interpreter who translated everything into his ear in a very subdued voice. He was a man shorter than tall, dark-skinned, with mixed-race features, a slight Asian hint in his somewhat slanted eyes, and a very wide forehead, with thin hair carefully combed and parted in the middle. He had a small mustache and a freshly trimmed chin and smelled of cologne. The legend about his obsession with hygiene and appearance must have been true. He dressed impeccably, in a finely tailored suit possibly made in a Savile Row tailor shop. He did not open his mouth while the other directors, this time indeed, questioned Roger Casement with a thousand questions that had undoubtedly been prepared for them by Arana's lawyers. They attempted to make him fall into contradictions and insinuated ambiguities, exaggerations, sensitivities, and scruples of an urban and civilized European who is bewildered by the primitive world.

As Roger Casement responded and added testimonies and precisions that intensified what he had said in the first meeting, he kept casting glances at Julio C. Arana. Still as an idol, Arana did not move from his seat and did not even blink. His expression was impenetrable. In his

hard and cold gaze, there was something inflexible. It reminded Roger of those empty gazes of humanity from the station chiefs of the rubber plantations in Putumayo, the looks of men who have lost (if they ever had it) the ability to distinguish between good and evil, kindness and malice, the human and the inhuman.

This neat little man, slightly stout, was indeed the owner of an empire the size of a European country, possessing the lives and properties of tens of thousands of people, both hated and adored. In that miserable world that was the Amazon, he had amassed a fortune comparable to that of the great magnates of Europe. He had started as a poor child in that little lost town that must have been Rioja, in the high Peruvian jungle, selling from house to house the straw hats woven by his family. Little by little, compensating for his lack of education—only a few years of primary schooling—with superhuman work ethic, a brilliant intuition for business, and a complete lack of scruples, he climbed the social pyramid. From a street vendor of hats across the vast Amazon, he became an enabler for the miserable rubber workers who dared to venture into the jungle at their own risk, supplying them with machetes, rifles, fishing nets, knives, cans for the rubber, preserves, cassava flour, and household utensils, in exchange for a portion of the rubber they gathered, which he took charge of selling in Iquitos and Manaus to export companies. Until, with the money earned, he could transition from enabler and agent to producer and exporter. He initially partnered with Colombian rubber workers, who, being less intelligent or diligent or lacking in morals than him, all ended up selling him their lands, stores, indigenous laborers, and sometimes working for him. Distrustful, he placed his brothers and brothers-in-law in key positions of the company, which, despite its large size and being registered since 1908 with the London Stock Exchange, continued to operate practically as a family business. How much was his fortune worth? The legend undoubtedly exaggerated the reality. But in London, the Peruvian Amazon Company owned this valuable building in the heart of the City, and Arana's mansion on Kensington Road did not pale in comparison to the palaces of the princes and bankers that surrounded it. His house in Geneva and his summer palace in Biarritz were furnished by fashionable decorators and showcased paintings and luxury items. Yet, it was said of him that he led an austere life, that he neither drank nor played nor had lovers, and that he dedicated all his free time to his wife. He had fallen in love with her since childhood—she was also from Rioja—but Eleonora Zumaeta only said yes after many years, when he was already well-off and powerful, and she a school teacher from the little town where she was born.

At the conclusion of the second Board meeting of the Peruvian Amazon Company, Julio C. Arana stated, through the interpreter, that his company would do everything necessary to address any deficiencies or malfunctions in the

rubber plantations of Putumayo immediately. It was the policy of his company to always act within the legality and the altruistic morals of the British Empire. Arana bid farewell to the consul with a bow, without extending his hand.

Writing the *Report on the Putumayo* took him a month and a half. He started drafting it in an office at the Foreign Office, assisted by a typist, but later preferred to work in his apartment on Philbeach Gardens in Earl's Court, near the beautiful little church of St. Cuthbert and St. Matthias, where Roger sometimes went to listen to the magnificent organist. Even there, he was interrupted by politicians, members of humanitarian and anti-slavery organizations, and press people, as rumors that his *Report on the Putumayo* would be as devastating as the one he wrote about the Congo circulated throughout London, leading to speculations *and* gossip in the columns *and* gossips of London, so he requested permission from the Foreign Office to travel to Ireland. There, in a room at the Buswells Hotel on Molesworth Street in Dublin, he completed his work at the beginning of March 1911. Immediately, congratulations from his superiors *and* colleagues poured in. Sir Edward Grey himself called him to his office to praise his *Report*, while suggesting some minor corrections. The text was sent immediately to the Government of the United States, so that London and Washington could pressure the Peruvian Government of President Augusto B. Leguía, demanding, on behalf of the civilized community, that it put an end to slavery, torture, abductions, rapes, and the annihilation of Indigenous communities and bring those incriminated to justice.

Roger was unable to take the break prescribed by the doctors that he desperately needed. He had to meet several times with committees from the Government, Parliament, and the Society against Slavery, which were studying the most practical ways for public and private institutions to act to alleviate the situation of the natives in the Amazon. At his suggestion, one of the first initiatives was to finance the establishment of a religious mission in Putumayo, something that the Arana Company had always obstructed. Now he committed to facilitating it.

Finally, in June 1911, he was able to go on vacation to Ireland. It was there that he received a personal letter from sir Edward Grey. The chancellor informed him that, due to his recommendation, His Majesty George V had decided to honor him in recognition of his services to the United Kingdom in the Congo and the Amazon.

While relatives and friends showered him with congratulations, Roger, who had almost burst out laughing the first few times he heard himself called sir Roger, was filled with doubt. How could he accept this title bestowed by a regime that, deep down in his heart, he felt was his adversary, the same regime that was colonizing his country? On the other hand, didn't he himself serve as a diplomat to this king and this

Government? Never before had he felt so deeply the hidden duplicity in which he had lived for years, working on one hand with discipline and efficiency in service of the British Empire, and, on the other, devoted to the cause of the emancipation of Ireland, increasingly aligning himself not with the moderate sectors seeking, under the leadership of John Redmond, to achieve Autonomy (Home Rule) for Eire, but with more radical groups like the IRB, secretly led by Tom Clarke, whose goal was independence through armed action. Tormented by these hesitations, he chose to thank sir Edward Grey in a polite letter for the honor that was being conferred upon him. The news spread in the press and contributed to increasing his prestige.

The efforts initiated by the British and United States Governments before the Peruvian Government, requesting that the main criminals identified in the *Report*—Fidel Velarde, Alfredo Montt, Augusto Jiménez, Armando Normand, José Inocente Fonseca, Abelardo Agüero, Elias Martinengui, and Aurelio Rodríguez— be captured and prosecuted, initially seemed to bear fruit. The Chargé d'Affaires of the United Kingdom in Lima, Mr. Lucien Gerome, cabled the Foreign Office that the eleven main employees of the Peruvian Amazon Company had been dismissed. Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel, sent from Lima, upon his arrival in Iquitos prepared an expedition to investigate the rubber plantations of Putumayo. However, he could not go with it, as he fell ill and had to travel urgently to the United States for surgery. He appointed a vigorous and respectable person to lead the expedition: Rómulo Paredes, director of the *El Oriente* newspaper, who traveled to Putumayo with a doctor, two interpreters, and an escort of nine soldiers. The commission visited all the rubber stations of the

Peruvian Amazon Company had just returned to Iquitos, where Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel was also back, now recovered. The Peruvian Government had promised Mr. Gerome that as soon as it received the report from Paredes and Valcárcel, it would act.

However, shortly after, Gerome reported again that the Government of Leguía, distressed, had informed him that most of the criminals with arrest warrants had fled to Brazil. The others were perhaps hiding in the jungle or had entered Colombian territory clandestinely. The United States and Great Britain tried to persuade the Brazilian Government to extradite the fugitives to Peru to bring them to justice. But the Brazilian chancellor, the Baron of Rio Branco, replied to both Governments that there was no extradition treaty between Peru and Brazil, and therefore those individuals could not be returned without raising a delicate international legal problem.

Days later, the British Chargé d'Affaires reported that in a private interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Peru, he had unofficially confessed that President Leguía was in an

impossible situation. Due to its presence in Putumayo and the security forces it had to protect its facilities, the Julio C. Arana Company was the only barrier preventing Colombians, who had been reinforcing their border garrisons, from invading that region. The United States and Great Britain demanded something absurd: closing or pursuing the Peruvian Amazon Company meant simply handing over to Colombia the vast territory it coveted. Neither Leguía nor any Peruvian ruler could do such a thing without committing political suicide. And Peru lacked the resources to establish a military garrison strong enough to protect national sovereignty in the remote solitudes of Putumayo. Lucien Gerome added that, for all these reasons, no immediate effective action could be expected from the Peruvian Government, other than statements and gestures devoid of substance.

This was the reason why the Foreign Office decided, before Her Majesty's Government made public its *Report on the Putumayo* and requested international community sanctions against Peru, that Roger Casement should return to the field and verify there in the Amazon, with his own eyes, whether any reforms had been made, whether a judicial process was underway, and whether the legal action initiated by Dr. Carlos A. Valcárcel was true. Sir Edward Grey's insistence forced Roger to accept, telling himself something that he would have many opportunities to repeat in the following months: "I will leave my bones on that damn trip."

He was preparing for their departure when Omarino and Arédomi arrived in London. During the five months they spent under his care in Barbados, Father Smith had taught them English, reading and writing skills, and had accustomed them to dressing in the Western manner. But Roger encountered two children who, despite being fed, and not beaten or flogged, had been saddened and dulled by civilization. They always seemed fearful that the people around them, scrutinizing them endlessly, looking them up and down, touching them, passing their hands over their skin as if they believed them to be dirty, questioning them with inquiries they did not understand and did not know how to respond to, were going to harm them. Roger took them to the zoo, to get ice cream in Hyde Park, to visit his sister Nina, his cousin Gertrude, and to an evening with intellectuals and artists where Alice Stopford Green was present. Everyone treated them kindly, but the curiosity with which they were examined, especially when they had to take off their shirts and show the scars on their backs and buttocks, disturbed them. Occasionally, Roger would discover the children's eyes brimming with tears. He had planned to send the children to be educated in Ireland, on the outskirts of Dublin, at the bilingual school of St. Enda's, which was run by Patrick Pearse, whom he knew well. He wrote to him about it, telling him where both children came from. Roger had given a talk at

St. Enda's about Africa and supported with financial donations the efforts of Patrick Pearse both in the Gaelic League and its publications and in this school to promote the dissemination of the ancient Irish language. Pearse, a poet, writer, militant catholic, educator, and radical nationalist, agreed to take them both, even offering to lower the tuition and boarding fees at St. Enda's. However, by the time he received Pearse's response, Roger had already decided to consent to what Omarino and Arédomi were pleading for daily: to return them to the Amazon. Both were profoundly unhappy in that England where they felt like human anomalies, objects of exhibition that surprised, amused, touched, and sometimes frightened people who would never treat them as equals, always as exotic outsiders.

Roger Casement would think a lot on the return journey to Iquitos about the lesson reality taught him regarding how paradoxical and elusive the human soul was. Both children had wanted to escape from the Amazonian hell where they were mistreated and forced to work like animals with hardly any food. He made efforts and spent a good amount of his limited wealth to pay for their tickets to Europe and to support them for six months, thinking that in this way he was saving them, giving them access to a decent life. And yet, here, though for different reasons, they were as far from happiness, or at least from a tolerable existence, as they had been in Putumayo. Even though they were not beaten and were rather treated with affection, they felt alien, alone, and aware that they would never be part of this world.

Shortly before Roger departed for the Amazon, following his advice, the Foreign Office appointed a new consul in Iquitos: George Michell. It was a magnificent choice. Roger had met him in the Congo. Michell was diligent and worked enthusiastically on the campaign to denounce the crimes under Leopold II's regime. He shared the same stance as Casement regarding colonization. When the situation called for it, he would not hesitate to confront Casa Arana. They had two long conversations and planned a close collaboration.

On August 16, 1911, Roger, Omarino, and Arédomi departed from Southampton, heading towards *Magdalena*, on their way to Barbados. They arrived on the island twelve days later. Since the ship began to sail through the silver-blue waters of the Caribbean Sea, Roger felt in his veins that his sexuality, which had been dormant in recent months due to illness, worries, and heavy physical and mental work, was awakening again and filling his head with fantasies and desires. He summarized his state of mind in his diary with three words: 'I burn again.'

As soon as he disembarked, he went to thank father Smith for what he had done for the two children. It moved him to see how Omarino and Arédomi, who were so reserved in London when it came to expressing their feelings, hugged and patted the priest with great familiarity. Father Smith

took them to visit the Ursulines Convent. In that quiet cloister with small carob trees and purple bougainvillea flowers, where the noise from the street did not reach and time seemed to be suspended, Roger stepped away from the others and sat on a bench. He was watching a line of ants carrying a leaf, like the bearers of the Virgin's palanquin in the processions of Brazil, when he remembered: today was his birthday. Forty-seven! It couldn't be said that he was old. Many men and women his age were in great physical and psychological shape, full of energy, desires, and projects. But he felt old and had the unpleasant sensation of having entered the final stage of his existence. Once, with Herbert Ward in Africa, they had fantasized about what it would be like

his last years. The sculptor envisioned a Mediterranean old age, in Provence or Tuscany, in a rural house. He would have a vast workshop and many cats, dogs, ducks, and chickens, and he would cook dense and seasoned dishes like the *bouillabaisse* for a large family on Sundays. Roger, startled, said: "I will not reach old age, I am sure." It had been a premonition. He vividly remembered that intuition and felt it again as true: he would not grow old.

Father Smith agreed to host Omarino and Arédomi for the eight days they stayed in Bridgetown. The day after their arrival, Roger went to a public bath he had frequented on his previous visit to the island. As he expected, he saw young, athletic, and statuesque men, for here, just like in Brazil, no one was ashamed of their body. Both women and men flaunted it with ease. A very young boy, a teenager of fifteen or sixteen years, disturbed him. He had that typical paleness seen in mulattos, smooth and shiny skin, large and bold green eyes, and from his snug swimsuit, emerged hairless and elastic thighs that caused a beginning of dizziness in Roger. The experience had sharpened in him that intuition which allowed him to quickly know, by imperceptible signs to anyone else — a hint of a smile, a sparkle in the eyes, an inviting gesture of the hand or body — if a boy understood what he wanted and was willing to grant it or, at least, negotiate it. With the pain in his soul, he felt that this beautiful young man was completely indifferent to the furtive messages he sent with his eyes. Nevertheless, he approached him. He conversed for a moment with him. He was the son of a Bajan clergyman and aspired to be an accountant. He studied at a trade academy and soon, taking advantage of a vacation, would accompany his father to Jamaica. Roger invited him for ice cream, but the young man declined.

Returning to his hotel, filled with excitement, he wrote in his diary, using the vulgar and telegrammatic language he employed for the most intimate episodes: «Public baths. Son of

a clergyman. Beautiful. Long, delicate phallus, that stiffened in my hands. I received it in my mouth. Happiness for two minutes». He masturbated and went to bathe again, soaping himself meticulously, while trying to push away the sadness and loneliness that usually overcame him in these situations.

The next day, at noon, while having lunch on the terrace of a restaurant in the port of Bridgetown, he saw Andrés O'Donnell pass by. He called him. The former foreman of Arana, head of the Entre Ríos station, recognized him immediately. For a few seconds, he looked at him with suspicion and a bit of fear. But finally, he shook his hand and agreed to sit with him. He had a coffee and a drink of brandy while they chatted. He confessed that Roger's presence in the Putumayo had been like the curse of a huitoto sorcerer for the rubber dealers. As soon as he left, rumors spread that police and judges with arrest warrants would soon arrive and that all the leaders, foremen, and stewards of the rubber plantations would have problems with the law. And since the Arana Company was English, they would be sent to England and judged there. That's why many, like O'Donnell, had preferred to distance themselves from the area towards Brazil, Colombia, or Ecuador. He had come here with the promise of a job on a sugar plantation, but he didn't manage to get it. Now he was trying to head to the United States, where there seemed to be opportunities in the railroads. Sitting on that terrace, without boots, a gun, or a whip, dressed in an old overall and a tattered shirt, he was nothing more than a poor devil anguished about his future.

—You do not know it, but you owe me your life, Mr. Casement —he told him, as he was already saying goodbye, with a bitter smile—. Although, undoubtedly, you will not believe me.

—Tell me anyway —Roger encouraged him.

—Armando Normand was convinced that if you got out of there alive, all the chiefs of the rubber plantations would go to jail. That it would be best if you drowned in the river or were eaten by a puma or a caiman. You understand me. Like what happened to that French explorer, Eugène Robuchon, who started to make people nervous with all the questions he asked, which is why he disappeared.

—Why didn't they kill me? It was very easy, with the practice you all had.

—I made them see the possible consequences —Andrés O'Donnell stated, with some boastfulness—. Víctor Macedo supported me. That, being you English, and Mr. Julio's Company as well, we would be judged in England according to English laws. And that we would be hanged.

—I am not English but Irish —Roger Casement corrected him—. Things probably wouldn't have happened as you think. In any case, thank you very much. That said, safe travels as soon as possible and don't tell me where. I am obliged to inform that I have seen you and the English Government will soon issue an order to have you detained.

That afternoon, he returned to the public baths. He had better luck than the day before. A burly and smiling dark-skinned man, whom he had seen lifting weights in the exercise room, smiled at him. Taking him by the arm, he led him to a small room where they sold drinks. While they were having a pineapple and banana juice and the man told him his name, Stanley Weeks, he got very close to him, almost brushing one of his legs with his own. Then, with a sly smile full of intentions, he always took him by the arm to a small changing room, the door of which he locked as soon as they entered. They kissed, nibbled on each other's ears and neck, while they took off their pants. Roger watched, choking with desire, Stanley's very dark phallus and the reddish and wet glans, swelling under his gaze. "Two pounds and I'll suck you," he heard him say. "Then, I'll fuck you." He nodded, kneeling down. Later, in his hotel room, he wrote in his diary: "Public baths. Stanley Weeks: athlete, young, 27 years. Huge, very hard, at least 9 inches. Kisses, bites, penetration with a scream. Two *pounds*."

Roger, Omarino, and Arédomi departed from Barbados heading to Pará on September 5, on the *Boniface*, an uncomfortable, small, and overcrowded ship that smelled bad and had terrible food. However, Roger enjoyed the journey to Pará thanks to Dr. Herbert Spencer Dickey, a North American doctor. He had worked for the Arana Company in El Encanto and, in addition to confirming the horrors that Casement was already aware of, shared many anecdotes, some fierce and others humorous, about his experiences in Putu-May. He turned out to be an adventurous spirit who had traveled the world, sensitive, and with good stories to tell. It was pleasant to watch the night fall on deck by his side, smoking, taking swigs of whiskey straight from the bottle, and listening to intelligent conversation. Dr. Dickey approved of the efforts being made by Great Britain and the United States to address the atrocities in the Amazon. However, he was fatalistic and skeptical: things would not change there now or in the future.

—We carry evil in our souls, my friend—he said, half joking, half serious—. We will not rid ourselves of it so easily. In European countries and in mine, it is more concealed; it only manifests itself in full light during a war, a revolution, or a riot. It needs pretexts to become public and collective. In the Amazon, on the other hand, it can show itself openly and commit the worst atrocities without the justifications of patriotism or religion. Just pure, unadulterated greed. The evil that poisons us is everywhere there are human beings, with its roots deeply embedded in our hearts.

But immediately after making these gloomy statements, he would tell a joke or recount an anecdote that seemed to refute them. Roger enjoyed conversing with doctor Dickey, although at the same time, it depressed him a little. The *Boniface* arrived in Pará on September 10 at noon. Throughout the time he was consul, he had felt frustrated and

suffocated. However, several days before arriving at this puerto, he experienced waves of desire remembering the Prague of the Palace. He used to go there at night to pick up one of those boys who wandered looking for clients or adventures among the trees in tight little shorts, showcasing their behinds and testicles.

He stayed at the Commerce Hotel, feeling that the ancient fever rekindled in his body, taking hold of him as he embarked on those journeys in that *Prague of the Palace*. He remembered— or did he invent?— some names from those encounters that generally ended in a rundown little hotel nearby or, occasionally, in some dark corner on the grass of the park. He anticipated those swift and startled entanglements, feeling his heart race. But tonight was also bad for him, because neither Marco, nor Olympio, nor Bebé (were they called that?) showed up, and instead, he was almost mugged by two ragged vagrants, almost children. One of them tried to put his hand in his pocket in search of a wallet he didn't have, while the other asked him for directions. He escaped from them by shoving one hard enough to make him roll on the ground. Seeing his determined attitude, both of them ran away. He returned to the hotel furious. He calmed down by writing in his diary: "Prague of the Palace: one big and very tough. Out of breath. Drops of blood on my underwear. Pleasurable pain."

The next morning, he visited the English consul and a few Europeans and Brazilians he knew from his previous stay in Pará. His inquiries were useful. He located at least two fugitives from Putumayo. The consul and the head of the local Police assured him that José Inocente Fonseca and Alfredo Montt, after spending some time on a plantation by the Yavarí River, were now settled in Manaus, where Casa Arana had secured them jobs at the port as customs controllers. Roger immediately telegraphed the Foreign Office to request that the Brazilian authorities issue an arrest warrant for the pair of criminals. Three days later, the British Foreign Office responded that Petrópolis viewed the request favorably. They would order the police in Manaus to arrest Montt and Fonseca immediately. However, they would not be extradited but tried in Brazil.

His second and third night in Pará were more fruitful than the first. At dusk on the second day, a barefoot boy selling flowers practically offered himself to him when Roger probed him by asking the price of the bouquet of roses he was holding. They went to a small clearing, where, in the shadows, Roger heard the gasps of couples. These street encounters, in precarious conditions always full of risks, filled him with contradictory feelings: excitement and disgust. The flower vendor smelled of armpits, but his thick breath and the heat of his body and the strength of his embrace warmed him up and soon brought him to climax. Upon entering the Hotel do Comércio, he noticed that he had the

pants full of dirt and stains, and the receptionist looked at him puzzled. "I was mugged," he explained.

The following night, in the Praça do Palácio, he had a new encounter, this time with a young man who asked him for a handout. He invited him to stroll, and at a kiosk, they drank a glass of rum. Joao took him to a tin and mat cabin in a miserable neighborhood. While they undressed and made love in the dark on a mat of fibers laid on the dirt floor, hearing dogs bark, Roger was sure that at any moment he would feel the edge of a knife or the blow of a club on his head. He was prepared: in such cases, he never carried much money, nor his watch nor his silver pen, just a handful of bills and coins to allow himself to be robbed a little and thus appease the thieves. But nothing happened to him. Joao accompanied him back near the hotel and bid him farewell by biting his mouth with a big laugh. The next day, Roger discovered that Joao or the flower seller had given him pubic lice. He had to go to a pharmacy to buy calomel, a task always unpleasant: the pharmacist — worse if it was a woman — would usually fix him with a gaze that embarrassed him, and so metimes would throw him a knowing smile that, besides confusing him, infuriated him.

The best, but also the worst experience during the twelve days he spent in Pará was the visit to the Da Matta couple. They were the best friends he had made during his stay in the city: Junio, a civil engineer, and his wife, Irene, a watercolor painter. Young, handsome, cheerful, and friendly, they radiated love for life. They had a beautiful little girl, Maria, with big, smiling eyes. Roger met them at some social gathering or official event because Junio worked for the Department of Public Works of the local government. They saw each other frequently, took walks by the river, and went to the cinema and theater. They welcomed their old friend with open arms. They took him to dinner at a restaurant with very spicy Bahian food, and little Maria, who was already five years old, danced and sang for him, making funny faces.

That night, during the long wakefulness in his bed at the Commerce Hotel, Roger fell into one of those depressions that had accompanied him for almost his entire life, especially after a day or a streak of street sexual encounters. It saddened him to know that he would never have a home like the Da Matta family, that his life would become increasingly lonely as he aged. He paid dearly for those minutes of mercenary pleasure. He would die without having tasted that warm intimacy, a wife with whom to discuss the day's happenings and plan for the future—travels, vacations, dreams—without children to carry on his name and memory when he left this world. His old age, if he were to have it, would be like that of ownerless animals. Just as miserable, for even though he earned a decent salary since becoming a diplomat, he had never been able to save due to the amount of donations and support he gave to humanitarian organizations fighting against slavery, for the rights to survival of peoples.

and primitive cultures, and now, to the organizations that defended Gaelic and the traditions of Ireland.

But, even more than all that, it saddened him to think that he would die without having known true love, a shared love, like that of Junio and Irene, that complicity and silent intelligence that could be sensed between them, the tenderness with which they held hands or exchanged smiles while watching the antics of little Maria. As always during these crises, he lay awake for many hours, and when he finally caught some sleep, he sensed the languid figure of his mother outlined in the shadows of his room.

On September 22, Roger, Omarino, and Arédomi departed from Pará bound for Manaus on the steamship *Hilda* of the Booth Line, a shabby and calamitous ship. The six days they spent sailing on it to Manaus were a torment for Roger, due to the cramped conditions of his cabin, the dirt that prevailed everywhere, the dreadful food, and the clouds of mosquitoes that attacked travelers from dusk until dawn.

As soon as they disembarked in Manaus, Roger resumed the hunt for the fugitives from Putumayo. Accompanied by the English consul, he went to see the governor, Mr. Dos Reis, who confirmed that indeed, an order had arrived from the Central Government in Petrópolis to detain Montt and Fonseca. "And why hadn't the police arrested them yet?" The governor provided a reason that seemed stupid or merely a pretext: they were waiting for him to arrive in the city. "Could they do it immediately, before the two birds flew away?" They would do it today.

The consul and Casement, with the arrest order from Petrópolis, had to make two round trips between the Governor's office and the police. Finally, the Chief of Police sent two agents to arrest Montt and Fonseca at the customs of the port.

The next morning, the distressed English consul came to inform Roger that the arrest attempt had ended in a grotesque, farcical manner. He had just been informed by the head of the Police, who was offering all kinds of apologies and pledging to make amends. The two police officers sent to capture Montt and Fonseca knew them and, before taking them to the station, went to have a few beers with them. They got quite drunk, during which the criminals escaped. Since it could not be ruled out that they had received money to let them go, the implicated police officers were in custody. If corruption was proven, they would face severe penalties. "I'm sorry, sir Roger," the consul said to him, "but even though I didn't say it, I expected something like this. You, who have been a diplomat in Brazil, know it well. It's normal for things like this to happen here."

Roger felt so unwell that his discomfort heightened his physical unease. He stayed in bed for most of the time, with fever and muscle pain, while waiting for the ship's departure to Iquitos. One afternoon, while battling the overwhelming feeling of helplessness, he fantasized in his

diary: «Three lovers in one night, two sailors among them. They did it to me six times! I arrived at the hotel walking with my legs open like a woman in labor». In the midst of his bad mood, the enormity of what he had written caused an attack of laughter. He, so educated and polished with his vocabulary in front of people, always felt, in the intimacy of his diary, an invincible urge to write obscenities. For reasons he could not understand, coprolalia did him good.

Hilda *Hilda* continued her journey on October 3 and, after a troubled crossing with torrential rains and encountering a small barrier, she arrived in Iquitos at dawn on October 6, 1911. There at the port, waiting for her, hat in hand, was Mr. Stirs. His replacement, George Michell, and his wife would arrive soon. The consul was looking for a house for them. This time, Roger stayed not in his residence but in the Hotel Amazonas, near the Plaza de Armas, while Mr. Stirs temporarily took Omarino and Arédomi with him. Both young men decided to stay in the city working as domestic employees, instead of returning to Putumayo. Mr. Stirs promised to help find a family that would wish to employ them and treat them well.

As Roger feared, given the background in Brazil, the news here was not encouraging either. Mr. Stirs did not know how many detainees were among the leaders of Casa Arana from the long list of 237 presumed guilty that Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel had ordered arrested after receiving the report from Rómulo Paredes about his expedition to Putumayo. He was unable to find out because there was a strange silence regarding the matter in Iquitos, as well as about the whereabouts of Judge Valcárcel. He had been untraceable for several weeks. The general manager of the Peruvian Amazon Company, Pablo Zumaeta, who appeared on that list, seemed to be hiding, but Mr. Stirs assured Roger that his hiding was a ruse because Arana's brother-in-law and his wife Petronila were showing off in local restaurants and parties without anyone bothering them.

Later, Roger would remember these eight weeks spent in Iquitos as a slow shipwreck, a gradual sinking into a sea of intrigues, false rumors, blatant lies or half-truths, contradictions, a world where no one spoke the truth, because truth brought enmities and problems or, more frequently, because people lived within a system where it was practically impossible to distinguish the false from the true, reality from deception. Since his years in the Congo, he had known that desperate feeling of having fallen into quicksand, a muddy ground that was swallowing him, where his efforts only served to sink him deeper into that viscous matter that would ultimately engulf him. He had to get out of here as soon as possible!

The day after arriving, he went to visit the prefect of Iquitos. There was a new one again. Mr. Adolfo Gamarra — sturdy mustache, protruding belly, smoking cigar,

nervous and damp hands— welcomed him in his office with hugs and congratulations:

—Thanks to you —he said, opening his arms theatrically and patting him—, a monstrous social injustice has been uncovered in the heart of the Amazon. The Government and the Peruvian people acknowledge this, Mr. Casement.

Immediately afterwards, he added that the report which Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel had prepared at the request of the Peruvian Government to satisfy the requirements of the English Government was "formidable" and "devastating." It consisted of nearly three thousand pages and confirmed all the accusations that England had conveyed to President Augusto B. Leguía.

However, when Roger asked if he could have a copy of the report, the prefect replied that it was a state document and that it was beyond his jurisdiction to authorize a foreigner to read it. The consul had to submit a request in Lima to the Supreme Government, through the Chancellery, and would undoubtedly receive permission. When Roger asked what he could do to arrange an interview with Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel, the prefect became very serious and recited smoothly:

—I have no idea where doctor Valcárcel is. His mission has ended, and I understand he has left the country.

Roger left the Prefectura completely bewildered. What was really happening? This guy had only told him lies. That same afternoon, he went to the office of the newspaper *El Oriente* to speak with its director, doctor Rómulo Paredes. He encountered a fifty-year-old man, very dark-skinned, in short sleeves, covered in sweat, wavering and in a panic. He had a few gray hairs. As soon as Roger began to talk, he silenced him with a peremptory gesture that seemed to say, "Be careful, the walls have ears." He grabbed him by the arm and took him to a small bar on the corner called La Chipirona. He had him sit at a secluded little table.

—I beg you to forgive me, sir consul —he said, constantly glancing around suspiciously—. I can't and shouldn't tell you much. I am in a very compromised situation. Being seen with you represents a great risk for me.

He was pale, his voice trembled, and he had started to bite one of his nails. He asked for a shot of aguardiente and gulped it down. He listened in silence to the account Roger gave him of his interview with prefect Gamarra.

—He is a sovereign fraud —he finally said, having been emboldened by the drink—. Gamarra has a report of mine, corroborating all the accusations from Judge Valcárcel. I handed it to him in July. More than three months have passed, and he still hasn't sent it to Lima. Why do you think he has held it for so long? Because everyone knows that Prefect Adolfo

Gamarra is also, like half of Iquitos, an employee of Arana.

Regarding Judge Valcárcel, he said that he had left the country. He did not know his whereabouts, but he did know that if he had stayed in Iquitos, he would probably already be a corpse. He abruptly got to his feet:

—Which is what will happen to me as well at any moment, consul—he wiped the sweat from his brow as he spoke, and Roger thought he was about to break down in tears—. Because I, unfortunately, cannot leave. I have a wife and children, and my only business is the newspaper.

He left without even saying goodbye. Roger returned to the prefect, furious. Mr. Adolfo Gamarra confessed to him that, indeed, the report prepared by Dr. Paredes had not been able to be sent to Lima "due to logistical problems, which fortunately have now been resolved." It would depart this very week "and with an escort for greater security, since President Leguía himself urgently demands it."

Everything was like that. Roger felt as if he were being rocked in a lulling whirlpool, turning round and round in place, manipulated by tortuous and invisible forces. All the arrangements, promises, information, decomposed and dissolved without the facts ever corresponding to the words. What was done and what was said were worlds apart. The words denied the facts, and the facts contradicted the words, and everything operated in a generalized deceit, in a chronic divorce between saying and doing that everyone practiced.

Throughout the week, he was making various inquiries about Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel. Like Saldaña Roca, the character inspired him with respect, affection, pity, and admiration. Everyone promised to help him, to inform themselves, to deliver messages, to locate him, but they sent him from one place to another without anyone giving him the slightest serious explanation regarding his situation. Finally, seven days after arriving in Iquitos, he managed to escape from that maddening web thanks to an Englishman living in the city. Mr. F. J. Harding, manager of John Lilly & Company, was a tall and stiff man, a bachelor and almost bald, one of the few merchants in Iquitos who did not seem to dance to the rhythms of the Peruvian Amazon Company.

—No one tells him or will tell him what happened with Judge Valcárcel because they fear getting caught up in the mess, sir Roger—they were conversing in Mr. Harding's cottage, near the boardwalk. There were engravings of Scottish castles on the walls. They were having a coconut soda—. The influences of

Arana in Lima succeeded in having Judge Valcárcel removed, accused of misconduct and I don't know how many other falsities. The poor man, if he is alive, must bitterly regret having made the worst mistake of his life by accepting this mission. He came to step into the wolf's den *and* has paid dearly for it. He was very respected in Lima, it seems. Now they have sunk him into the dirt and possibly murdered him. No one knows where

he is. Talking about him has become a taboo in Iquitos.

Indeed, the story of the upright and daring doctor Carlos A. Valcárcel, who came to Iquitos to investigate the "horrors of Putumayo," could not be more tragic. Roger reconstructed it over the course of these weeks like a puzzle. When he had the audacity to issue an arrest order against 237 people for alleged crimes, almost all of them linked to the Peruvian Amazon Company, a shiver ran through the Amazon. Not only the Peruvian one but also the Colombian and Brazilian. Immediately, the machinery of the empire of Julio C. Arana felt the blow and began its counter-offensive. The police could only locate nine of the 237 accused. Of the nine, the only truly important one was Aurelio Rodríguez, a section chief in Putumayo, responsible for an extensive record of kidnappings, rapes, mutilations, kidnappings, and murders. However, the nine detainees, including Rodríguez, filed a *habeas corpus* with the Superior Court of Iquitos, and the Tribunal granted them provisional release while studying their case.

—Unfortunately—the prefect explained to Roger, without blinking and with a pained expression—, taking advantage of provisional freedom, those bad citizens fled. As you cannot ignore, it will be difficult to find them in the vastness of the Amazon if the Superior Court validates the arrest warrant.

The Court was in no hurry to do so, for when Roger Casement went to ask the judges when they would review the case file, they explained that this was done "in strict order of the arrival of cases." There was a bulky number of files in line "before the aforementioned one that concerns you." One of the interns at the Tribunal took the liberty of adding, in a mocking tone:

—Here, justice is certain but slow, and these procedures can take many years, Mr. Consul.

Pablo Zumaeta, from his supposed hideout, orchestrated the judicial offensive against Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel, initiating, through front men, multiple complaints for misconduct, embezzlement, false testimony, and various other crimes. One morning, a bora woman and her young daughter, accompanied by an interpreter, showed up at the Iquitos police station to accuse Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel of "attacking the honor of a minor." The judge had to spend a large part of his time defending himself from those slanderous fabrications, declaring, running around, and writing orders instead of focusing on the investigation that brought him to the jungle. The whole world was collapsing around him. The small hotel where he was staying, El Yurimaguas, fired him. He found no shelter or boarding house in the city that dared to take him in. He had to rent a small room in Nanay, a neighborhood full of garbage dumps and ponds of putrid water, where, at night, he felt the little runs of rats under his hammock and stepped on cockroaches.

Todo esto lo fue sabiendo Roger Casement a pedazos, con detalles susurrados aquí y allá, mientras aumentaba su admiración por ese magistrado al que hubiera querido estrecharle la mano y felicitarlo por su decencia y su coraje. ¿Qué había sido de él? Lo único que pudo saber con certeza, aunque la palabra «certeza» no parecía tener arraigo firme en el suelo de Iquitos, era que, cuando llegó la orden de Lima destituyéndolo, Carlos A. Valcárcel ya había desaparecido. Desde entonces nadie en la ciudad podía dar cuenta de su paradero. ¿Lo habían matado? Se

he was repeating the story of journalist Benjamín Saldaña Roca. The hostility against him had been so great that he had no choice but to flee. In a second interview, at Mr. Stirs' house, the director of *El Oriente*, Rómulo Paredes, told him:

—I myself advised Judge Valcárcel to move away before they killed him, sir Roger. He had already received quite a few warnings.

What kind of warnings? Provocations in the restaurants and bars where Judge Valcárcel would go to grab a bite or have a beer. Suddenly, a drunk would insult him and challenge him to fight, showing him a knife. If the judge went to file a complaint with the police or the Prefectura, they would make him fill out endless forms detailing the events, assuring him that they would "investigate your complaint."

Roger Casement soon felt as Judge Valcárcel must have felt before escaping from Iquitos or being eliminated by one of Arana's hired assassins: deceived everywhere, turned into the laughingstock of a community of puppets whose strings were pulled by the Peruvian Amazon Company, to which all of Iquitos obeyed with vile obsequiousness.

He had proposed to return to Putumayo, although it was evident that if here in the city the Arana Company had managed to evade sanctions and avoid the announced reforms, it was obvious that there in the rubber plantations everything would remain the same or worse than before concerning the indigenous people. Rómulo Paredes, Mr. Stirs, and Prefect Adolfo Gamarra urged him to abandon that trip.

—You will not come out alive from there, and your death will be of no use —the director of *El Oriente*— assured him. Mr. Casement, I am sorry to say this to you, but you are the most hated man in Putumayo. Neither Saldaña Roca, nor the gringo Hardenburg, nor Judge Valcárcel are as detested as you are. I returned alive from Putumayo by a miracle.

But that miracle will not happen again if you go there to be crucified. Besides, do you know something? The most absurd thing is that they will have you killed with poisoned darts from the blowpipes of those boras and huitotos that you defend. Don't go, don't be foolish. Don't commit suicide.

The prefect Adolfo Gamarra, barely informed of his travel preparations to Putumayo, came to find him at Hotel Amazonas. He seemed very alarmed. He took him to have a beer at a bar where they played Brazilian music. It was the only time Roger felt that the official spoke to him with sincerity.

—I beg you to give up that madness, Mr. Casement—he said, looking him in the eyes—. I can't guarantee your protection. I'm sorry to tell you this, but it's the truth. I don't want to carry your corpse on my service record. It would be the end of my career. I say this with my heart in my hand. You will not reach Putumayo. I've managed, with great effort, to ensure that no one here touches you. It hasn't been easy at all, I swear. I've had to beg and threaten those in charge. But my authority disappears outside the city limits. Don't go to Putumayo. For you and for me. Please don't ruin my future, for all that you hold dear. I speak to you as a friend, truly.

But what finally made him give up the trip was an unexpected and abrupt visit in the middle of the night. He was already lying down and about to fall asleep when the receptionist at the Hotel Amazonas came to knock on his door. A gentleman was looking for him, saying it was very urgent. He got dressed, went downstairs, and found Juan Tizón. He hadn't heard from him since the trip to Putumayo, in which this high-ranking official of the Peruvian Amazon Company collaborated with the Commission so loyally. He was no longer the self-assured man that Roger remembered. He looked aged, exhausted, and above all, demoralized.

They went to look for a quiet place, but it was impossible because the night in Iquitos was filled with noise, drunkenness, gambling, and sex. They resigned themselves to sitting in Pim Pam, a bar-boîte where they had to shake off two Brazilian mulattoes who were hounding them to go dance. They ordered a couple of beers.

Always with the chivalrous demeanor and the elegant manners that Roger remembered, Juan Tizón spoke to him in a way that seemed absolutely sincere.

—Nothing has been done about what the Company offered, despite the fact that, following President Leguía's request, we agreed upon it in a Board meeting. When I presented my report, everyone, including Pablo Zumaeta and Arana's brothers and brothers-in-law, agreed with me that radical improvements needed to be made at the stations. To avoid problems with the law and for moral and Christian reasons. It's all just empty talk. Nothing has been done and nothing will be done.

He told her that, except for instructing the employees in Putumayo to take precautions and erase the traces of past abuses—such as disappearing the corpses, for example—, the Company had facilitated the escape of the main individuals implicated in the report that London sent to the Peruvian Government. The system of rubber collection using forced indigenous labor continued as before.

—It was enough for me to step on Iquitos to realize that nothing had changed —Roger nodded—. *And you, Mr. Juan?*

—I'm returning to Lima next week and I don't think I'll come back here. My situation at the Peruvian Amazon Company has become unsustainable. I preferred to resign before they fired me. They will buy back my shares, but at a miserable price. In Lima, I will have to take care of other matters. I do not regret it, despite having lost ten years of my life working for Arana. Even though I have to start from scratch, I feel better. After what we saw in Putumayo, I felt dirty and guilty within the Company. I discussed it with my wife and she supports me.

They talked for about an hour. Juan Tizón also insisted that Roger should not return to Putumayo for any reason: he would gain nothing except risk being killed, and perhaps, in one of those fits of cruelty that he had already witnessed during his time in the rubber plantations.

Roger dedicated himself to preparing a new report for the Foreign Office. He explained that no reforms had been made nor the slightest sanction applied to the criminals of the Peruvian Amazon Company. There was no hope for anything to be done in the future. The blame lay both with the firm of Julio C. Arana and the public administration, and indeed, with the entire country. In Iquitos, the Peruvian Government was nothing more than an agent of Julio C. Arana. The power of his company was such that all political, police, and judicial institutions actively worked to allow him to continue exploiting the indigenous people without any risk, because all officials received money from it or feared its reprisals.

As if to confirm this, during those days, suddenly, the Superior Court of Iquitos ruled on the reconsideration requested by the nine detainees. The ruling was a masterpiece of cynicism: all judicial actions were suspended while the 237 people on the list established by Judge Valcárcel were not detained. With just a small group of captured individuals, any investigation would be truncated and illegal, the judges decreed. Therefore, the nine were definitively released and the case suspended until the police forces delivered the 237 suspects to justice, something that, of course, would never happen.

A few days later, another even more grotesque event took place in Iquitos, testing Roger Casement's capacity for astonishment. As he walked from his hotel to Mr. Stirs' house, he saw people crowded into two places that appeared to be State offices, as they displayed the coat of arms and flag of Peru on their facades. What was happening?

—There are municipal elections —Mr. Stirs explained to him with that lackluster voice of his that seemed impervious to excitement—. Very particular elections because, according to Peruvian electoral law, to be eligible to vote, one must be a property owner and know how to read and write. This reduces the number of voters to just a few hundred people. In reality, the elections are decided in the offices of Casa Arana. The names of the winners and the percentages they receive in the voting.

It had to be because that night a small rally took place in the Plaza de Armas with music bands and the distribution of aguardiente, which Roger observed from afar, celebrating the election of don Pablo Zumaeta as the new mayor of Iquitos! Julio C. Arana's brother-in-law emerged from his "hiding place," vindicated by the people of Iquitos — as he stated in his thank-you speech — of the slanders from the Anglo-Colombian conspiracy, determined to continue fighting, unyieldingly, against the enemies of Peru and for the progress of the Amazon. After the distribution of alcoholic beverages, there was a popular dance with fireworks, guitars, and drums that lasted until dawn. Roger chose to return to his hotel to avoid being lynched.

George Michell and his wife finally arrived in Iquitos on a ship from Manaus on November 30, 1911. Roger was already packing for his departure. The arrival of the new British consul was preceded by frantic efforts from Mr. Stirs and Casement himself to find a house for the couple. "Great Britain has fallen into disgrace here because of you, sir Roger," said the outgoing consul. "No one wants to rent me a house for the Michells, even though I offer to pay over the odds. Everyone is afraid of offending Arana; everyone refuses." Roger sought help from Rómulo Paredes, and the director of *El Oriente* solved the problem. He rented the house himself and sublet it to the British consulate. It was an old and dirty house that had to be hurriedly renovated and furnished in any way to receive its new guests. Mrs. Michell was a cheerful and resourceful little woman whom Roger only met at the foot of the ship's gangway, at the port, on the day of their arrival. She was not discouraged by the condition of her new home or by the place she was stepping into for the first time. She seemed unflappable. Immediately, even before unpacking, she energetically and good-humoredly started cleaning everything.

Roger had a long conversation with his old friend and colleague George Michell in Mr. Stirs' small room. He informed him in great detail about the situation and did not hide a single one of the difficulties he would face in his new position. Michell, a chubby forty-something who displayed the same energy as his wife in all his gestures and movements, took notes in a little notebook, with brief pauses to ask for clarification. Then, instead of appearing demoralized or complaining about what awaited him in Iquitos, he

simply said with a big smile: "Now I know what it's about and I'm ready for the fight."

The last two weeks in Iquitos, Roger was once again irresistibly overtaken by the demon of sex. During his previous stay, he had been very cautious, but now, despite knowing the hostility many people linked to the rubber business had toward him and that they could set a trap, he did not hesitate to go out at night to stroll along the boardwalk by the river, where there were always women and men looking for clients. This is how he met Alcibiades Ruiz, if that was indeed his name. He took him to the Hotel Amazonas. The night doorman had no objections after Roger slipped him a tip. Alcibiades agreed to pose for him, striking the classical statue poses he suggested. After some haggling, he agreed to undress. Alcibiades was a mixed-race man of white and indigenous descent, a cholo, and Roger noted in his diary that this racial mix produced a type of male of great physical beauty, even superior to that of the "caboclos" from Brazil, men with slightly exotic features that blended the softness and sweetness of Indigenous people with the rugged virility of Spanish descendants. Alcibiades and he kissed and touched each other but did not make love, neither that day nor the following day when Alcibiades returned to the Hotel Amazonas. It was morning and Roger was able to photograph him naked in several poses. When he left, he wrote in his diary: "Alcibiades Ruiz. *Cholo*. Movements of a dancer. Small and long, that when it hardened curved like a bow. Entered me like a hand in a glove."

In those days, the director of *El Oriente*, Rómulo Paredes, was attacked on the street. After leaving the printing house of his newspaper, he was assaulted by three ill-tempered individuals who smelled of alcohol. According to what he told Roger, whom he went to see at the hotel immediately after the incident, they would have beaten him to death if he hadn't been armed and scared off his three attackers by firing into the air. He was carrying a suitcase. Don Rómulo was so shaken by what happened that he refused to go out for a drink on the street as Roger suggested. His resentment and indignation against the Peruvian Amazon Company were boundless:

—I have always been a loyal collaborator of Casa Arana and I pleased them in everything they wanted—he complained. They had sat at two corners of the bed and were speaking in semi-darkness, because the small flame of the lighter barely illuminated a corner of the room—. When I was a judge and when I published *El Oriente*. I never opposed their requests, even though many times they went against my conscience. But I am a realistic man, Mr. consul, I know which battles cannot be won. This commission, going to Putumayo at the behest of Judge Val-jail, I never wanted to take it on. From the very first moment I knew I would get into trouble. They forced me. Pablo Zumaeta himself demanded it from me. I made that trip just following their orders. My report, before delivering it to the prefect, I had Mr. Zumaeta read it. He returned it to me without comments. Doesn't that mean he accepted it? Only then did I deliver it to

perfect. And it turns out that they have now declared war on me and want to kill me. This attack is a warning for me to leave Iquitos. Where to? I have a wife, five children, and two maids, Mr. Casement. Have you seen such ingratitude as that of these people? I also recommend that you leave as soon as possible. Your life is in danger, sir Roger. So far, nothing has happened to you because they think that if they kill an Englishman, especially a diplomat, there will be an international mess. But don't trust them. Those scruples can disappear in any drunkenness. Take my advice and get out of here, my friend.

—I am not English, but Irish —Roger gently corrected him.

Rómulo Paredes handed him the suitcase he had brought with him.

—Here you have all the documents I collected in Putumayo that my work was based on. It was wise of me not to give them to Prefect Adolfo Gamarra. They would have met the same fate as my report: to rot in the Prefecture of Iquitos. Take them, I know you will put them to good use. I apologize for burdening you with one more parcel, though.

Roger left four days later, after saying goodbye to Omarino and Arédomi. Mr. Stirs had placed them in a carpentry shop in Nanay where, in addition to working as the owner's domestic help, a Bolivian, they would be apprentices in his workshop. At the port, where Stirs and Michell went to see him off, Roger learned that the volume of rubber exported in the last two months had exceeded last year's mark. What better proof that nothing had changed and that huitotos, boras, andoques, and other Indigenous people from Putumayo continued to be squeezed without mercy?

The five days of the journey to Manaus barely left his compartment. He felt demoralized, sick, and disgusted with himself. He hardly ate and only appeared on the deck when the heat in the narrow cabin became unbearable. As they descended the Amazon and the riverbed widened, and its shores became lost to sight, he thought he would never return to this jungle. And in the paradox — he had often thought the same in Africa, navigating the Congo River— of that majestic landscape, with those flocks of pink herons and shrill little parrots that occasionally flew over the ship, and the trail of small fish that followed the vessel jumping and twisting as if to attract the travelers' attention, resided the dizzying suffering caused by the greed of those avaricious and bloodthirsty beings he had encountered in Putumayo. He remembered the calm face of Julio C. Arana in that Board meeting in London, of the Peruvian Amazon Company. He swore again that he would fight to the last drop of energy left in his body so that that well-groomed little man who had set this machinery in motion and was the main beneficiary of that apparatus that crushed human beings indiscriminately would receive some punishment for it.

satisfy his hunger for wealth. Who would dare to say now that Julio C. Arana did not know what was happening in Putumayo? He had set up a spectacle to deceive everyone—especially the Peruvian Government and the British Government—in order to continue extracting rubber from these jungles as mistreated as the indigenous people who inhabited them.

In Manaus, where he arrived in mid-December, he felt better. While waiting for a ship to depart for Pará and Barbados, he was able to work confined in his hotel room, adding comments and details to his report. He spent an afternoon with the English consul, who confirmed that, despite his complaints, the Brazilian authorities had not taken any effective action to capture Montt, Agüero, or the other fugitives. Rumors circulated everywhere that several of the former leaders of Julio C. Arana in the Putumayo were now working on the under-construction Madeira-Mamoré railway.

During the week he stayed in Manaus, Roger led a spartan life, not going out at night in search of adventures. He took walks along the riverbanks and through the city's streets, and when he wasn't working, he spent many hours reading books on Ancient History of Ireland that Alice Stopford Green had recommended to him. Becoming passionate about the affairs of his country would help him clear his mind of the images of the Putumayo and the intrigues, lies, and abuses of the widespread political corruption he had witnessed in Iquitos. However, it wasn't easy for him to concentrate on Irish affairs as he constantly remembered that he had an unfinished task and that in London, he needed to bring it to completion.

On December 17, he set sail for Pará, where he finally found a message from the Foreign Office. The Chancellery had received his telegrams sent from Iquitos and was aware that, despite the promises of the Peruvian Government, nothing substantial had been done against the abuses in Putumayo, apart from allowing the accused to flee.

On Christmas Eve, he boarded the *Denis*, a comfortable ship carrying only a handful of passengers. He had a smooth crossing to Bridgetown. There, the Foreign Office had arranged a ticket for him on the *SS Terence* heading to New York. The English authorities had decided to take firm action against the British company responsible for what was happening in Putumayo and wanted the United States to join their efforts and protest together to the Government of Peru for its unwillingness to respond to the demands of the international community.

In the capital of Barbados, while waiting for the ship to depart, Roger led a life as chaste as in Manaus: no visits to public baths, no nocturnal escapades. He had entered once again into one of those periods of sexual abstinence that sometimes lasted many months. These were times when, generally, his mind was filled with religious worries. In Bridgetown, he visited father Smith daily. He had long conversations with him.

They discussed the New Testament, which he used to carry with him on his travels. He reread it from time to time, alternating this reading with that of Irish poets, especially William Butler Yeats, from whom he had learned some poems by heart. He attended a mass at the Ursulines Convent and, as had happened before, he felt the urge to take communion. He told father Smith about it, and he, smiling, reminded him that he was not catholic but a member of the Anglican Church. If he wanted to convert, he offered to help him take the first steps. Roger was tempted to do so, but he regretted it, thinking of the weaknesses and sins he would have to confess to that good friend, father Smith.

On December 31, he departed on the *SS Terence* bound for New York, and there, immediately, without even time to admire the skyscrapers, he took the train to Washington D.C. The British Ambassador, James Bryce, surprised him by announcing that the President of the United States, William Howard Taft, had granted him an audience. He and his advisors wanted to hear directly from sir Roger, who was personally acquainted with the events occurring in Putumayo and was a trusted man of the British Government, about the situation in the rubber plantations and whether the campaign being carried out in the United States and Great Britain by various churches, humanitarian organizations, journalists, and liberal publications was true or merely demagoguery and exaggeration as claimed by the rubber companies and the Peruvian Government.

Staying at Ambassador Bryce's residence, treated like royalty and being called sir Roger everywhere he went, Casement went to a barber to get his hair and beard cut and to have his nails done. He also renewed his wardrobe in the elegant shops of Washington D.C. Many times during these days, he thought about the contradictions of his life. Less than two weeks ago, he was a poor devil threatened with death in a cheap hotel in Iquitos, and now, he, an Irishman dreaming of Ireland's independence, embodied a representative sent by the British Crown to persuade the President of the United States to help the Empire demand that the Peruvian Government put an end to the disgrace of the Amazon. Wasn't life something absurd, a dramatic performance that suddenly turned into farce?

The three days he spent in Washington D.C. were dizzying: daily working sessions with officials from the Department of State and a long personal interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. On the third day, he was received at the White House by President Taft accompanied by several advisors and the Secretary of State. An instant before beginning his presentation on Putumayo, Roger had a hallucination: he was not there as a diplomatic representative of the British Crown, but as a special envoy of the newly established Republic of Ireland. He had been sent by his Provisional Government to defend the reasons that had led the vast majority of the Irish, in a plebiscitary act, to break their ties with Great Britain and

proclaim its independence. The new Ireland wanted to maintain friendly and cooperative relations with the United States, with whom it shared adherence to democracy and where a vast community of Irish origin lived.

Roger Casement fulfilled his obligations impeccably. The hearing was supposed to last half an hour but extended three times longer, as President Taft himself, who listened attentively to his report on the situation of the indigenous people in Putumayo, subjected him to a careful interrogation and asked for his opinion on the best way to compel the Peruvian Government to end the crimes in the rubber plantations. Roger's suggestion that the United States open a consulate in Iquitos to work alongside the British consulate in denouncing the abuses was well received by the president. And indeed, a few weeks later, the United States would send a career diplomat, Stuart J. Fuller, as consul to Iquitos.

More than the words he heard, it was the surprise and indignation with which President Taft and his collaborators listened to his account that convinced Roger that the United States would now decisively collaborate with England in denouncing the situation of the indigenous Amazonian people.

In London, despite his physical condition always being affected by fatigue and old ailments, he dedicated himself wholeheartedly to completing his new report for the Foreign Office, showing that the Peruvian authorities had not made the promised reforms and that the Peruvian Amazon Company had sabotaged all initiatives, making life impossible for Judge Carlos A. Valcárcel and withholding in the Prefectura the report of Mr. Rómulo Paredes, whom they had attempted to kill for describing impartially what he witnessed during the four months (from March 15 to July 15) he spent in the rubber plantations of Arana. Roger began translating into English a selection of testimonies, interviews, and various documents that the director of *El Oriente* handed to him in Iquitos. This material considerably enriched his own report.

He did this at night because his days were filled with meetings at the Foreign Office, where, from the chancellor to multiple committees, they asked him for reports, advice, and suggestions on the ideas that the British Government was considering for action. The atrocities that a British company was committing in the Amazon were the subject of an energetic campaign, which, initiated by the Society against Slavery and the magazine *Truth*, was now supported by the liberal press and many religious and humanitarian organizations.

Roger insisted that the *Report on the Putumayo* be published immediately. He had lost all hope that the silent diplomacy attempted by the British Government with President Leguía would lead to anything. Despite the resistance from some sectors of the administration,

sir Edward Grey finally accepted this criterion, and the cabinet approved the publication. The book would be called *Blue Book*. Roger spent many sleepless nights, smoking incessantly and drinking countless cups of coffee, reviewing the final draft word by word.

The day the final text finally went to print, he felt so unwell that, fearing something might happen to him while alone, he sought refuge at his friend Alice Stopford Green's house. "You look like a skeleton," the historian told him, taking him by one arm and leading him to the living room. Roger dragged his feet and, dazed, felt that he would lose consciousness at any moment. His back hurt so much that Alice had to place several cushions for him to lie down on the sofa. Almost instantly, he fell asleep or fainted. When he opened his eyes, he saw his sister Nina and Alice sitting next to him, together and smiling at him.

—We thought you would never wake up—he heard one of them say.

He had slept for about twenty-four hours. Alice called the family doctor, and the doctor diagnosed that Roger was exhausted. Let him sleep. He did not remember dreaming. When he tried to stand up, his legs gave way, and he fell back onto the sofa. "The Congo didn't kill me, but the Amazon will," he thought.

After having a light snack, he was able to get up, and a car took him to his apartment in Philbeach Gardens. He took a long bath that somewhat cleared his head. But he felt so weak that he had to lie down again.

The Foreign Office forced him to take ten days of vacation. He was reluctant to leave London before the appearance of the *Blue Book*, but eventually, he agreed to depart. Accompanied by Nina, who requested leave from the school where she taught, he spent a week in Cornwall. His fatigue was so great that he could hardly concentrate on reading. His mind wandered into dissolutive images. Thanks to the peaceful life and healthy diet, he began to regain his strength. He was able to take long walks in the countryside, enjoying some warm days. There could be nothing more different from the friendly and civilized landscape of Cornwall than that of the Amazon, and yet, despite the well-being and calm he felt here, watching the routine of the farmers, the serene cows grazing, and the horses neighing in the stables, without threats from wild beasts, snakes, or mosquitoes, he found himself one day thinking that this nature, which revealed centuries of agricultural work for the service of man, populated and civilized, had already lost its status as a natural world—its soul, as the pantheists would say—compared to that wild, effervescent, untamed territory of the Amazon, where everything seemed to be both born and dying, an unstable, risky, fluid world, where a man felt ripped from the present and thrown back to the most remote past, in communication with the ancestors, returning to the dawn of human happenings. And,

surprised, he discovered that he remembered it with nostalgia, despite the horrors it concealed.

The *Blue Book* about Putumayo was published in July 1912. From the very first day, it caused an uproar that, centered in London, spread in concentric waves throughout Europe, the United States, and many other parts of the world, especially Colombia, Brazil, and Peru. *The Times* dedicated several pages and an editorial to it, in which, while praising Roger Casement to the skies, stating that he had once again displayed exceptional qualities of a "great humanitarian," demanded immediate action against that British company and its shareholders who profited financially from an industry that practiced slavery and torture and was exterminating indigenous peoples.

But the praise that moved Roger the most was the article written by his friend and campaign ally against the King of the Belgians Leopold II, Edmund D. Morel, in the *Daily News*. Commenting on the *Blue Book*, he said of Roger Casement that "he had never seen such magnetism in a human being as in him." Always allergic to public display, Roger did not enjoy this new wave of popularity at all. Rather, he felt uncomfortable and tried to avoid it. But it was difficult because the scandal caused by the *Blue Book* led dozens of English, European, and North American publications to want to interview him. He received invitations to give lectures at academic institutions, political clubs, religious centers, and charitable organizations. There was a special service at Westminster Abbey on the subject, and Canon Herbert Henson delivered a sermon harshly attacking the shareholders of the Peruvian Amazon Company for profiting from slavery, murder, and mutilation.

The Chargé d'Affaires of Great Britain in Peru, Des Graz, reported on the uproar caused in Lima by the accusations from the *Blue Book*. The Peruvian Government, fearing an economic boycott from Western countries, announced the immediate implementation of reforms and the deployment of military and police forces to Putumayo. However, Des Graz added that this announcement would likely not be effective either, as there were governmental sectors that presented the events recorded in the *Blue Book* as a conspiracy by the British Empire to favor Colombian claims over Putumayo.

The atmosphere of sympathy and solidarity with the indigenous people of the Amazon that the *Blue Book* stirred in public opinion led to significant financial support for the project to open a Catholic mission in Putumayo. The Anglican Church had some reservations, but ultimately allowed itself to be convinced by Roger's arguments after countless meetings, appointments, letters, and dialogues: that, given the context of a country where the Catholic Church was so

deeply rooted, a Protestant mission would raise suspicions, and the Peruvian Amazon Company would work to discredit it by presenting it as a spearhead of the colonial appetites of the Crown.

Roger had meetings in Ireland and England with Jesuits and Franciscans, two orders for which he always felt sympathy. He had read, since he was in the Congo, about the efforts made in the past by the Society of Jesus in Paraguay and Brazil to organize the indigenous people, catechize them, and gather them into communities where, while maintaining their traditions of communal work, they practiced a basic form of Christianity, which had elevated their living standards and freed them from exploitation and extermination. For this reason, Portugal destroyed the Jesuit missions and conspired to convince Spain and the Vatican that the Society of Jesus had become a state within a state and was a danger to papal authority and Spanish imperial sovereignty. However, the Jesuits did not receive the project for an Amazonian mission with much enthusiasm. In contrast, the Franciscans adopted it with eagerness.

This is how Roger Casement learned about the work being done by Franciscan worker priests in the poorest neighborhoods of Dublin. They worked in factories and workshops and lived through the same hardships and deprivations as the workers. While conversing with them and witnessing the devotion with which they carried out their ministry while sharing the fate of the underprivileged, Roger thought that no one was better prepared than these religious individuals for the challenge of establishing a mission in La Chorrera and El Encanto.

Alice Stopford Green, with whom Roger celebrated in a state of euphoria the departure of the first four Irish Franciscans to the Peruvian Amazon, predicted to him:

—Are you sure you are still a member of the Anglican Church, Roger? Although you may not realize it, you are on the irreversible path of a papist conversion.

Among the regular participants in Alice's gatherings in the spacious library of her house on Grosvenor Road, there were Irish nationalists who were Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Catholics. Roger had never noticed any friction or disputes among them. After Alice's observation, he often wondered in those days whether his approach to Catholicism was a strictly spiritual and religious disposition or rather political, a way to further commit himself to the nationalist option since the vast majority of Ireland's independence supporters were Catholics.

To escape the harassment he faced as the author of the *Blue Book*, he requested a few more days off from the Ministry and spent them in Germany. Berlin left him with an extraordinary impression. German society, under the Kaiser, seemed to him a model of modernity, economic development, order, and efficiency. Although brief, this visit helped solidify a vague idea that had been swirling in his mind for some time.

To achieve its freedom, Ireland could not rely on the understanding, let alone the benevolence, of the British Empire. He was realizing this in those days. The mere possibility that the English Parliament would discuss again the bill to grant Ireland Autonomy (Home Rule), which Roger and his radical friends considered an insufficient formal concession, had provoked a patriotic and furious rejection in England not only from conservatives but also from broad sectors of liberals and progressives, including labor unions and artisan guilds. In Ireland, the prospect of the island having administrative autonomy and its own Parliament ignited a passionate mobilization among the Ulster unionists. There were rallies, the Volunteer Army was being formed, public collections were being held to buy weapons, and tens of thousands of people signed a Pact in which the Northern Irish proclaimed that they would not comply with the Home Rule if it were approved and that they would defend Ireland's place in the Empire with their arms and lives. In these circumstances, Roger thought, the independents should seek solidarity from Germany. The enemies of our enemies are our friends, and Germany was England's most notable rival. In case of war, a military defeat of Great Britain would open a unique opportunity for Ireland to emancipate itself. During those days, Roger often repeated the old nationalist proverb: 'England's misfortunes are Ireland's joys.'

However, while arriving at these political conclusions that he only shared with his nationalist friends during his travels to Ireland, or, in London, at Alice Stopford Green's home, it was England that demonstrated affection and admiration for what he had done. Remembering this caused him discomfort.

Throughout that time, despite the desperate efforts of the Peruvian Amazon Company to prevent it, it became increasingly evident each day that the fate of Julio C. Arana's company was in jeopardy. Its disrepute was heightened by a scandal that occurred when Horace Thorogood, a journalist from *The Morning Leader* who went to the headquarters in the City to try to interview the executives, received an envelope with money from one of them, Mr. Abel Larco, Julio C. Arana's brother-in-law. The journalist inquired what this gesture meant. Larco replied that the Company was always generous with its friends. The reporter, outraged, returned the money with which they intended to bribe him, reported the incident in his newspaper, and the Peruvian Amazon Company had to issue public apologies, claiming that it was a misunderstanding and that those responsible for the bribery attempt would be dismissed.

Shares of the Company owned by Julio C. Arana began to decline on the London Stock Exchange. Although this was partly due to the competition posed by the new rubber exports coming from

the British colonies in Asia—Singapore, Malaysia, Java, Sumatra, and Ceylon—planted there with shoots taken from the Amazon in a bold smuggling operation by the English scientist and adventurer Henry Alexander Wickham, the central fact behind the collapse of the Peruvian Amazon Company was the poor image it acquired in the eyes of the public and financial media following the publication of the *Blue Book*. Lloyd's cut off its credit. Throughout Europe and the United States, many banks followed this example. The boycott of rubber from the Peruvian Amazon Company promoted by the Society against Slavery and other organizations deprived the Company of many customers and partners.

The final blow against the empire of Julio C. Arana came with the establishment, in the House of Commons, on March 14, 1912, of a special committee to investigate the responsibility of the Peruvian Amazon Company in the atrocities of Putumayo. Comprising fifteen members and chaired by a prestigious parliamentarian, Charles Roberts, it met for fifteen months. During thirty-six sessions, twenty-seven witnesses were interrogated in public hearings attended by journalists, politicians, and members of both secular and religious societies, including the Society against Slavery and its president, missionary John Harris. Newspapers and magazines reported extensively on the meetings, and there were abundant articles, caricatures, gossip, and humorous stories commenting on them.

The most anticipated witness, whose presence drew the largest crowd, was sir Roger Casement. He appeared before the commission on November 13 and December 11, 1912. He accurately and soberly described what he had seen with his own eyes in the rubber plantations: the stocks, the main instrument of torture in all camps, the backs with the scars of lashings, the whips and Winchester rifles carried by the foremen of the stations, and the "boys" or "rational beings" tasked with maintaining order and raiding the tribes during the "raids," as well as the regime of slavery, overexploitation, and hunger to which the indigenous people were subjected. He then summarized the testimonies of the Barbadians, whose truthfulness, he pointed out, was assured by the fact that almost all had admitted to being perpetrators of torture and murder. At the request of the commission members, he also explained the prevailing Machiavellian system: that section heads received no salaries but commissions based on the rubber collected, which led them to demand more and more from the collectors to increase their profits.

In his second appearance, Roger put on a show. Before the surprised looks of the parliamentarians, he pulled out of a large bag carried by two ushers, items he had acquired from the stores of the Peruvian Amazon Company in Putumayo. He demonstrated how the Indian laborers were exploited, to whom the Company sold on credit, to always keep them in debt, at

prices several times higher than in London, objects for work, domestic life, or decorative trinkets. He displayed an old single-barreled shotgun whose price in La Chorrera was 45 shillings. To pay this amount, a huitoto or a bora would have needed to work two years, assuming they were paid what a street sweeper in Iquitos earned. He was showing raw shirts, drill pants, colorful trinkets, little boxes with gunpowder, pita straps, tops, oil lamps, raw straw hats, ointments for bites, shouting the prices at which these utensils could be acquired in England. The eyes of the parliamentarians widened with indignation and horror. It was even worse when sir Roger made dozens of photographs taken by himself in El Encanto, La Chorrera, and other stations of Putumayo parade before Charles Roberts and other members of the Commission: there were backs and buttocks marked with the "Arana's mark" in the form of scars and sores, corpses bitten and pecked rotting among the underbrush, the incredible thinness of men, women, and children who, despite their skeletal thinness, carried large solidified rubber chorizos on their heads, their bellies swollen from parasites of newborns about to die. The photos were an irrefutable testimony to the condition of beings who lived almost without food and were mistreated by greedy people whose only purpose in life was to extract more rubber, even if entire towns had to perish from consumption.

A pathetic aspect of the sessions was the interrogation of the British directors of the Peruvian Amazon Company, where the Irish Swift McNeill shone with his aggressiveness and subtlety, the veteran parliamentarian from South Donegal. He proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that prominent business figures, such as Henry M. Read and John Russell Gubbins, stars of London society and aristocrats or rentiers, such as sir John Lister-Kaye and Baron de Souza-Deiro, were completely uninformed about what was happening in the Julio C. Arana Company, whose boards they attended and whose minutes they signed, earning substantial sums of money. Not even when the weekly *Truth* began to publish the denunciations of Benjamín Saldaña Roca and Walter Hardenburg did they bother to find out what truth there was to those accusations. They were content with the defenses that Abel Larco or Julio C. Arana himself provided, which consisted of accusing the accusers of being resentful blackmailers since they had not received from the Company the money they intended to extract through threats. None took the trouble to verify on the ground whether the company to which they lent the prestige of their name was committing those crimes. Worse yet, not a single one had taken the time to examine the papers, accounts, reports, and correspondence of a company in which those misdeeds had left traces in the records. For, as unbelievable as it may seem, Julio C. Arana, Abel Larco, and other hierarchs were

they felt so secure until the outbreak of the scandal that they did not disguise in their books the traces of the abuses: for example, not paying wages to the indigenous laborers and spending enormous amounts of money buying whips, revolvers, and rifles.

A moment of heightened drama took place when Julio C. Arana appeared to testify before the Commission. His first appearance had to be postponed because his wife Eleonora, who was in Geneva, suffered a nervous trauma due to the tension in which a family that, after having reached the highest positions, now saw their situation collapsing at full speed. Arana entered the House of Commons dressed in his usual elegance and as pale as the victims of the paludism fevers of the Amazon. He appeared surrounded by aides and counselors, but in the hearing room, he was only allowed to be with his lawyer. At first, he remained calm and arrogant. As questions from Charles Roberts and the old Swift McNeill began to corner him, he started to fall into contradictions and missteps that his translator did his best to tone down. He evoked laughter from the audience when, to a question from the president of the commission—"Why were there so many Winchester rifles in the stations of Putumayo? For the 'corridas' or assaults on the tribes in order to take people to the rubber plantations?"—he replied: "No, sir, to defend against the tigers that abound in the region." He tried to deny everything, but suddenly he acknowledged that, yes, it was true, he had once heard that an indigenous woman was burned alive. It's just that it had been a long time ago. The abuses, if they had occurred, were always a thing of the past.

The greatest bewilderment of the rubber dealer occurred when he tried to discredit Walter Hardenburg's testimony, accusing the American of having forged a promissory note in Manaus. Swift McNeill interrupted him to ask if he would dare to call Hardenburg a "forger" in person, as he was believed to be living in Canada. "Yes," Arana replied. "Go ahead, then," McNeill said. "Here he is." Hardenburg's arrival caused a stir in the courtroom. Advised by his lawyer, Arana retracted and clarified that he was not accusing Hardenburg, but rather "someone" of having changed a note at a bank in Manaus that turned out to be false. Hardenburg demonstrated that this was all an ambush to discredit him set up by the Arana Company, using a shady character named Julio Muriedas, who was currently imprisoned in Pará for fraud.

From that episode onwards, Arana crumbled. He limited himself to giving hesitant and confusing answers to all the questions, betraying his discomfort and, above all, the lack of truthfulness as the most evident trait of his testimony.

In the midst of the parliamentary commission's work, a new catastrophe struck the businessman. Judge Swinfen Eady, of the High Court of Justice, at the request of

a group of shareholders decreed the immediate cessation of the business activities of the Peruvian Amazon Company. The judge declared that the Company was profiting "from collecting rubber in the most atrocious way imaginable" and that "if Mr. Arana did not know what was happening, his responsibility was even graver, for he, more than anyone, had the absolute obligation to know what was occurring in his domains."

The final report of the parliamentary commission was equally damning. It concluded that: "Mr. Julio C. Arana, like his partners, was aware and is therefore the main responsible for the atrocities committed by his agents and employees in Putumayo."

When the commission made its report public, sealing the final disgrace of Julio C. Arana and precipitating the downfall of the empire that had turned this humble neighbor from Rioja into a rich and powerful man, Roger Casement had already begun to forget about the Amazon and Putumayo. The affairs of Ireland had once again become his main concern. After taking a short vacation, the Foreign Office proposed that he return to Brazil as consul general in Rio de Janeiro, and he initially accepted. However, he kept delaying his departure, and although he made various excuses to the Ministry and himself, the truth was that deep down in his heart, he had already decided he would not serve as a diplomat or in any other position under the British Crown. He wanted to make up for lost time, focusing his intelligence and energy on fighting for what would now be the sole purpose of his life: the emancipation of Ireland.

Therefore, he followed from afar, without being too interested, the final twists of the Peruvian Amazon Company and its owner. That, in the sessions of the Commission, it had become clear, by the general manager's own confession, Henry Lex Gielgud, that Julio C. Arana's company did not possess any title of ownership over the lands of the Putumayo and that it exploited them only "by right of occupancy," increased distrust among banks and other creditors. They immediately pressured the owner, demanding that he fulfill pending payments and commitments (with only institutions in the City, his debts amounted to more than two hundred fifty thousand pounds sterling). Threats of seizure and judicial auction of his assets rained down on him. Making public protests that, to save his honor, he would pay every last cent, Arana put his small palace in London on Kensington Road, his mansion in Biarritz, and his house in Geneva up for sale. But, since the proceeds from those sales were not enough to appease his creditors, they obtained court orders to freeze his savings and bank accounts in England. As his personal fortune disintegrated, the decline of his businesses continued unabated. The drop in the price of Amazon rubber due to competition from Asian sources was parallel to the decision of many European and North American importers not to buy Peruvian rubber again until it was clear.

proven, by an independent international Commission, that slave labor, torture, and assaults on the tribes had ceased and that in the rubber stations wages were paid to the indigenous collectors of latex and that existing labor laws in England and in the United States were respected.

There was no opportunity for these quixotic demands to even be attempted. The flight of the main foremen and heads of the Putumayo stations, terrified at the thought of being imprisoned, plunged the entire region into a state of absolute anarchy. Many indigenous people—entire communities—seized the chance to escape, which led to the extraction of rubber being reduced to its lowest point and soon ceasing completely. The fugitives left, looting warehouses and offices, taking away everything valuable, primarily weapons and provisions. It was later learned that the company, frightened by the possibility that these fugitive murderers could become, in possible future trials, key witnesses against it, paid them large sums to facilitate their escape and buy their silence.

Roger Casement followed the collapse of Iquitos through the letters of his friend George Michell, the British consul. He told him how hotels, restaurants, and the shops that once sold imported goods from Paris and New York were closing down, how the champagne that had previously been poured so generously disappeared as if by magic, just like whiskey, cognac, port, and wine. In the taverns and brothels, only the harsh liquor that scratched the throat and drinks of dubious origin circulated now—supposed aphrodisiacs that often, instead of igniting sexual desires, had the effect of dynamites in the stomachs of the unwary.

Just like in Manaus, the collapse of Casa Arana and the rubber industry caused a widespread crisis in Iquitos as rapid as the prosperity the city had experienced for three decades. The first to emigrate were the foreigners — merchants, explorers, traffickers, tavern owners, professionals, technicians, prostitutes, pimps, and madams — who returned to their countries or left in search of more favorable lands than this one, which was sinking into ruin and isolation.

Prostitution did not disappear, but it changed agents. Brazilian prostitutes and those who claimed to be "French," but were actually often Polish, Flemish, Turkish, or Italian, faded away, replaced by cholas and indigenous women, many of whom were girls and adolescents who had worked as domestic workers and lost their jobs because the owners also left in search of better prospects or because, with the economic crisis, they could no longer afford to clothe or feed them. The British consul, in one of his letters, provided a pathetic description of those fifteen-year-old indigenous girls, skeletal, strolling along the malecón of Iquitos painted like clowns in search of clients. Newspapers and magazines struggled, and even the weekly bulletin announcing the arrival and departure of ships because the trans-

River transport, once so intense, began to decrease until it almost ceased. The fact that sealed the isolation of Iquitos, its break with that vast world with which it had such intense trade for about fifteen years, was the decision of the Booth Line to gradually reduce the traffic of its goods and passenger lines. When the movement of boats stopped altogether, the umbilical cord that connected Iquitos to the world was cut. The capital of Loreto took a journey back in time. In a few years it became a lost and forgotten town in the heart of the Amazonian plain.

One day, in Dublin, Roger Casement, who had gone to see a doctor for his arthritis pain, spotted a Franciscan waving goodbye while crossing the wet grass of St. Stephen's Green. He was one of the four missionaries—the worker priests—who had departed for Putumayo to establish a mission. They sat down to chat on a bench by the pond with ducks and swans. The experience of the four religious men had been quite tough. The hostility they encountered in Iquitos from the authorities, who were following orders from the Arana Company, did not deter them—they had the support of the Augustinian fathers—nor did the malaria attacks or insect bites, which tested their spirit of sacrifice in the early months in Putumayo. Despite the obstacles and setbacks, they managed to settle in the surroundings of El Encanto, in a cabin similar to those built by the huitotos in their camps. Their relationships with the indigenous people, after a beginning in which they seemed sullen and wary, had been good and even cordial. The four Franciscans set out to learn huitoto and bora and erected a rustic open-air church, with a palm leaf roof over the altar. But suddenly, a widespread flight of people of all conditions occurred. Chiefs and employees, artisans and guards, domestic Indians and laborers began to leave as if expelled by some malevolent force or a plague of panic. As they were left alone, the life of the four Franciscans became increasingly difficult. One of them, Father McKey, contracted beriberi. Then, after long discussions, they also chose to leave that place, which seemed to be the victim of a divine curse.

The return of the four Franciscans was an epic journey and a passion play. With the drastic decline in rubber exports, the disorder and depopulation of the stations, the only means of transportation to leave Putumayo were the boats of the Peruvian Amazon.

Ireland

He woke up, feeling a mix of fear and surprise. Because, in the confusion of his nights, this time he had been startled and tense during sleep by the memory of his friend—now ex-friend—Herbert Ward. But, not back in Africa, where they had met while both working on Sir Henry Morton Stanley's expedition, nor later, in Paris, where Roger had gone to visit Herbert and Sarita several

times, but in the streets of Dublin and no less than in the midst of the noise, the barricades, the gunfire, the cannon fire, and the great collective sacrifice of Holy Week. Herbert Ward amidst the Irish insurgents, the Irish Volunteers, and the Irish Citizen Army, fighting for the independence of Eire! How could the human mind surrendered to sleep conjure up such absurd fantasies?

He recalled that just a few days earlier, the British cabinet had met without making any decision regarding the plea for clemency. His lawyer, George Gavan Duffy, had informed him of this. What was happening? Why this new delay? Gavan Duffy saw it as a good sign: there were disagreements among the ministers, and they were unable to reach the necessary unanimity. Thus, there was hope. But waiting meant continuing to die many times each day, each hour, each minute.

Remembering Herbert Ward saddened him. They would never be friends again. The death of his son Charles, so young, so handsome, so healthy, on the front at Neuve Chapelle, in January 1916, had opened an abyss between them that nothing would ever close. Herbert was the only true friend he had made in Africa. From the very first moment, he saw in this man something greater than himself, with a remarkable personality, who had traveled half the world—New Zealand, Australia, San Francisco, Borneo—of a culture far superior to that of all the Europeans around them, including Stanley, someone from whom he learned many things and with whom he shared concerns and aspirations. Unlike the other Europeans recruited by Stanley for that expedition in the service of Leopold II, who only aspired to obtain money and power from Africa, Herbert loved adventure for adventure's sake. He was a man of action but had a passion for art and approached Africans with a respectful curiosity. He inquired about their beliefs, their customs and their religious objects, their clothing and adornments, which interested him from an aesthetic and artistic perspective, but also intellectual and spiritual. Even then, in his free time, Herbert drew and made small sculptures with African motifs. In his long conversations at dusk, when they set up the tents, prepared the meals, and got ready to rest from the day's marches and work, he confided to Roger that one day he would leave all these tasks to dedicate himself solely to being a sculptor and live an artist's life in Paris, "the world capital of art." That love for Africa never left him. On the contrary, distance and the years had increased it. He remembered the London home of the Wards, Chester Square 53, filled with African objects. And, above all, his studio in Paris with walls covered in spears, javelins, arrows, shields, masks, paddles, and knives of all shapes and sizes. Amid the heads of stuffed beasts on the floor and the animal skins covering the leather sofas, they had spent entire nights remembering their travels through Africa. Francis, the daughter of the Wards, nicknamed *Cricket*, still a child, sometimes dressed in native tunics, necklaces, and adornments and danced a dance.

Bakongo that their parents accompanied with claps and a monotone tune.

Herbert was one of the few people to whom Roger confided his disappointment with Stanley, with Leopold II, and with the idea that brought him to Africa: that the Empire and colonization would lead Africans on the path to modernization and progress. Herbert completely agreed with him, realizing that the true reason for the presence of Europeans in Africa was not to help Africans escape from paganism and barbarism, but to exploit them with an insatiable greed for abuse and cruelty.

But Herbert Ward never took Roger's gradual conversion to nationalist ideology very seriously. He used to mock him, in the affectionate way that was his own, warning him against the fake patriotism —flags, anthems, uniforms— which, he would say, always represented, sooner or later, a regression to provincialism, the narrow-minded spirit of the belfry, and a distortion of universal values. However, that citizen of the world, as Herbert liked to call himself, had reacted to the excessive violence of the world war by also taking refuge in patriotism like so many millions of Europeans. The letter in which he broke off his friendship with him was full of that patriotic sentiment he had previously mocked, of that love for the flag and the homeland which he had once found primitive and contemptible. Imagining Herbert Ward, that English man in Paris, tangled up with the men of Sinn Fein led by Arthur Griffith, the People's Army of James Connolly, and the Volunteers of Patrick Pearse, fighting in the streets of Dublin for the independence of Ireland, what nonsense. Yet, while waiting for dawn lying on the narrow cot of his cell, Roger thought that, after all, there was some reason beneath that madness, for in his dream, his mind had tried to reconcile two things he loved and longed for: his friend and his country.

Early in the morning, the *sheriffv'mo* came to announce a visit to him. Roger felt his heart race as he entered the visiting room and spotted Alice Stopford Green sitting on the only bench in the narrow room. Upon seeing him, the historian stood up and approached him with a smile to embrace him.

—Alice, dear Alice —Roger said—. How wonderful to see you again! I thought we wouldn't meet again. At least not in this world.

—It wasn't easy to get this second permission —Alice said—. But, you see, my stubbornness eventually convinced them. You have no idea how many doors I knocked on.

Her old friend, who usually dressed with studied elegance, was now wearing a shabby dress, a scarf tied in any old way on her head from which some gray strands escaped. She was wearing muddy shoes. Not only had her outfit deteriorated. Her expression showed fatigue and discouragement. What had happened to her in these days to cause such a change? Had Scotland Yard bothered her again? She shrugged, as if that old episode were of no importance. Alice did not bring up the topic of the

plea for clemency and its postponement until the next Council of Ministers. Roger, assuming that nothing was known yet about it, did not mention it either. Instead, he told her about the absurd dream he had had, imagining Herbert Ward mistaken for the Irish rebels amid the skirmishes and battles of Holy Week in the center of Dublin.

—Little by little, more news is filtering through about how things happened —Alice said, and Roger noticed that his friend's voice was becoming both sad and furious at the same time. He also observed that, upon hearing talk about the Irish insurrection, the *sheriff* and the guard standing next to them with their backs turned were becoming rigid and were definitely straining to listen. He feared that the *sheriff would* warn them that discussing this topic was prohibited, but he did not.

—So, have you heard anything more, Alice? —he asked, lowering his voice to turn it into a whisper.

He saw that the historian was losing some color while nodding. She kept a long silence before answering, as if questioning whether she should disturb her friend by bringing up a painful topic for him or as if she had so much to say about it that she didn't know where to start. Finally, she chose to respond that, although she had heard and was still hearing many versions of what happened in Dublin and some other cities in Ireland during the week of the Rising —contradictory things, facts mixed with fantasies, myths, realities, exaggerations, and inventions, as often happened when an event stirred an entire people—, she placed a lot of trust primarily in the testimony of Austin, a nephew of hers, a Capuchin friar who had just come to London. He was a first-hand source, as he had been there, in Dublin, right in the middle of the fight, serving as a nurse and spiritual assistant, going from the General Post Office (GPO), the headquarters from which Patrick Pearse and James Connolly directed the uprising, to the trenches of St. Stephen's Green, where the actions were commanded by countess Constance Markievicz, with a pirate pistol and her impeccable Volunteer uniform, to the barricades erected at the Jacob's Biscuit Factory and to the Boland's Mills occupied by the rebels under the command of Eamon de Valera, before the English troops surrounded them. Alice thought that the testimony of brother Austin was probably the one that came closest to that elusive truth that only future historians would fully reveal.

There was another long silence that Roger did not dare to interrupt. It had only been a few days since he had last seen her, but Alice seemed to have aged ten years. She had wrinkles on her forehead and neck, and her hands were covered with freckles. Her once bright eyes no longer sparkled. He noticed she looked very sad, but he was sure that Alice would not cry in front of him. Could it be that her plea for mercy was denied, and she did not dare to tell him?

—What my nephew remembers most —Alice added— are not the shootings, the bombs, the injured, the blood, the flames of the fires, the smoke that prevented them from breathing,

but, you know what, Roger?, the confusion. The immense, the enormous confusion that reigned all week in the strongholds of the revolutionaries.

—The confusion? —Roger repeated very softly. Closing his eyes, he tried to see it, hear it, and feel it.

—The immense, the enormous confusion —Alice repeated once more, with emphasis—. They were willing to be killed, and at the same time, they experienced moments of euphoria. Incredible moments. Of pride. Of freedom. Although none of them, neither the leaders nor the militants, ever knew exactly what they were doing or what they wanted to do. That's what Austin says.

—Did they at least know why the weapons they were expecting hadn't arrived? —Roger murmured, noticing that Alice was once again lost in a long silence.

—They knew nothing at all. Among themselves, they said the most fantastic things. No one could deny them, because no one knew what the real situation was. Extraordinary rumors circulated that everyone believed, because they needed to think there was a way out of the desperate situation they were in. That a German Army was approaching Dublin, for example. That companies and battalions had landed at various points on the island and were advancing towards the capital. That, inside, in Cork, in Galway, in Wexford, in Meath, in Tralee, everywhere, including Ulster, the Volunteers and the Citizen Army had risen in their thousands, occupying barracks and police stations, and were advancing from all directions towards Dublin, with reinforcements for those under siege. They fought half dead from thirst and hunger, almost out of ammunition, and placed all their hopes in unreality.

—I knew that was going to happen —Roger said—. I didn't arrive in time to stop that madness. Now, the freedom of Ireland is farther away than ever, once again.

—Eoin MacNeill tried to stop them when he found out —Alice said—. The military command of the IRB kept him in the dark about the plans for the Rising because he was against armed action without German support. When he learned that the military command of the Volunteers, the IRB, and the Irish Citizen Army had called people for military maneuvers on Palm Sunday, he issued a counter-order prohibiting that march and that the Volunteer companies go out onto the streets unless they received other instructions signed by him. This caused great confusion. Hundreds, thousands of Volunteers stayed at home. Many tried to contact Pearse, Connolly, Clarke, but they failed to do so. Afterwards, those who obeyed MacNeill's counter-order had to stand by while those who disobeyed were being killed. For this reason, now, many Sinn Féin and Volunteers hate MacNeill and consider him a traitor.

He fell silent again, and Roger got distracted. Eoin MacNeill a traitor! What nonsense! He imagined the founder of the Gaelic League, the editor of the *Gaelic Journal*, one of the founders of the Irish Volunteers, who had dedicated his life to fighting

for the survival of the Irish language and culture, being accused of betraying his brothers for wanting to prevent that doomed romantic uprising. In the jail where he had been locked up, he would be subjected to humiliations, perhaps from that disdainful coldness with which the Irish patriots punished the lukewarm and the cowardly. How badly would that gentle and cultured university professor feel, filled with love for the language, customs, and traditions of his country? He would torture himself, asking, "Did I do wrong by giving that counter-order? Did I contribute more to the failure of the rebellion by sowing disorder and division among the revolutionaries?" He felt identified with Eoin MacNeill. Both resembled each other in the contradictory positions in which History and circumstances had placed them. What would have happened if, instead of being arrested in Tralee, he had managed to speak with Pearse, Clarke, and the other leaders of the military command? Would he have convinced them? Probably not. And now, perhaps, they would also say of him that he was a traitor.

—I'm doing something I shouldn't, dear —said Alice, forcing a smile—. Just giving you the bad news, the pessimistic view.

—Can there be another after what happened?

—Yes, there is —the historian asserted, her voice lively and blushing—. I was also against this Rising, under these conditions. And yet...

—And yet what, Alice?

—For a few hours, for a few days, for an entire week, Ireland was a free country, dear —she said, and Roger felt that Alice was trembling, moved—. An independent and sovereign Republic, with a president and a Provisional Government. Austin had not yet arrived when Patrick Pearse came out of the Post Office and, from the steps of the plaza, read the Declaration of Independence and the creation of the Constitutional Government of the Republic of Ireland, signed by the seven. There weren't many people there, it seems. Those who were there and heard it must have felt something very special, right, dear? I was against it, I've told you. But when I read that text, I burst into tears like I've never cried before. 'In the name of God and of the dead generations, from whom the old tradition of nationality receives its sustenance, Ireland, by our mouth, now summons her children under her flag and proclaims her freedom...' You see, I've memorized it, yes. And I've lamented with all my strength not having been there, with them. You understand, right?

Roger closed his eyes. He saw the scene, clear, vibrant. At the top of the stands of the General Post Office, under an overcast sky that threatened to pour rain, in front of a hundred, two hundred? people armed with shotguns, revolvers, knives, pikes, clubs, mostly men, but also a good number of women with headscarves, stood the thin, slender, unhealthy figure of Patrick Pearse, at thirty-six years old with his steely gaze, imbued with that Nietzschean "will to power" that had always allowed him, especially since his

seventeen years he joined the Gaelic League of which he would soon be the undisputed leader, overcoming all mishaps, illness, repression, internal struggles, and materializing the mystical dream of his entire life—the armed rising of the Irish against the oppressor, the martyrdom of the saints that would redeem an entire people—reading, with that messianic voice that the emotion of the moment magnified, the carefully chosen words that closed centuries of occupation and servitude and established a new era in the History of Ireland. He listened to the religious, sacred silence that Pearse's words should have installed in that corner of the center of Dublin, still intact because the shots had not yet begun, and saw the faces of the Volunteers who from the windows of the Post Office and the neighboring buildings of Sackville Street occupied by the rebels, peeked out to contemplate the simple, solemn ceremony. He listened to the uproar, the applause, cheers, and hurras, with which, after the reading of the seven names that signed the Declaration, the words of Patrick Pearse were rewarded by the people from the street, from the windows and rooftops, and the brief and intense moment when Pearse himself and the other leaders closed it explaining that there was no more time to waste. They had to return to their posts, fulfill their obligations, prepare to fight. He felt his eyes welling up. He too had begun to tremble. To avoid crying, he said hastily:

—It must have been exciting, of course.

—It is a symbol, and History is made of symbols—Alice Stopford Green nodded—. It doesn't matter that they executed Pearse, Connolly, Clarke, Plunkett, and other signatories of the Declaration of Independence. On the contrary. Those executions have baptized that symbol with blood, giving it an aura of heroism and martyrdom.

—Exactly what Pearse and Plunkett wanted—Roger said—. You are right, Alice. I would have liked to be there with them too.

Alice moved her almost as much as that act on the external stairs of the Post Office that so many women from the female organization of the rebels, Cumann na mBan, had participated in the rebellion. The Capuchin monk had seen this with his own eyes. In all the rebel strongholds, the women were tasked by the leaders to cook for the combatants, but then, as the skirmishes escalated, the very weight of the action expanded the range of responsibilities of those militants from Cumann na mBan, whom the gunfire, bombs, and fires pulled from the improvised kitchens and turned into nurses. They bandaged the injured and assisted the surgeons in extracting bullets, suturing wounds, and amputating limbs threatened by gangrene. But perhaps the most important role of those women—teenagers, adults, approaching old age—had been that of post office workers, when, due to the growing isolation of the barricades and rebel positions, it became essential to rely on the cooks and nurses and send them, pedaling on their bicycles and,

when they became scarce, at the speed of their feet, to carry and bring messages, oral or written information (with instructions to destroy, burn, or eat those papers if they were wounded or captured). Brother Austin assured Alice that during the six days of the rebellion, amidst the bombings and the gunfire, the explosions that were collapsing roofs, walls, balconies, and turning the center of Dublin into an archipelago of fires and piles of burnt and bloody rubble, he never ceased to see, going back and forth held to the handlebars like amazons to their mounts, and pedaling furiously, those angels in skirts, serene, heroic, unflinching, defying the bullets, with the messages and the information that broke the quarantine that the strategy of the British Army wanted to impose on the rebels by isolating them before crushing them.

—When they could no longer serve as Post Office workers, because the troops occupied the streets and movement was impossible, many took the revolvers and rifles from their husbands, fathers, and brothers and fought as well —said Alice—. Not only did Constance Markievicz show that not all women belong to the weak sex. Many fought like her and died or were wounded with weapons in hand.

—Is it known how many?

Alice shook her head.

—There are no official figures. The ones that are mentioned are pure fantasy. But one thing is certain. They fought. British military personnel who arrested them and dragged them to the Richmond barracks and Kilmainham jail know this. They wanted to subject them to martial courts and execute them as well. I know this from very reliable sources: a minister. The British cabinet was terrified, rightly so, thinking that if they started executing women, all of Ireland would rise in arms this time. The Prime Minister Asquith himself telegraphed the military chief in Dublin, Sir John Maxwell, firmly prohibiting the execution of a single woman. That's why Countess Constance Markievicz saved her life. A martial court sentenced her to death, but her sentence has been commuted to life imprisonment due to pressure from the Government.

However, not everything had been enthusiasm, solidarity, and heroism among the civilian population of Dublin during the week of fighting. The Capuchin monk witnessed looting in the shops and warehouses on Sackville Street and other streets in the center, committed by vagrants, rogues, or simply miserable people from the neighboring slums, which put the leaders of the IRB, the Volunteers, and the People's Army in a difficult situation, as they had not anticipated this criminal drift of the rebellion. In some cases, the rebels attempted to prevent the looting of the hotels, even firing shots into the air to scare away the looters who were devastating the Gresham Hotel, but in others, they let it happen, confused by how those humble, hungry individuals, for whose interests they believed they were fighting, confronted them with rage to allow them to ransack the elegant shops of the city.

Not only the thieves faced the rebels in the streets of Dublin. Many mothers, wives,

sisters, and daughters of the police and soldiers whom the armed rebels had attacked, injured, or killed during the Rising, sometimes numerous groups of fearless females, fueled by pain, despair, and anger. In some cases, these women charged at the rebel strongholds, insulting, throwing stones, and spitting at the combatants, cursing them and calling them murderers. This was the hardest test for those who believed they had justice, good, and truth on their side: to discover that those opposing them were not the hunting dogs of the Empire, the soldiers of the Occupation Army, but humble Irish women, blinded by suffering, who did not see in them the liberators of the homeland, but the murderers of their loved ones, of those Irish like them whose only crime was being humble and earning a living as soldiers or police, roles that the poor of this world had always filled.

—Nothing is black and white, dear —Alice remarked—. Not even in such a just cause. Even here, those murky greys appear that cloud everything.

Roger nodded. What his friend had just said applied to him. No matter how cautious one was and planned their actions with the utmost clarity, life, being more complex than all calculations, burst the schemes and replaced them with uncertain and contradictory situations. Wasn't he a living example of those ambiguities? His interrogators Reginald Hall and Basil Thomson believed that he came from Germany to lead the Rising, whose leaders concealed from him until the last moment because they knew he opposed a rebellion that did not have the German Armed Forces behind it. Was more incongruence possible?

Would demoralization now spread among the nationalists? Their best leaders were dead, executed, or in jail. Rebuilding the independence movement would take years. The Germans, in whom many Irish, including himself, had placed their trust, had turned their backs on them. Years of sacrifice and effort dedicated to Ireland, lost without remedy. And here he was, in an English jail, awaiting the outcome of a request for clemency that would likely be denied. Wouldn't it have been better to die there, with those poets and mystics, shooting and being shot? His death would have had a clear meaning, instead of the ambiguous nature of dying on the gallows like a common criminal. 'Poets and mystics.' That is what they were, and that is how they had acted, choosing, as the focus of the rebellion, not a barracks or Dublin Castle, the fortress of colonial power, but a civil building, the Post Office, recently remodeled. A choice of civilized citizens, not of politicians or military. They wanted to win over the population before defeating the English soldiers. Hadn't Joseph Plunkett made this so clear in his discussions in Berlin? A rebellion of poets and mystics eager for martyrdom to awaken those sleepy masses who believed, like John Redmond, in the peaceful path and the goodwill of the Empire to achieve the freedom of Ireland. Were they naive or seers?

He sighed and Alice affectionately patted him on the arm:

—It's sad and exhilarating to talk about this, isn't it, dear Roger?

—Yes, Alice. Sad and exhilarating. Sometimes, I feel a great rage for what they did. Other times, I envy them with all my soul, and my admiration for them knows no bounds.

—In truth, I can't stop thinking about this. And about how much I miss you, Roger —Alice said, taking his arm—. Your ideas, your clarity, would help me a lot to see the light amid so much shadow. Do you know something? Not right now, but in the medium term, something good will come from everything that has happened. There are already signs.

Roger nodded, not entirely understanding what the historian meant.

—For now, the supporters of John Redmond lose more strength every day across Ireland —the historian added—. We, who were in the minority, have gained the majority of the Irish people on our side. It may seem unbelievable to you, but I swear it's true. The executions, the martial courts, the deportations are doing us a great service.

Roger warned that the *sheriff*, always facing away, moved as if about to turn towards them to order them to be quiet. But he didn't do that this time either. Alice now seemed optimistic. According to her, perhaps Pearse and Plunkett were not so misguided. Because every day in Ireland, spontaneous demonstrations by the people were multiplying, in the streets, in churches, in community associations, in the unions, showing sympathy for the martyrs, the executed, and those sentenced to long prison terms, and expressing hostility towards the Police and soldiers of the British Army. These forces were subjected to insults and humiliations from passersby to such an extent that the military Government issued instructions for the Police and soldiers to always conduct their patrols in groups, and when off duty, to dress in civilian clothes. Because the popular hostility was causing demoralization among the law enforcement forces.

According to Alice, the most notable change had occurred in the Catholic Church. The hierarchy and most of the clergy were always closer to the pacifist, gradualist thesis, and in favor of Home Rule for Ireland, of John Redmond and his followers from the Irish Parliamentary Party, than to the separatist radicalism of Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League, the IRB, and the Volunteers. But, since the Rising, it changed. Perhaps the deeply religious behavior exhibited by the rebels during the week of fighting influenced this. The testimonies of the priests, including that of brother Austin, who were on the barricades, buildings, and venues turned into rebel hotspots were conclusive: masses, confessions, communions were held, and many combatants asked the religious for blessings before starting to fire. In all the strongholds, the rebels respected the leaders' strict prohibition against consuming even a drop of alcohol. During calm periods, the rebels prayed the rosary aloud, kneeling. Neither

One of those executed, including James Connolly, who proclaimed himself a socialist and was known as an atheist, had stopped requesting the assistance of a priest before facing the firing squad. In a wheelchair, with wounds still bleeding from the bullets he received in combat, Connolly was executed after kissing a crucifix that was handed to him by the chaplain of Kilmainham jail. Since May, throughout Ireland, Thanksgiving masses and tributes to the martyrs of Holy Week proliferated. There wasn't a Sunday when, in the sermons of the mass, the parish priests didn't urge the parishioners to pray for the souls of the executed patriots who were clandestinely buried by the British Army. The military chief, Sir John Maxwell, had made a formal protest to the Catholic hierarchy, and instead of providing explanations, Bishop O'Dwyer justified his priests by accusing the general of being "a military dictator" and of acting in an un-Christian manner with the executions and his refusal to return the bodies of the executed to their families. This last fact, above all, that the military Government, supported by the suppression of guarantees under Martial Law, had secretly buried the patriots to prevent their graves from becoming centers of republican pilgrimage, caused outrage that encompassed sectors that had not previously viewed the radicals with sympathy.

—In summary, the papists gain more ground every day, and the Anglican nationalists shrink like *The Skin of Our Teeth*, that novel by Balzac. It's just a matter of time before you and I also convert to Catholicism, Roger—joked Alice.

—I've practically already done it— replied Roger—. And not for political reasons.

—I would never do that, don't forget that my father was a cleric of the Church of Ireland— said the historian—. What you did doesn't surprise me; I saw it coming long ago. Do you remember the jokes we made about it during the gatherings at my house?

—Those unforgettable gatherings— sighed Roger—. I'm going to tell you something. Now, with so much free time to think, I often reflect: where and when was I happiest? It was at the Tuesday gatherings in your house on Grosvenor Road, dear Alice. I never told you, but I left those meetings in a state of grace. Exalted and happy. Reconciled with life. Thinking: 'What a shame I didn't study, that I didn't go to university.' Listening to you and your friends, I felt as far from culture as the natives of Africa or the Amazon.

—Something similar happened to me and to them with you, Roger. We envied your travels, your adventures, that you had lived so many different lives in those places. I heard Yeats say it once: «Roger Casement is the Irish

most universal person I have known. A true citizen of the world». I don't think I ever told you.

They recalled a discussion, years ago, in Paris, about symbols, with Herbert Ward. He had shown them the recent casting of one of his sculptures of which he was very proud: an African sorcerer. Indeed, it was a beautiful piece that, despite its realistic character, revealed all the secrets and mysteries of a man with a face full of incisions, armed with a broom and a skull, aware of the powers conferred upon him by the deities of the forest, the streams, and the beasts, in whom the men and women of the tribe placed their blind trust to be saved from curses, diseases, fears, and to connect them with the beyond.

—We all carry one of these ancestors within us — said Herbert, pointing to the bronze sorcerer who, with his eyes half-closed, seemed entranced in one of those dreams induced by herbal brews—. What's the proof? The symbols we venerate with reverential respect. The shields, the flags, the crosses.

Roger and Alice discussed, arguing that symbols should not be viewed as anachronisms of humanity's irrational era. On the contrary, a flag, for example, was the symbol of a community that felt solidarity and shared beliefs, convictions, and customs, respecting individual differences and discrepancies that did not destroy but rather strengthened the common denominator. Both confessed that seeing a republican flag of Ireland fly always moved them. How Herbert and Sarita had mocked them for that phrase!

Alice, when she learned that while Pearse was reading the Declaration of Independence, many Irish republican flags had been hoisted on the roofs of the Post Office, Liberty Hall, and later saw the photos of the buildings occupied by the Dublin rebels like the

Hotel Metropole and the Hotel Imperial with flags that the wind shook at the windows and parapets, she felt her throat tighten. This must have caused limitless happiness for those who experienced it. Later, she also learned that in the weeks leading up to the insurrection, the women of Cumann na mBan, the auxiliary female body of the Volunteers, while they prepared homemade bombs, dynamite cartridges, grenades, pikes, and bayonets, gathered medicines, bandages, disinfectants, and sewed those tricolor flags that would appear on the morning of Monday, April 24, on the rooftops of downtown Dublin. The Plunkett house in Kimmage had been the most active factory for weapons and banners for the uprising.

—It has been a historical event —Alice stated—. We abuse words. Politicians, especially, apply the term 'historic' to any nonsense. But those republican flags in the sky of old Dublin were significant. It will always be remembered with fervor. A historical event. It has traveled around the world, dear. Many newspapers in the United States published it on the front page. Wouldn't you have liked to see it?

Yes, he would have liked to see that too. According to Alice, more and more people on the island were defying the prohibition and placing republican flags on the front of their houses, even in Belfast and Derry, strongholds of the pro-British.

On the other hand, despite the war on the continent from which unsettling news arrived daily —the actions were resulting in staggering numbers of casualties and the outcomes remained uncertain—, in England itself, many people were willing to help the deported from Ireland by the military authorities. Hundreds of men and women considered subversive had been expelled and were now scattered throughout England, with orders to settle in remote locations and, for the vast majority, without resources to survive. Alice, who belonged to humanitarian associations that sent them money, food, and clothing, told Roger that they had no difficulty in collecting funds and assistance from the general public. The participation of the Catholic Church had also been important in this regard.

Among the deportees, there were dozens of women. Many of them —with some, Alice had personally conversed— harbored, amid their solidarity, a certain resentment towards the commanders of the rebellion who made it difficult for women to collaborate with the insurgents. However, almost all, willingly or unwillingly, ended up admitting them into the strongholds and making use of them. The only commander who flatly refused to admit women in Boland's Mills and all the neighboring territory controlled by his companies was Eamon de Valera. His arguments irritated the militants of Cumann na mBan for being conservative. That a woman's place was her home and not the barricade, and her natural instruments were the spinning wheel, the kitchen, flowers, the needle, and thread, not the pistol or rifle. And that her presence could distract the combatants, who,

for protecting them, they would neglect their obligations. The tall and thin mathematics professor, leader of the Irish Volunteers, with whom Roger Casement had conversed many times and maintained abundant correspondence, was sentenced to death by one of those secret and expedient martial courts that judged the leaders of the Rising. But he was saved at the last minute. When, having confessed and taken communion, he awaited with total tranquility, the rosary between his fingers, to be taken to the back wall of Kilmainham Gaol where the executions took place, the Tribunal decided to commute his death sentence to life imprisonment. According to rumors, the companies under the command of Eamon de Valera, despite his lack of military training, behaved with great efficiency and discipline, inflicting many losses on the enemy. They were the last to surrender. But rumors also said that the tension and sacrifices of those days had been so hard that, at some point, his subordinates at the station where his command post operated believed he was going to lose his mind, due to the erratic nature of his behavior. He was not the only case. Under the rain of lead and fire, without sleeping, eating, or drinking, some had gone mad or suffered nervous breakdowns at the barricades.

Roger had become distracted, recalling the elongated silhouette of Eamon de Valera, his speech so solemn and ceremonious. He noticed that Alice was now talking about a horse. She did so with emotion and tears in her eyes. The historian had a great love for animals, but why did this one affect her in such a special way? Gradually, he began to understand that his nephew had recounted the episode to her. It was about the horse of one of the British cavalry who, on the first day of the insurrection, charged against the Post Office and were repelled, losing three men. The horse took several bullet hits and collapsed in front of a barricade, gravely injured. It whinnied in terror, pierced with pain. Sometimes it managed to get back up, but weakened by blood loss, it would fall to the ground after attempting a few steps. Behind the barricade, there was a discussion among those who wanted to end its suffering and those who opposed, believing it could recover. Finally, they shot it. Two rifle shots were needed to end its agony.

—It wasn't the only animal that died in the streets — said Alice, sorrowfully—. Many died, horses, dogs, cats. Innocent victims of human brutality. Many nights I have nightmares about them. Poor things. Humans are worse than animals, aren't we, Roger?

—Not always, dear. I assure you that some are as ferocious as we are. I think of snakes, for example, whose venom slowly kills you amid horrible gasps. And of caimans in the Amazon that enter your body through the anus and cause hemorrhaging. In short...

—Let's talk about something else —Alice said—. Enough already with the war, the fighting, the wounded, and the dead.

But, a moment later, she was telling Roger that among the hundreds of Irish deported and brought to English jails, it was striking how support for Sinn Fein and the IRB was growing. Even moderate, independent people and well-known pacifists were joining these radical organizations. And the large number of petitions appearing throughout Ireland calling for amnesty for those convicted. Also in the United States, in all the cities with Irish communities, protests against the excesses of repression following the Rising continued. John Devoy had done a fantastic job and managed to get the best of North American society, from artists and businesspeople to politicians, professors, and journalists, to sign amnesty petitions. The House of Representatives passed a motion, written in very severe terms, condemning the summary death sentences against opponents who had laid down their arms. Despite the defeat, things had not gotten worse with the Rising. As for international support, the situation had never been better for nationalists.

—The visiting time has run out excessively —the sheriff interrupted her—. They must say goodbye once and for all.

—I will get another permit, I will come to see you before... —Alice said and fell silent as she stood up. She had turned very pale.

—Of course, my dear Alice —Roger nodded, embracing her—. I hope you succeed. You don't know how much good it does me to see you. How it calms me and fills me with peace.

But it was not so this time. He returned to his cell with a turmoil of images in his head, all related to the Holy Week rebellion, as if the memories and testimonies of his friend had pulled him out of Pentonville Prison and thrown him into the midst of street warfare, in the heat of battle. He felt an immense nostalgia for Dublin, for its buildings and red brick houses, the tiny gardens protected by wooden fences, the noisy trams, the ramshackle neighborhoods of precarious housing with miserable, barefoot people surrounding the islets of influx and modernity. How would all of that have fared after the artillery fire, the incendiary bombs, the collapses? He thought of the Abbey Theatre, of The Gate, of Olympia, of the foul-smelling, warm pubs full of beer and crackling with conversations. Would Dublin ever be what it once was?

The *sheriff* did not offer to take him to the showers, and he did not ask for it. He saw the jailer so depressed, with such an expression of detachment and absence, that he did not want to bother him. It saddened him to see him suffer in that way, and it made him sad that he couldn't figure out how to lift his spirits. The *sheriff* had already come twice, violating the rules, to talk at night in his cell, and each time Roger had felt anxious for not having been able to give Mr. Stacey the peace he sought. The second time, just like the first, had only involved talking about his son Alex and his death in the battles against the Germans in Loos, that unknown place in France to which he referred as a cursed spot.

At one point, after a long silence, the jailer confessed to Roger that the memory of the time he whipped Alex, still just a small boy, for stealing a pastry from the bakery on the corner haunted him. "It was an offense and had to be punished —said Mr. Stacey—, but not so severely. To whip a child of such a young age was an unforgivable cruelty." Roger tried to comfort him by reminding him that the captain Casement, his father, had sometimes hit him and his brothers, including their mother, and that they had never stopped loving him. But was Mr. Stacey listening?

He remained silent, brooding over his pain, with deep and agitated breaths.

When the jailer closed the door of the cell, Roger went to lie down on his cot. He sighed, feverish. The conversation with Alice had not done him any good. Now he felt sadness for not having been there, stuffed into his Volunteer uniform with his Mauser in hand, participating in the Rising, not caring that this armed action would end in a slaughter. Perhaps Patrick Pearse, Joseph Plunkett, and the others were right. It was not about winning but about resisting as much as possible. About immolating oneself, like the Christian martyrs of heroic times. Their blood was the seed that germinated, ended the pagan idols, and replaced them with Christ the Redeemer. The blood shed by the Volunteers would also bear fruit, opening the eyes of the blind and winning freedom for Ireland. How many companions and friends from Sinn Féin, from the Volunteers, from the People's Army, from the IRB had been on the barricades, knowing full well that it was a suicidal endeavor? Hundreds, thousands, undoubtedly. Patrick Pearse, the first. He always believed that martyrdom was the main weapon of a just struggle. Did that not form part of the Irish character, of the Celtic heritage? The ability to endure the suffering of Catholics was already in Cúchulainn, in the mythic heroes of Éire and their great deeds and, likewise, in the serene heroism of their saints that his friend Alice had studied with such love and wisdom: an infinite capacity for great gestures. An impractical spirit of the Irish, perhaps, but compensated by the excessive generosity to embrace the boldest dreams of justice, equality, and happiness. Even when defeat was inevitable. With all the craziness of the plan by Pearse, Tom Clarke, Plunkett, and the others, in those six days of unequal struggle, the spirit of the Irish people had come to the surface for the world to admire, indomitable despite so many centuries of servitude, idealistic, reckless, willing to do anything for a just cause. What a different attitude from that of those compatriots imprisoned in the Limburg camp, blind and deaf to their exhortations. Theirs was the other face of Ireland: that of the subdued, those who, because of centuries of colonization, had lost that indomitable spark that led so many women and men to the barricades of Dublin. Had he been wrong once again in his life? What would have happened if the German weapons that the *Aud* was bringing had reached the hands of the Volunteers on the night of April 20 in

Tralee Bay? He imagined hundreds of patriots on bicycles, cars, wagons, mules, and donkeys moving under the stars and distributing those weapons and ammunitions throughout the geography of Ireland. Would things have changed with those twenty thousand rifles, ten machine guns, and five million cartridges in the hands of the rebels? At least, the battles would have lasted longer, the rebels would have defended themselves better, and they would have inflicted more losses on the enemy. Happily, he noticed he was yawning. Sleep would erase those images and soothe his unease. He felt as if he were sinking.

He had a pleasant dream. His mother appeared and disappeared, smiling, beautiful and graceful with her long straw hat from which hung a ribbon floating in the wind. A coquettish flowered parasol protected the whiteness of her cheeks from the sun. Anne Jephson's eyes were fixed on him and Roger's on her, and nothing and no one seemed capable of interrupting their silent and tender communication. But suddenly, the captain of lancers Roger Casement emerged from the forest, with his gleaming light dragons uniform. He looked at Anne Jephson with eyes that had an obscene greed. Such vulgarity offended and frightened Roger. He didn't know what to do. He had no strength to prevent what would happen, nor to run away and free himself from that horrible premonition. With tears in his eyes, trembling with fear and indignation, he saw the captain lift his mother into the air. He heard her gasp in surprise and then laugh with a forced and complacent giggle. Tem

soft with disgust and jealousy, he saw her kicking in the air, showing her slender ankles, while her father took her running among the trees. They faded into the forest and her giggles thinned until they were eclipsed. Now, he heard the wind moan and the chirping of birds. He did not cry. The world was cruel and unfair, and rather than suffer this way, it would be preferable to die.

The dream continued for a long while, but upon waking up, still in darkness, some minutes or hours later, Roger could no longer remember its ending. Not knowing the time distressed him again. Sometimes he would forget, but the slightest unease, doubt, or anxiety would make the piercing anxiety of not knowing what moment of day or night he was in freeze his heart, giving him the feeling of having been expelled from time, of living in a limbo where the before, the now, and the after did not exist.

Just over three months had passed since his capture, and he felt as if he had been behind bars for years, in isolation where, day by day, hour by hour, he was losing his humanity. He didn't tell Alice, but if he ever hoped that the British Government would grant his request for clemency and commute his death sentence to imprisonment, he had now lost that hope. In the climate of cholera and desire for revenge that he had put the Crown in, especially its military, after the Easter Rising, England needed an exemplary punishment for the traitors who saw in Germany the enemy against which the Empire was fighting in the fields of Flanders, the ally of Ireland in its struggles for emancipation. What was strange was that the cabinet had delayed the decision for so long. What were they waiting for? Did they want to prolong his agony by making him pay for his ingratitude to the country that decorated and ennobled him and to which he had responded by conspiring with its adversary? No, in politics, feelings did not matter; only interests and conveniences did. The Government would be coldly assessing the advantages and disadvantages that his execution would bring.

Would it serve as a warning? Would it worsen the Government's relations with the Irish people? The campaign to discredit him aimed to ensure that no one would mourn for that human ignominy, for that degenerate whom the noose would free decent society from. It was foolish to leave those newspapers within anyone's reach when he left for the United States. A negligence that would be cleverly exploited by the Empire and would for a long time cast a shadow over the truth of his life, his political conduct, and even his death.

He fell asleep again. This time, instead of a dream, he had a nightmare that he could barely remember the next morning. In it, there was a little bird, a canary with a clear voice, being tormented by the bars of the cage in which it was trapped. The desperation with which it flapped its golden wings was evident, as if by doing so those bars would widen to allow it to escape. Its little eyes spun incessantly in their sockets, pleading for mercy. Roger, a boy in short pants, told his mother that cages and zoos should not exist, and that animals should always live in freedom. At the same time, something secret was happening, a danger was closing in on him, something invisible that his sensitivity sensed, something insidious, treacherous, that was already there and ready to strike. He was sweating, trembling like a little piece of paper.

He woke up so agitated that he could hardly breathe. He felt like he was drowning. His heart pounded in his chest so forcefully that it might have been the onset of a heart attack. Should he call the guard on duty? He immediately decided against it. What better way to die here, in his cot, from a natural death that would free him from the gallows? Moments later, his heart calmed down and he was able to breathe normally again.

Would Father Carey come today? He was eager to see him and have a long conversation about topics and concerns that would relate much to the soul, religion, and God, and very little to politics. And, at that moment, while he began to calm down and forget his recent nightmare, the last meeting with the prison chaplain came to his mind, along with that moment of sudden tension that filled him with unease. They were talking about his conversion to Catholicism. Father Carey was telling him once again that he should not speak of 'conversion' since, having been baptized as a child, he had never strayed from the Church. The act would be a reactivation of his status as a catholic, something that did not require any formal procedure. Nonetheless — and at that moment, Roger noticed that Father Carey hesitated, carefully searching for words to avoid offending him — His Eminence Cardinal Bourne had thought that, if Roger deemed it appropriate, he could sign a document, a private text between him and the Church, manifesting his desire to return, a reaffirmation of his status as a catholic as well as a testimony of renunciation and repentance for old mistakes and missteps.

Father Carey could not hide how uncomfortable he felt.

There was a silence. Then, Roger said softly:

—I will not sign any document, Father Carey. My reinstatement to the Catholic Church must be something personal, with you as the only witness.

—That will be —said the chaplain.

Another silence followed, always tense.

—Was Cardinal Bourne referring to what I imagine? — Roger asked—. I mean, to the campaign against me, the accusations about my private life. Should I regret that in a document to be readmitted to the Catholic Church?

Father Carey's breathing had become faster. Again, he was searching for the words before responding. — Cardinal Bourne is a good and generous man, of compassionate spirit —he asserted, finally—. But, do not forget, Roger, he bears the responsibility of safeguarding the good name of the Church in a country where Catholics are a minority and where there are still those who foster great phobias against us.

—Tell me candidly, Father Carey: Has Cardinal Bourne made it a condition for my readmission to the Catholic Church that I sign that document repenting of those vile and vicious things of which the press accuses me?

—It is not a condition, just a suggestion —said the clergyman—. You can accept it or not, and that will not change anything. He was baptized. He is catholic and will remain so. Let's not talk more about this matter.

Indeed, they did not speak of it again. But for Roger, the memory of that dialogue returned from time to time, leading him to wonder if his desire to return to the Church of his mother was pure or stained by the circumstances of his situation. Was it not an act decided for political reasons? To show his solidarity with the Irish catholics who were in favor of independence and his hostility to that minority, the vast majority of which was Protestant, who wanted to continue being part of the Empire? What validity would a conversion that, deep down, did not obey anything spiritual, but rather the yearning to feel sheltered by a community, to be part of a long tribe, have in the eyes of God? God would see in such a conversion the flailing of a castaway.

—What matters now, Roger, is not Cardinal Bourne, nor me, nor the Catholics of England, nor those of Ireland — Father Carey said—. What matters now is you. Your reunion with God. There lies the strength, the truth, that peace you deserve after such an intense life and so many trials you have had to face.

—Yes, yes, Father Carey —Roger nodded, anxious—. I know. But, just so. I make the effort, I swear to you. I try to make myself heard, to reach Him. Sometimes, very rarely, it seems to me that I succeed. Then, I finally feel a bit of peace, that incredible calm. Like some nights back in Africa, with the full moon, the sky filled with stars, not a drop of wind to stir the trees, the murmur of insects. Everything was so beautiful and so quiet that the

thought that came to my mind was always: "God exists. How could I even imagine that He does not exist, seeing what I see?". But, other times, Father Carey, most of the time, I do not see Him, He does not answer me, He does not listen. And I feel very alone. In my life, most of the time, I have felt very alone. Now, these days, it happens to me very often. But the loneliness of God is much worse. Then, I tell myself: "God does not listen to me nor will He listen. I will die as alone as I have lived." It is something that torments me day and night, Father.

—He is there, Roger. He listens to him. He knows what he feels. That he needs him. He will not fail him. If there is one thing I can guarantee, of which I am absolutely sure, it is that God will not fail him.

In the darkness, lying on his cot, Roger thought that Father Carey had taken on a task as heroic, if not more so, than the rebels at the barricades: to bring comfort and peace to those desperate, shattered beings who were going to spend many years in a cell or were preparing to ascend the gallows. A terrible, dehumanizing task that must have brought Father Carey, especially in the early days of his ministry, to despair for many days. But he knew how to hide it. He always maintained his composure and at all times transmitted that feeling of understanding, of solidarity, which did him so much good. They had spoken at times about the Rising.

—What would you have done, Father Carey, if you had been in Dublin in those days?

—Go there to provide spiritual assistance to whoever might need it, as many priests did.

He added that it was not necessary to agree with the rebels' idea that the freedom of Ireland could only be achieved with weapons in order to provide them with spiritual support.

Certainly, this was not what Father Carey believed; he had always encouraged a visceral rejection of violence. But he would have gone to hear confessions, to give communion, to pray for anyone who requested it, to assist nurses and doctors. Many religious men and women had done the same, and the hierarchy had supported them. Pastors were supposed to be where the flock was, right?

All of that was true, but it was also true that the idea of God did not fit within the limited confines of human reason. It had to be forced in because it never fully fit. He and Herbert Ward had spoken many times about this matter. "When it comes to God, one must believe, not reason," Herbert said. "If you reason, God evaporates like a puff of smoke."

Roger had spent his life believing and doubting. Not even now, at the gates of death, was he able to believe in God with the resolute faith that his mother, father, or siblings possessed. How lucky were those for whom the existence of the Supreme Being had never been a problem but a certainty that ordered their world and provided explanations and reasons for everything. Those who believed this way would undoubtedly reach a resignation before death that those who, like him, had played hide and seek with God would never know. Roger recalled that some

once had written a poem with that title: "Hiding with God." But Herbert Ward assured him that it was very bad, and he threw it in the trash. What a pity. He would have liked to reread it and correct it now.

It was beginning to dawn. A ray of light peeked through the bars of the tall window. Soon they would come to take away the chamber pot of urine and excrement and to bring him breakfast.

It seemed to him that the first snack of the day was taking longer to arrive than usual. The sun was already high in the sky, and a golden, cold light illuminated his cell. He had been reading and re-reading the maxims of Thomas à Kempis about the distrust of knowledge that makes humans arrogant and the waste of time that is 'the excessive pondering over obscure and mysterious things' whose ignorance would not even be reproached in the final judgment when he felt the large key turning in the lock and the door of the cell opening.

'Good morning,' said the guard, placing the dark flour roll and the cup of coffee on the floor. Or would it be tea today? For, due to inexplicable reasons, breakfast frequently changed from tea to coffee or from coffee to tea.

—Good morning—said Roger, standing up and going to grab the basin—. Have you taken longer today than on other days, or am I mistaken?

True to the silence directive, the guard did not respond and Roger felt that he was avoiding eye contact. The guard stepped aside to let him pass, and Roger went out into the long hallway filled with soot, carrying the basin. The guard walked two steps behind him. He felt his spirits lift with the summer sun's glow on the thick walls and the stones of the floor, creating glimmers that looked like sparks. He thought about the parks of London, the Serpentine, and the tall plane trees, poplars, and chestnuts of Hyde Park, and how beautiful it would be to walk there right now, anonymous among the athletes riding horses or bicycles and the families with children who, taking advantage of the good weather, had gone out to spend the day outdoors.

In the deserted bathroom —there should have been instructions for him to have different times than the other prisoners for washing— he emptied and scrubbed the basin. Then, he sat on the toilet without any success —constipation had been a lifelong issue— and, finally, removing the blue prison smock, he washed and vigorously scrubbed his body and face. He dried himself with the half-damp towel hanging from a hook. He returned to his cell with the clean basin, slowly enjoying the sunlight that fell over the hallway of barred windows high up on the wall and the noises —incomprehensible voices, honks, footsteps, engines, squeaks— which gave him the impression that he had entered time once again, only to disappear as soon as the guard locked the door to his cell.

The drink could be tea or coffee. He didn't care how bland it was, as the liquid, going down his chest towards his stomach, made him feel good and relieved the acidity that

always troubled him in the mornings. He saved the pastry in case he got hungry later.

Lying on his bed, he resumed reading the *Imitation of Christ*. At times it seemed to him to be of a childish naivety, but sometimes, upon turning a page, he would come across a thought that disturbed him and prompted him to close the book. He would start to meditate. The monk said that it was useful for man to occasionally suffer pains and adversities, because it reminded him of his condition: he was "exiled in this land" and should have no hope in the things of this world, only in those of the beyond. That was true. The German friar, back in his convent in Agnetenberg, five hundred years ago had hit the nail on the head, expressing a truth that Roger experienced firsthand. Or, rather, since childhood, the death of his mother had plunged him into an orphans' state from which he could never escape. That word best described how he had always felt, in Scotland, in England, in Africa, in Brazil, in Iquitos, in Putumayo: an exile. A good part of his life had boasted this condition of a citizen of the world that, according to Alice, Yeats admired in him: someone who is from nowhere because they are from everywhere. For a long time, he told himself that this privilege bestowed upon him a freedom unknown to those who lived anchored in one single place. But Thomas à Kempis was right. He had never felt from anywhere because that was the human condition: exile in this vale of tears, a transitory fate until with death and the beyond men *and* women would return to the fold, to their nourishing source, where they would live for all eternity.

In contrast, Thomas à Kempis's recipe for resisting temptations was candid. Had that pious man ever faced temptations, back in his solitary convent? If he did, it must not have been so easy for him to resist them and defeat the "devil, who never sleeps and always lurks around, looking for someone to devour." Thomas à Kempis said that no one was so perfect as to be free from temptations and that it was impossible for a Christian to be exempt from "concupiscence," the source of them all.

He had been weak and succumbed to concupiscence many times. Not as many as he had written in his journals and notebooks, although, undoubtedly, writing what had not been lived, what had only been wished to be lived, was also a way — cowardly and timid — of experiencing it and therefore surrendering to temptation. Would he pay for this despite not having truly enjoyed it, but rather in that uncertain and elusive way in which fantasies were lived? Would he have to pay for everything he did not do, for what he only desired and wrote about? God would know how to discriminate and would surely sanction those rhetorical faults more lightly than the sins actually committed.

In any case, writing about what was not experienced to get the idea of living it already carried an implicit punishment: the feeling of failure and frustration that always concluded the deceitful games in their diaries. (And also the lived experiences, for that matter.) But now, those games

irresponsible had put a formidable weapon in the enemy's hands to vilify their name and memory.

On the other hand, it was not so easy to know which temptations Thomas à Kempis was referring to. They could arrive so disguised, so hidden, that they blended in with benign things, with aesthetic enthusiasms. Roger recalled, in those distant years of his adolescence, that his first emotions regarding well-shaped bodies, with virile muscles, the harmonious slenderness of adolescents, did not seem to him a malicious and lustful sentiment, but rather a manifestation of sensitivity, of aesthetic enthusiasm. He believed this for a long time. And that it was this same artistic vocation that had prompted him to learn the technique of photography to capture those beautiful bodies on cardstock. At some point, living in Africa, he noticed that this admiration was not healthy, or better said, it was not only healthy, but healthy and unhealthy at the same time, since those harmonious, sweaty, muscular bodies, devoid of fat, in which the material sensuality of felines could be sensed, apart from rapture and admiration, also produced in him greed, desires, a wild urge to touch them. This is how temptations became part of his life, revolutionizing it, filling it with secrets, anguish, fear, but also with startled moments of pleasure. And of remorse and bitterness, of course. Would God, at the supreme moment, tally up the sums and the differences? Would He forgive him? Would He punish him? He felt curious, not frightened. As if it were not about him, but rather an intellectual exercise or a riddle.

And, at that moment, he heard the thick key struggling again in the lock, surprised. When the door to his cell opened, a blaze of light entered, that strong sun that suddenly seemed to ignite the mornings of London in August. Blinded, he noticed that three people had entered the cell. He could not distinguish their faces. He stood up. When the door closed, he saw that the person closest to him, almost touching him, was the governor of Pentonville Prison, whom he had only seen a couple of times. He was an elderly man, thin and wrinkled. He was dressed in dark clothing and had a serious expression. Behind him stood the *sheriff*, as white as a sheet of paper. And a guard who looked at the ground. Roger felt as if the silence lasted for centuries.

Finally, looking him in the eyes, the governor spoke, with a voice that was initially hesitant but became firm as he progressed in his explanation:

—I fulfill my duty to inform you that this morning, August 2, 1916, the Council of Ministers of Her Majesty's Government has met, studied the plea for clemency presented by your lawyers, and rejected it by unanimous vote of the attending ministers. Consequently, the sentence of the Tribunal that judged and condemned you for high treason will be executed tomorrow, August 3, 1916, in the courtyard of Pentonville Prison, at nine in the morning. According to established custom, for the execution, the condemned does not have to wear the prisoner's uniform and may use the clothing

civilians from whom he was stripped upon entering the prison and that will be returned to him. Likewise, I fulfill my duty to inform you that the chaplains, the catholic priest, *father Carey and father MacCarroll*, of the same confession, will be available to provide you with spiritual help, if you wish. They will be the only people with whom you can meet. If you wish to leave some letters to your family with your final wishes, the establishment will provide writing materials. If you have any other requests to make, you can do so now.

—What time will I be able to see the chaplains? —asked Roger, and he felt that his voice was hoarse and icy.

The governor turned to the *sheriff*, they exchanged a few phrases in whispers, and it was the *sheriff* who replied: — They will come at the beginning of the afternoon. —Thank you.

After a moment of hesitation, the three people left the cell, and Roger heard the guard lock the door.

The phase of his life in which he would be most immersed in the problems of Ireland began for Roger Casement with a trip to the Canary Islands in January 1913. As the ship ventured deeper into the Atlantic, he felt a great weight lifting off him, shedding those images of Iquitos, Putumayo, the rubber plantations, Manaus, the Bajans, Julio C. Arana, the intrigues of the Foreign Office, and regaining a readiness that he could now direct toward the affairs of his country. He had already done what he could for the indigenous people of the Amazon. Arana, one of his worst tormentors, would never rise again: he was a discredited and ruined man, likely to end his days in jail. Now he had to attend to another group of Indigenous people, those of Ireland. They too needed to rid themselves of the 'aranas' who exploited them, though with more refined and hypocritical weapons than those of the Peruvian, Colombian, and Brazilian rubber dealers.

But, despite the liberation he felt moving away from London, both during the journey and in the month he spent in Las Palmas, he was troubled by the deterioration of his health. The pains in his hip and back due to arthritis would strike at any hour of the day or night. The painkillers no longer had the same effect as before. He had to spend hours lying in his hotel bed or in a chair on the terrace, sweating cold. He walked with difficulty, always with a cane, and could no longer undertake long walks through the countryside or along the hills as he had in previous trips, fearing that pain would paralyze him in the middle of a stroll. His best memories of those weeks in early 1913 would be the hours he spent immersed in the past of Ireland thanks to reading a book by Alice Stopford Green, *The Old Irish World* (The Oíd Irish World), in which history, mythology, legend, and traditions mingled to portray a society of adventure and fantasy, of conflict and creativity, where a fighting and generous people thrived in the face of a challenging nature and displayed courage and inventiveness with their songs, their

dances, their daring games, their rites and customs: a whole heritage that the English occupation came to cut short and to

trying to annihilate, without succeeding completely. On the third day of being in the city of Las Palmas, he went out after dinner to take a walk around the port, an area filled with taverns, bars, and brothel-like hotels. In Santa Catalina Park, adjacent to Las Canteras beach, after exploring the surroundings, he approached two young men who looked like sailors to ask for a light. He chatted with them for a moment. His imperfect Spanish, which he mixed with Portuguese, elicited laughter from the boys. He suggested going for a drink, but one of them had a date, so he stayed with Miguel, the younger one, a dark-haired youth just out of adolescence. They went to a narrow, smoky bar named *Almirante Colón*, where an older woman was singing, accompanied by a guitarist. After the second drink, Roger, sheltered in the dimness of the place, reached out his hand and placed it on Miguel's thigh. Miguel smiled, nodding. Encouraged, Roger moved his hand a little further towards the zipper. He felt the boy's sex, and a wave of desire coursed through him from head to toe. It had been many months—"How many?" he thought, "three, six?"—since he had been a man without sex, without desires or fantasies. He felt that with the excitement, youth and a love for life returned to his veins. "Can we go to a hotel?" he asked. Miguel smiled, neither agreeing nor denying, but he made no attempt to stand up. Instead, he ordered another glass of the strong, spicy wine they had been served. When the woman finished singing, Roger asked for the bill. He paid, and they went out. "Can we go to a hotel?" he asked him again on the street, anxiously. The boy seemed undecided, or perhaps he was delaying his response to make himself more desirable and increase the reward he would receive for his services. At that moment, Roger felt a stabbing pain in his hip that made him flinch and lean against the railing of a window. This time the pain did not come in small waves, as it had before, but suddenly and stronger than usual. Like a knife, yes. He must have sat on the floor, doubled over. Frightened, Miguel quickly moved away without asking him what was wrong or saying goodbye. Roger remained hunched over like that for a long time, with his eyes closed, waiting for that red-hot iron to relent that was tormenting his back. When he was finally able to stand, he had to walk several blocks very slowly, dragging his feet, until he found a car to take him to the hotel. Only at dawn did the pain subside, and he was able to sleep. In a restless dream filled with nightmares, he suffered and enjoyed on the edge of a precipice he was about to tumble over at any moment.

The next morning, while having breakfast, he opened his diary and, writing slowly and in tight handwriting, made love with Miguel, several times, first in the darkness of Santa Catalina park listening to the murmur of the sea, and then, in the stinking room of a small hotel from which the sirens of the boats could be heard howling. The dark-haired boy was riding on him, teasing, "you're an old man, that's what

you are, an extremely old man», and giving him a few slaps on the buttocks that made him moan, perhaps from pain, perhaps from pleasure.

Neither the rest of the month he spent in the Canary Islands, nor during the trip to South Africa, nor the weeks he was in Cape Town and Durban with his brother Tom and his sister-in-law Katje, did he try another sexual adventure, paralyzed by the fear of experiencing again, due to arthritis, a situation as ridiculous as the one he faced in the park.

Santa Catalina de Las Palmas thwarted his meeting with the Canarian sailor. Occasionally, as he had done so many times in Africa and Brazil, he would make love alone, scribbling on the pages of his diary with nervous, hurried handwriting, synthetic phrases, sometimes as amusing as those fleeting lovers from whom he later had to seek gratification. These simulations sank him into a depressing stupor, so he tried to space them out, as nothing made him more aware of his solitude and his clandestine condition, which he knew very well would accompany him until his death.

The enthusiasm that Alice Stopford Green's book about old Ireland caused him led him to ask his friend for more reading material on the subject. The package with books and pamphlets that Alice sent him arrived just as he was about to embark on the *Grantilly Castle* headed to South Africa on February 6, 1913. He read day and night during the journey and continued to do so in South Africa, so that despite the distance, those weeks he felt very close to Ireland again, the Ireland of now, yesterday, and the distant past, a history he felt he was acquiring through the texts Alice selected for him. During the trip, the pain in his back and hip diminished.

The encounter with his brother Tom, after so many years, was painful. Contrary to what Roger had thought when he decided to go see him, that the trip would bring him closer to his older brother and create an emotional bond that had never truly existed, it served rather to confirm that they were two strangers. Apart from their blood relationship, there was nothing in common between them. All these years they had written to each other, generally when Tom and his first wife, Blanche Baharry, an Australian, were having financial problems and wanted Roger to help them. He had never stopped doing so, except when the loans that his brother and sister-in-law asked for were excessive for his budget. Tom had remarried a South African, Katje Ackerman, and they had started a tourist business in Durban that was not doing well. His brother seemed older than he was and had become the prototypical South African, rustic, sunburned by the outdoors, with informal and somewhat rough manners, that even in his way of speaking English seemed much more South African than Irish. He was not interested in what was happening in Ireland, Great Britain, or Europe. His obsessive topic was the economic problems he faced with the *lodge* he had opened with Katje in Durban. They thought that the beauty of the place would attract tourists and hunters, but not

so many people were attending and the maintenance costs were higher than they had calculated. They had built up many hopes for this project and feared that, as things were going, they would have to sell the *lodge*. Although his sister-in-law was more fun and interesting than his brother —she had artistic hobbies and a sense of humor—, Roger ended up regretting having made that long trip just to visit the couple.

In mid-April, he began his return to London. By then, he felt more energized and, thanks to the South African climate, the pains from his arthritis had eased. Now his focus was on the Foreign Office. He could no longer delay his decision or request new unpaid leave. He would either return to the consulate in Rio de Janeiro, as his superiors demanded, or resign from diplomacy. Going back to Rio, a city he had never liked, which, despite the physical beauty of its surroundings, he always felt was hostile towards him, was intolerable. But that was not all. Above all, he did not want to go back to living in duplicity, acting as a diplomat in service of an Empire he condemned with his feelings and principles. Throughout the journey back to England, he calculated: his savings were limited, but by leading a frugal lifestyle—something that was easy for him—and with the pension he would receive for the years accumulated as an official, he would manage. Upon arriving in London, his decision was made. The first thing he did was go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to submit his resignation, explaining that he was leaving the service for health reasons.

He stayed very few days in London, organizing his retirement from the Foreign Office and preparing his trip to Ireland. He did it with joy, but also with a sense of anticipatory nostalgia, as if he were to leave England forever. He saw Alice a couple of times and also his sister Nina, to whom, in order not to worry her, he concealed Tom's financial troubles in South Africa. He tried to see Edmund D. Morel, who, interestingly, had not replied to any of the letters he had sent in the last three months. Yet his old friend, the *Bulldog*, could not meet him, claiming travel and obligations that were clearly excuses. What was happening to that companion in struggles whom he admired and cared for so much? Why this cooling? What gossip or intrigue had been communicated to him to turn him against him? Soon after, Herbert Ward informed him, in Paris, that Morel, aware of the harshness with which Roger criticized England and the Empire regarding Ireland, was avoiding him to not disclose his opposition to such political attitudes.

—It happens that, although you may not realize it, you have become an extremist —Herbert told him, half joking, half serious.

In Dublin, Roger rented a tiny, old cottage at number 55 Lower Baggot Street. It had a small garden with geraniums and hortensias that he pruned and watered early in the mornings. It was a quiet neighborhood of shopkeepers, artisans, and inexpensive trades where families went to mass on Sundays, with ladies dressed up like

for a party and men in dark suits, wearing caps and polished shoes. In the cobwebbed pub on the corner, run by a tiny barmaid, Roger drank stout with the greengrocer, the tailor, and the shoemaker from the neighborhood, discussing current events and singing old songs. The fame he achieved in England for his campaigns against crimes in the Congo and the Amazon had spread to Ireland, and despite his desire to lead a simple, anonymous life, since his arrival in Dublin, he found himself sought after by a diverse range of people — politicians, intellectuals, journalists, and cultural clubs and centers — to give talks, write articles, and attend social gatherings. He even had to sit for a well-known painter, Sarah Purser. In the portrait she made, Roger appeared rejuvenated, with an air of confidence and triumph that he did not recognize.

Once again, he resumed his studies of old Irish. The teacher, Mrs. Temple, with her cane, glasses, and a little hat with a veil, came three times a week to teach him Gaelic and would assign tasks that she later marked with a red pencil, usually giving low grades. Why did he have such difficulty learning this language of the Celts with whom he wanted so much to identify? He had an aptitude for languages; he had learned French, Portuguese, at least three African languages, and was able to make himself understood in Spanish and Italian. Why did the vernacular language, to which he felt a bond, elude him so much? Each time he learned something with great effort, within a few days, sometimes within a few hours, he forgot it. Since then, without telling anyone, and even less so in political discussions where, for principle's sake, he maintained the opposite view, he began to wonder if it was realistic, if the dream of people like Professor Eoin MacNeill and poet and educator Patrick Pearse to believe it was possible to revive the language that the colonizer had pursued, made clandestine, minority, and nearly extinguished, and to convert it once again into the mother tongue of the Irish, was not just a chimera. Was it possible that in future Ireland English would recede and, thanks to schools, newspapers, the sermons of priests, and politicians' speeches, it would be replaced by the language of the Celts? In public, Roger said yes, not only was it possible, it was also necessary, for Ireland to regain its authentic identity. It would be a long process, spanning several generations, but inevitable, because only when Gaelic was once again the national language would Ireland be free. However, in the solitude of his desk on Lower Baginbun Street, when he faced the composition exercises in Gaelic left by Mrs. Temple, he told himself that it was a futile endeavor. Reality had advanced too far in one direction to turn it back. English had become the way of communicating, of speaking, of being and feeling for an immense majority of Irish people, and wanting to renounce it was a political whim that could only result in Babel-like confusion and culturally turn his beloved Ireland into an archaeological curiosity, disconnected from the rest of the world.

· Was it worth it?

In May and June of 1913, his peaceful and studious life was abruptly interrupted when, following a conversation with a journalist from *The Irish Independent*, who spoke to him about the poverty and primitivism of the fishermen in Connemara, he decided, on a whim, to travel to that region in the west of Galway where, according to what he had heard, the most traditional Ireland was still preserved, and its inhabitants kept the old Irish language alive. Instead of a historical relic, Roger found in Connemara a spectacular contrast between the beauty of the sculpted mountains, cloud-swept slopes, and pristine swamps where the native ponies of the region roamed, and people living in dreadful misery, without schools, without doctors, in total helplessness. To make matters worse, several cases of typhus had just been reported. The epidemic could spread and cause devastation. The man of action within Roger Casement, sometimes dimmed but never extinguished, immediately got to work. He wrote an article in *The Irish Independent*, "The Irish Putumayo", and created a Relief Fund of which he was the first donor and subscriber. At the same time, he engaged in public actions with the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches and various charity associations, and encouraged doctors and nurses to go to the villages of Connemara as volunteers to support the scarce official health efforts. The campaign was successful. Many donations from Ireland and England arrived. Roger made three trips to the region bringing medicines, clothing, and food for the affected families. Additionally, he established a committee to provide Connemara with health dispensaries and build primary schools. During this campaign, in those two months, he had exhausting meetings with clerics, politicians, authorities, intellectuals, and journalists. He was surprised by the consideration with which he was treated, even by those who disagreed with his nationalist positions.

In July, he returned to London to be seen by the doctors, who were to report to the Foreign Office if the health reasons he claimed for resigning from diplomacy were accurate. Although, despite the intense activity carried out due to the Connemara epidemic, he did not feel unwell, he thought the examination would be a mere formality. However, the report from the doctors was more serious than he had thought: the arthritis in his spine, ilium, and knees had worsened. It could be alleviated with rigorous treatment and a very quiet life, but it was not curable. And it could not be ruled out that, if it progressed, it would leave him crippled. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs accepted his resignation and, in view of his condition, granted him a decent pension.

Before returning to Ireland, he decided to go to Paris, accepting an invitation from Herbert and Sarita Ward. He was happy to see them again and share the warm atmosphere of that African enclave that was their Parisian home. The entire place seemed to be an emanation of the great workshop where Herbert showed him a new collection of his sculptures of men and women from Africa and, also, some of its fauna. They were pieces made of brass and wood, from the last three years, that

he was going to exhibit in the autumn in Paris. While Herbert was showing them to him, telling anecdotes, and showing sketches and small models of each one, abundant images from the time when he and Herbert worked on the expeditions of Henry Morton Stanley and Henry Shelton Sanford came back to Roger's memory. He had learned a lot by listening to Herbert recount his adventures around the world, the colorful people he met during his Australian travels, and his vast readings. His intelligence remained just as sharp, as did his jovial and optimistic spirit. His wife, Sarita, an American, wealthy heiress, was his kindred spirit, also adventurous and somewhat bohemian. They understood each other wonderfully. They went on hiking trips through France and Italy. They had raised their children with the same cosmopolitan, restless, and curious spirit. Now the two boys were boarding school students in England but spent all their vacations in Paris. The girl, *Cricket*, lived with them.

The Wards took him to dinner at a restaurant in the Eiffel Tower, from which the bridges of the Seine and the neighborhoods of Paris were visible, and to the Comédie-Française to see *The Imaginary Invalid*, by Molière.

But not everything was friendship, understanding, and affection during the days he spent with the couple. He and Herbert had disagreed on many things, but that never cooled their friendship; on the contrary, the disagreements invigorated it. This time was different. One night they argued so passionately that Sarita had to intervene, forcing them to change the subject.

Herbert had always had a tolerant and somewhat amused attitude towards Roger's nationalism. But that night, he accused his friend of embracing the nationalist idea in a way that was too exalted, little rational, almost fanatical.

—If the majority of Irish people want to separate from Great Britain, so be it—he said—. I don't think Ireland gains much by having a flag, a coat of arms, and a president of the Republic. Nor do I think its economic and social problems will be solved by that. In my opinion, it would be better to adopt the Autonomy advocated by John Redmond and his supporters. They are Irish too, right? And a large majority compared to those, like you, who want secession. Well, none of that worries me much, to be honest. What does worry me is how intolerant you have become. Before, you used to give reasons, Roger. Now you only shout with hatred against a country that is yours too, that of your parents and siblings. A country you have served so well all these years. And it has recognized you for it, hasn't it? It has made you noble, it has bestowed the kingdom's most important honors upon you. Does that mean nothing to you?

—Should I become a colonialist in gratitude?— Casement interrupted him—. Should I accept for Ireland what you and I rejected for the Congo?

—Between the Congo and Ireland, there seems to be a staggering distance. Or are the English in the peninsulas of Connemara cutting off hands and beating the backs of the natives with whips?

—The methods of colonization in Europe are more refined, Herbert, but no less cruel.

In his final days in Paris, Roger avoided bringing up the topic of Ireland. He did not want his friendship with Herbert to suffer. Troubled, he told himself that in the future, undoubtedly, as he became increasingly involved in the political struggle, the distances with Herbert would grow, perhaps even destroying their friendship, one of the closest he had ever had in life. "Am I becoming a fanatic?" he would sometimes wonder thereafter, alarmed.

Upon returning to Dublin at the end of summer, he could no longer resume his Gaelic studies. The political situation had become volatile, and from the very beginning, he found himself drawn into participating in it. The Home Rule bill, which would have granted Ireland a Parliament and broad administrative and economic freedom, supported by the Irish Parliamentary Party led by John Redmond, was approved in the House of Commons in November 1912. However, the House of Lords rejected it two months later. In January 1913, in Ulster, a unionist stronghold dominated by the local Anglo-Irish and Protestant majority, the enemies of Autonomy, led by Edward Henry Carson, launched a virulent campaign. They formed the Ulster Volunteer Force, with over forty thousand enrolled. It was a political organization and a military force, ready to fight for Home Rule with weapons if necessary. The Irish Parliamentary Party, led by John Redmond, continued to fight for Autonomy. The second reading of the bill was approved in the House of Commons and again defeated in the House of Lords. On September 23, the Unionist Council voted to establish itself as the Provisional Government of Ulster, meaning to separate from the rest of Ireland if Autonomy was approved.

Roger Casement began to write in the nationalist press, now using his full name, criticizing the unionists of Ulster. He denounced the abuses that the Protestant majority committed against the Catholic minority in those provinces, such as Catholic workers being fired from factories and the municipalities of Catholic neighborhoods being discriminated against in budgets and allocations. "Upon seeing what is happening in Ulster—he stated in an article—I no longer feel Protestant." He lamented that the attitude of the extremists divided the Irish into enemy factions, which could have tragic consequences for the future. In another article, he criticized the Anglican clergy for sheltering the abuses against the Catholic community with their silence.

Although he expressed skepticism about whether Home Rule could free Ireland from its dependency in political conversations, his articles, nevertheless, hinted at hope: if the law were passed without amendments that would distort it, and Ireland had a Parliament, it could choose its authorities and manage its revenues, and would stand on the threshold of sovereignty. If that brought peace, what did it matter that its defense and diplomacy remained in the hands of the British Crown?

During those days, his friendship deepened further with two Irishmen who had devoted their lives to the defense, study, and promotion of the Celtic language: Professor Eoin MacNeill and Patrick Pearse. Roger came to feel great sympathy for this radical and uncompromising crusader of Gaelic and independence that Pearse was. He had joined the Gaelic League in his adolescence and was dedicated to literature, journalism, and teaching. He had founded and managed two bilingual schools, St. Enda's for boys and another for girls, St. Ita's, the first dedicated to reclaiming Gaelic as the national language. In addition to writing poems and plays, in pamphlets and articles he argued that if the Celtic language was not restored, independence would be worthless, as Ireland would remain culturally a colonial possession. His intolerance in this regard was absolute; in his youth, he had even called William Butler Yeats a "traitor"—whom he would later admire unreservedly—because he wrote in English. He was shy, a bachelor, with a robust and imposing physique, an tireless worker, with a slight defect in his eye, and an exuberant and charismatic speaker. When he was not discussing Gaelic or emancipation and was among trusted company, Patrick Pearse became a person bursting with humor and friendliness, loquacious and extroverted, who sometimes surprised his friends by disguising himself as an old beggar asking for alms in downtown Dublin or as a sprightly young lady boldly strolling at the tavern doors. But his life was one of monastic sobriety. He lived with his mother and brothers, did not drink, did not smoke, and had no known romances. His best friend was his inseparable brother Willie, a sculptor and art teacher at St. Enda's. At the entrance to this school, surrounded by the wooded hills of Rathfarnham, Pearse had engraved a phrase attributed to the mythical hero Cuchulain in Irish sagas: "I do not care to live a single day and night, if my deeds are remembered forever." He was said to be chaste. He practiced his Catholic faith with military discipline, to the extent of fasting frequently and wearing a cilice. During this time, when he was so involved in the hustle, intrigues, and heated disputes of political life, Roger Casement often told himself that the indomitable affection he felt for Patrick Pearse was perhaps because he was one of the very few politicians he knew who had not been deprived of humor by politics, and because his civic action was entirely principled and selfless: he cared about ideas and despised power. But he was troubled by Pearse's obsession with conceiving Irish patriots as the contemporary version of primitive martyrs: "Just as the blood of the martyrs was the seed of Christianity, that of the patriots will be the seed of our freedom," he wrote in an essay. A beautiful phrase, Roger thought. But was there not something ominous in it?

For him, politics stirred conflicting feelings. On one hand, it made him live with an unknown intensity—finally, he had immersed himself body and soul in Ireland!—, but he was irritated by the feeling of wasted time that the endless discussions leading up to and sometimes preventing agreements and action brought him, the intrigues, vanities, and

pettiness that were intertwined with ideals and ideas in everyday tasks. He had heard and read that politics, like everything connected to power, sometimes brings out the best in human beings—idealism, heroism, sacrifice, generosity—, but also the worst: cruelty, envy, resentment, arrogance. He verified that it was true. He lacked political ambitions; power did not tempt him. Perhaps for that reason, in addition to the prestige he carried as a great international fighter against the abuses of Indigenous peoples in Africa and South America, he had no enemies in the nationalist movement. At least, that is what he believed, for both sides expressed respect for him. In the autumn of 1913, he took to a podium to make his first attempts as a political speaker.

At the end of August, he had moved to the Ulster of his childhood and youth to try to unite the Irish Protestants opposed to the pro-British extremism of Edward Carson and his followers, who were training their military force in plain sight of the authorities in their campaign against Home Rule. The committee that Roger helped to form, named Ballymoney, called for a demonstration at the Town Hall in Belfast. It was agreed that he would be one of the speakers along with Alice Stopford Green, Captain Jack White, Alex Wilson, and a young activist named Dinsmore. He delivered his first public speech on a rainy evening on October 24, 1913, in a hall of the City Hall of Belfast, in front of five hundred people. Very nervous the night before, he wrote and memorized his speech. He had the feeling that by stepping onto that platform, he would take an irreversible step, that from then on there would be no turning back on the path he was embarking on. In the future, his life would be dedicated to a task that, given the circumstances, might put him at as much risk as he faced in the African and South American jungles. His speech, which focused on denying that the division of the Irish was both religious and political (autonomous Catholics and unionist Protestants) and made a call for the "union of the diversity of beliefs and ideals of all the Irish," was met with great applause. After the event, Alice Stopford Green, while embracing him, whispered in his ear: "Let me be a prophet. I foresee a great political future for you."

In the following eight months, Roger felt as if he did nothing but ascend and descend from platforms delivering speeches. At first, he read them, but then he started improvising based on a small guide. He traveled throughout Ireland in all directions, attending meetings, gatherings, discussions, round tables, sometimes public and sometimes secret, debating, arguing, proposing, and refuting for hours on end, often sacrificing meals and sleep. This total commitment to political action sometimes excited him and sometimes produced a profound sense of discouragement. During moments of despair, the pains in his hip and back would return to trouble him.

In the months at the end of 1913 and the beginning of 1914, political tension continued to rise in Ireland. The division between Ulster unionists and autonomists and independents escalated to such an extent that it seemed like the prelude to a civil war.

In November 1913, in response to the formation of the Ulster Volunteers by Edward Carson, the Irish Citizen Army was established. Its main inspirer, James Connolly, was a union leader and labor leader. It was a military formation, and its public reason for being was to defend workers against the aggression of employers and authorities. Its first commander, Captain Jack White, had served with merit in the British Army before converting to Irish nationalism. At the founding act, a text of adherence from Roger was read, who at that time had been sent by his political friends to London to collect financial aid for the nationalist movement.

Almost simultaneously with the Irish Citizen Army, the Irish Volunteers emerged, initiated by Professor Eoin MacNeill, who was supported by Roger Casement. From the very beginning, the organization received the backing of the clandestine Irish Republican Brotherhood, a militia that sought independence for Ireland and was led by Tom Clarke, a legendary figure in nationalist circles, from the benign tobacco shop that served as his cover. He had spent fifteen years in British jails accused of terrorist activities involving dynamite. He later went into exile in the United States. From there, he was sent by the leaders of Clan na Gael (the U.S. branch of the Irish Republican Brotherhood) to Dublin to establish a clandestine network, leveraging his organizational genius. He had succeeded: at fifty-two years old, he remained healthy, tireless, and strict. His true identity had not been detected by British intelligence. Both organizations would work in close, though not always easy, collaboration, and many adherents would belong to both at the same time. Members of the Gaelic League, militants of Sinn Féin, which was taking its first steps under the leadership of Arthur Griffith, affiliates of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and thousands of independents also joined the Volunteers.

Roger Casement worked with Professor MacNeill and Patrick Pearse on drafting the founding manifesto of the Volunteers and resonated among the crowd of attendees on November 25, 1913, at the Dublin Rotunda, during the organization's first public event. From the beginning, as MacNeill and Roger proposed, the Volunteers was a military movement dedicated to recruiting, training, and arming its members, who were organized into squads, companies, and regiments throughout Ireland, in case armed actions erupted, something that, given the tumultuous political situation, seemed imminent.

Roger devoted himself wholeheartedly to working for the Volunteers. In this way, he came to connect and form close friendships with their main leaders, among whom were many poets and writers, such as Thomas MacDonagh, who wrote plays and taught at the university, and the young Joseph Plunkett, who was sick with lung disease and disabled, and who, despite his physical limitations, exhibited extraordinary energy.

He was as catholic as Pearse, a reader of the mystics, and had been one of the founders of the Abbey Theatre. Roger's activities in favor of the Volunteers occupied his days and nights between November 1913 and July 1914. He spoke daily at his rallies in major cities like Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Londonderry, Galway, and Limerick, or in tiny villages and towns, in front of hundreds or just handfuls of people. His speeches began serenely ("I am a Protestant from Ulster defending the sovereignty and liberation of Ireland from the English colonial yoke") but as he progressed, he became increasingly passionate and often ended in epic outbursts. He almost always elicited thunderous applause from the audience.

At the same time, he collaborated in the strategic plans of the Volunteers. He was one of the leaders most committed to equipping the movement with weaponry capable of effectively supporting the struggle for sovereignty, which he was convinced would inevitably transition from the political realm to military action. To arm themselves, money was needed, and it was essential to persuade freedom-loving Irish people to be generous with the Volunteers.

Thus, the idea of sending Roger Casement to the United States was born. There, the Irish communities had financial resources and could increase their aid through a public opinion campaign. Who better to promote it than the most well-known Irishman in the world? The Volunteers decided to consult this project with John Devoy, the leader in the United States of the powerful Clan na Gael, which united the large nationalist Irish community in North America. Devoy, born in Kill, Co. Kildare, had been an underground activist since he was young and was sentenced to fifteen years in prison under terrorism charges. But he only served five. He was in the Foreign Legion in Algeria. In the United States, he founded a newspaper, *The Gaelic American*, in 1903, and established close ties with members of the American *establishment*, which allowed the Clan na Gael to have political influence.

While John Devoy studied the proposal, Roger continued dedicated to promoting the Irish Volunteers and their militarization. He became good friends with Colonel Maurice Moore, the inspector general of the Volunteers, accompanying him on his tours around the island to observe how the trainings were conducted and whether the arms hideouts were secure. At Colonel Moore's suggestion, he was incorporated into the General Staff of the organization.

He was sent to London several times. There, an underground committee operated, presided over by Alice Stopford Green, which, in addition to raising money, managed the secret purchase of rifles, revolvers, grenades, machine guns, and ammunitions in England and various European countries, secretly introducing them into Ireland. In these London meetings with Alice and her friends, Roger realized that a war in Europe had ceased to be a mere possibility and had become an unfolding reality: all the politicians and intellectuals who frequented the gatherings of the

historian in her home on Grosvenor Road believed that Germany had already decided and were not questioning whether there would be a war but rather when it would break out.

Roger had moved to Malahide, on the north coast of Dublin, although, due to his political travels, he spent few nights at home. Shortly after settling there, the Volunteers warned him that the Royal Irish Constabulary had opened a file on him and that he was being monitored by the secret police. This was yet another reason for him to leave for the United States: there he would be more useful to the nationalist movement than if he stayed in Ireland and was imprisoned. John Devoy made it known that the leaders of Clan na Gael welcomed his arrival. Everyone believed that his presence would accelerate the fundraising efforts.

He accepted, but delayed his departure for a project that excited him: a grand celebration on April 23, 1914, marking the nine hundred years since the Battle of Clontarf, in which the Irish, led by Brian Boru, defeated the English. MacNeill and Pearse supported him, but the other leaders viewed this initiative as a waste of time: why waste energy on a historical archaeology operation when what was important was the present? There was no time for distractions. The project did not come to fruition, nor did another initiative from Roger, a petition campaign requesting Ireland's participation in the Olympic Games with its own team of athletes.

While preparing for the trip, he continued speaking at the rallies, almost always alongside MacNeill and Pearse, and occasionally Thomas MacDonagh. He did this in Cork, Galway, and Kilkenny. On St. Patrick's Day, he took the stage in Limerick, the largest demonstration he had ever witnessed in his life. The situation worsened day by day. The Ulster unionists, heavily armed, conducted parades and military maneuvers openly, to the extent that the British Government had to take action by sending more soldiers and sailors to Northern Ireland. Then, the Curragh Mutiny occurred, an episode that would have a significant impact on Roger's political ideas. Amid the mobilization of British soldiers and sailors to prevent a possible armed action by the Ulster extremists, General Sir Arthur Paget, commander-in-chief of Ireland, informed the English Government that a significant number of British officers from the Curragh Military Forces had indicated that if ordered to attack the Ulster Volunteers led by Edward Carson, they would resign. The English Government yielded to the blackmail, and none of those officers faced any sanctions.

This event reinforced Roger's conviction: Home Rule would never become reality because, despite all its promises, the English Government, whether Conservative or Liberal, would never accept it. John Redmond and the Irish who believed in Autonomy would be frustrated time and again. This was not the solution for Ireland. The solution was independence, pure and simple, and it would never be granted willingly. It would have to be seized through political and military action, at the cost of great sacrifices and heroism.

as Pearse and Plunkett wanted. This was how all the free peoples of the Earth had achieved their emancipation.

In April 1914, the German journalist Oskar Schweriner arrived in Ireland. He wanted to write some chronicles about the poor in Connemara. Since Roger had been very active helping villages during the typhus epidemic, he sought him out. They traveled together to the area, touring the fishing villages, schools, and dispensaries that were starting to operate. Roger later translated Schweriner's articles for *The Irish Independent*. In discussions with the German journalist, who was supportive of nationalist ideas, Roger reaffirmed the notion he had during his trip to Berlin of linking the struggle for Ireland's emancipation to Germany if a military conflict broke out between that country and Great Britain. With such a powerful ally, there would be more possibilities of obtaining from England what Ireland, with its scarce resources — a pygmy against a giant — could never achieve. Among the Volunteers, the idea was well received. It was not new, but the imminence of war gave it renewed relevance.

In these circumstances, it became known that the Ulster Volunteers led by Edward Carson had secretly introduced 216 tons of weapons into Ulster through the port of Larne. Combined with what they already had, this shipment gave the unionist militias a much greater strength than that of the nationalist Volunteers. Roger had to hurry his departure to the United States.

He did so, but first he had to accompany Eoin MacNeill to London to meet with John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Despite all the setbacks, he remained convinced that Autonomy would eventually be approved. Before them, he defended the good faith of the British liberal Government. He was a stout and dynamic man who spoke very quickly, machine-gunning his words. The absolute self-confidence he displayed contributed to increasing the animosity that Roger Casement already inspired. Why was he so popular in Ireland? His thesis that Autonomy should be obtained through collaboration and friendship with England enjoyed majority support among the Irish. But Roger was sure that this popular confidence in the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party would fade as public opinion perceived that Home Rule was an illusion used by the imperial Government to keep the Irish deceived, demobilized, and divided.

What irritated Roger the most during the interview was Redmond's assertion that if war broke out with Germany, the Irish had to fight alongside England, as a matter of principle and strategy: in this way they would gain the trust of the English Government and public opinion, which would guarantee future Autonomy. Redmond demanded that there be twenty-five representatives from his party on the Executive Committee of the Volunteers, something that the Volunteers resigned themselves to accept in order to preserve unity. But not even with this concession did Redmond change his opinion about Roger Casement, whom he occasionally accused of being "a radical revolutionary." Nevertheless, in his last weeks in Ireland, Roger wrote two letters to Redmond.

kindly urging him to act in a way that the Irish would remain united despite their eventual disagreements. He assured him that if Home Rule became a reality, he would be the first to support it. But if the English Government, due to its weakness against the extremists of Ulster, failed to impose Autonomy, the nationalists should have an alternative strategy.

Roger was speaking at a Volunteers' meeting in Cushendun on June 28, 1914, when the news arrived that, in Sarajevo, a Serbian terrorist had assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria. At that moment, nobody there paid much attention to this episode, which, a few weeks later, would become the pretext that would trigger World War I. Roger's last speech in Ireland was delivered in Carn on June 30. He was already hoarse from talking so much.

Seven days later, he clandestinely left the port of Glasgow on the ship *Cassandra* — the name was a symbol of what the future held for him — bound for Montreal. He traveled in second class, under an assumed name. Additionally, he changed his clothing, which was usually neat and now very modest, and altered his appearance by changing his hairstyle and trimming his beard. He spent a few quiet days sailing after a long time. During the voyage, he noted, surprised, that the turmoil of these past months had had the effect of calming his arthritic pains. He had hardly suffered from them again, and when they did return, they were more bearable than before. On the train from Montreal to New York, he prepared the report he would present to John Devoy and other leaders of Clan na Gael regarding the state of affairs in Ireland and the economic assistance needed by the Volunteers to purchase weapons, as the political situation was evolving in such a way that violence could erupt at any moment. On the other hand, the war would open an exceptional opportunity for Irish nationalists.

Upon arriving in New York on July 18, he stayed at the Belmont Hotel, modest and frequented by Irish. That same day, while walking down a street in Manhattan, in the scorching heat of New York's summer, he had his encounter with the Norwegian Eivind Adler Christensen. A casual meeting? That's what he believed at the time. Not for a single moment did he suspect that it could have been planned by those British intelligence services that had been following him for months. He was sure that his precautions for clandestinely leaving Glasgow had been sufficient. He also did not suspect during those days the cataclysm that would cause in his life that twenty-four-year-old young man whose appearance was not at all that of the helpless, half-starved vagabond he claimed to be. Despite his worn clothes, Roger thought he was the most beautiful and attractive man he had ever seen in his life. As he watched him eat the sandwich and sip the drink he had invited him to, he felt confused, embarrassed, because his heart had begun to beat very strongly and he felt an effervescence in his blood that he hadn't experienced in a long time. He, always so

Careful in his gestures, so rigidly observant of good manners, that afternoon and that night he was on the verge several times of transgressing the norms, of following the temptations that assaulted him to caress those muscular arms of golden hair or to seize Eivind's narrow waist.

Knowing that the young man had no place to sleep, he invited him to his hotel. He took a small room on the same floor as his own. Despite being tired from the long journey, that night Roger could not close his eyes. He enjoyed and suffered while imagining the athletic body of his new friend immobilized by sleep, his tousled blonde hair and that delicate face, with very light blue eyes, resting on his arm, perhaps sleeping with his lips slightly parted, revealing his white, even teeth.

Meeting Eivind Adler Christensen was such a powerful experience that, the next day, during his first meeting with John Devoy, with whom he had important matters to discuss, that face and figure came back to his mind, momentarily distracting him from the small office where, overwhelmed by the heat, they were conversing.

Roger was strongly impressed by the old and experienced revolutionary whose life seemed like an adventure novel. He carried his seventy-two years with vigor and conveyed a contagious energy in his gestures, movements, and manner of speaking. Taking notes in a small notebook with a pencil that he moistened in his mouth from time to time, he listened to Roger's report on the Volunteers without interrupting. When Roger finished, he asked him numerous questions, requesting clarifications. Roger was amazed that John Devoy was so thoroughly informed about what was happening in Ireland, even regarding matters that were supposed to be kept in the utmost secrecy.

He was not a cordial man. He was hardened by his years in jail, clandestinity, and struggles, yet he inspired trust, a feeling of being frank, honest, and of having rock-solid convictions. In that conversation and in those he would have during his entire time in the United States, Roger noted that he and Devoy were perfectly aligned in their opinions about Ireland. John also believed that it was already too late for Autonomy, that now the goal of the Irish patriots was solely emancipation. Armed actions would be an indispensable complement to the negotiations. The English Government would only agree to negotiate when military operations created such a difficult situation for them that granting independence would be the lesser evil for London. In this imminent war, the approach to Germany was vital for the nationalists: its logistical and political support would give the independence fighters greater efficacy. John Devoy made it known that there was no unanimity in the Irish community in the United States on this matter. John Redmond's views also had supporters here, although the leadership of Clan na Gael was aligned with Devoy and Casement.

In the following days, John Devoy introduced him to most of the organization's leaders in New York *as well as* to John Quinn and William Boerke Cokrane, two lawyers

influential North Americans who were providing support to the Irish cause. Both had connections with high circles of the Government and the Parliament of the United States.

Roger noticed the positive effect he had among the Irish communities since, at the urging of John Devoy, he began speaking at rallies and meetings to raise funds. He was known for his campaigns in favor of Indigenous people from Africa and the Amazon, and his rational and emotional oratory resonated with all audiences. At the end of the rallies where he spoke, in New York, Philadelphia, and other cities on the East Coast, the collections increased. The leaders of Clan na Gael joked that at this rate they would become capitalists. The Ancient Order of Hibernians invited him to be the keynote speaker at the largest rally in which Roger participated in the United States.

In Philadelphia, he met another of the great nationalist leaders in exile, Joseph McGarrity, a close collaborator of John Devoy in Clan na Gael. He was actually at his house when the news arrived of the success of the clandestine landing of one thousand five hundred rifles and ten thousand ammunitions for the Volunteers in the town of Howth. The news caused an explosion of joy and was celebrated with a toast. Shortly after, he learned that, following that landing, there was a serious incident at Bachelor's Walk between Irish people and British soldiers from the regiment The King's Own Scottish Borderers, in which three people died and more than forty were injured. Did the war, then, begin?

In almost all his comings and goings in the United States, meetings of Clan na Gael, and public events, Roger appeared accompanied by Eivind Adler Christensen. He introduced him as his assistant and a person he trusted. He had bought him more presentable clothing and had brought him up to speed on Irish issues, which the young Norwegian claimed to know nothing about. He was uneducated but not foolish; he learned quickly and was very discreet in meetings among Roger, John Devoy, and other members of the organization. If the presence of the young Norwegian raised suspicions among them, they kept it to themselves, as they never questioned Roger with impolite inquiries about his companion.

When, in August 1914, the world conflict broke out —on the 4th Great Britain declared war on Germany—, Casement, Devoy, Joseph McGarrity, and John Keating, the closest circle of leaders of Clan na Gael, had already decided that Roger would go to Germany. He would go as a representative of the independentists in favor of establishing a strategic alliance, in which the Kaiser Government would provide political and military assistance to the Volunteers, and they would campaign against the enlistment of Irish in the British Army, which both Ulster unionists and followers of John Redmond defended. This project was consulted with a small number of leaders of the Volunteers, such as Patrick Pearse and Eoin MacNeill, who approved it without reservations. The German embassy in Washington, with which Clan na Gael had links, collaborated with the

plans. The German military attaché, Captain Franz von Papen, came to New York and met with Roger twice. He expressed enthusiasm for the rapprochement between Clan na Gael, the Irish IRB, and the German government. After consulting with Berlin, he informed them that Roger Casement would be welcome in Germany.

Roger anticipated the war, like almost everyone else, and as soon as the threat became a reality, he threw himself into action with the immense energy he was capable of. His favorable position towards the Reich took on an anti-British virulence that surprised his own companions from Clan na Gael, even though many of them also hoped for a German victory. He had a violent argument with John Quinn, who had invited him to spend a few days at his luxurious residence, for claiming that this war was a conspiracy driven by the resentment and envy of a declining country like England against a growing power, in the midst of industrial and economic development, with an increasing population. Germany represented the future without colonial burdens, whereas England, the very embodiment of an imperial past, was condemned to extinction.

In August, September, and October 1914, Roger, as in his best days, worked day and night, writing articles and letters, giving talks and speeches in which, with manic insistence, he accused England of being the cause of this European catastrophe and urged the Irish not to give in to the siren calls of John Redmond, who was campaigning for them to enlist. The English liberal government had the Autonomy approved in Parliament but suspended its enforcement until the end of the war. The division among the Volunteers was inevitable. The organization had grown extraordinarily, and Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party were overwhelmingly in the majority. More than one hundred fifty thousand Volunteers followed him, while only eleven thousand continued with Eoin MacNeill and Patrick Pearse. None of this dampened Roger Casement's pro-German fervor, who, at all the rallies in the United States, continued to present the Germany of the Kaiser as the victim in this war and the best defender of Western civilization. "It's not love for Germany that speaks from your mouth but hatred for England," John Quinn told him in that argument.

In September 1914, a small book by Roger Casement was published in Philadelphia, *Ireland, Germany and the Freedom of the Seas: A Possible Result of the 1914 War*, which gathered his essays and articles in favor of Germany. The book would later be reissued in Berlin under the title *The Crime Against Europe*.

His pronouncements in favor of Germany impressed the diplomats of the Reich accredited in the United States. The German ambassador in Washington, Count Johann von Bernstorff, traveled to New York to meet privately with the leading trio of Clan na Gael — John Devoy, Joseph McGarrity, and John Keating — and Roger Casement. Captain Franz von Papen was also present. It was Roger, according to the agreement with his companions, who presented to the

German diplomat the request of the nationalists: fifty thousand rifles and ammunitions. They could be secretly disembarked at various ports in Ireland thanks to the Volunteers. They would serve for an anti-colonial military uprising that would immobilize significant English military forces, which should be taken advantage of by the naval and military forces of the Kaiser to launch an offensive against the English coastal military garrisons. To broaden the sympathies toward Germany among the Irish public opinion, it was essential that the German Government make a declaration guaranteeing that, in the event of victory, it would support the Irish aspirations for liberation from colonial yoke. On the other hand, the German Government should commit to providing special treatment to Irish soldiers who fell into captivity, separating them from the English and giving them the opportunity to join an Irish Brigade that would fight "alongside, but not within" the German Army against the common enemy. Roger Casement would be the organizer of the Brigade.

Count Von Bernstorff, of robust appearance, monocle, and a chest covered in decorations, listened attentively. Captain Yon Papen was taking notes. The ambassador needed to consult Berlin, of course, but he indicated that the proposal seemed reasonable to him. And indeed, a few days later, at a second meeting, he informed them that the German Government was willing to hold discussions on the matter, in Berlin, with Casement as the representative of the Irish nationalists. He handed them a letter asking the authorities to provide all the facilities for sir Roger during his stay in Germany.

He began to prepare for his trip immediately. He noticed that Devoy, McGarrity, and Keating were surprised when he told them he would travel to Germany accompanied by his assistant Eivind Adler Christensen. As planned, for security reasons, he was to travel by ship from New York to Christiania; the assistance of the Norwegian as a translator in his own country would be useful, and also in Berlin, as Eivind also spoke German. He did not request an additional amount of money for his assistant. The sum that Clan na Gael provided for his trip and settlement—three thousand dollars—would be enough for both of them.

If his New York companions noticed anything strange about his effort to bring that silent young Viking with him to Berlin, they kept it to themselves. They nodded, without comments. Roger would not have been able to make the journey without Eivind. With him, a flow of youth, excitement, and —the word made him blush— love had entered his life. It had never happened before. He had experienced those sporadic street adventures with people whose names, if they were even names and not mere nicknames, he forgot almost instantly, or with those ghosts that his imagination, desires, and loneliness conjured on the pages of his diaries. But with the 'handsome Viking,' as he called him in private, he felt during these weeks and months that, beyond pleasure, he had finally established an emotional connection that could last, pulling him out of the loneliness to which his sexual vocation had condemned him.

He did not talk about these things with Eivind. He was not naive and often told himself that the most probable, even certain, thing was that the Norwegian was with him out of interest, because next to Roger he ate two meals a day, had a roof over his head, slept in a decent bed, had clothes, and security that, according to his own confession, he had not enjoyed for a long time. But Roger eventually set aside all his reservations in daily interactions with the young man. He was attentive and affectionate with him, seemed to live to take care of him, helping him with his clothes, accommodating all his requests. He addressed him at all times, even in the most intimate moments, keeping the appropriate distance, not allowing himself any abuse of trust or vulgarity.

They bought second-class tickets on the ship *Oskar II* from New York to Christiania, which was set to depart in mid-October. Roger, who carried documents under the name James Landy, changed his appearance by shaving his head and using creams to lighten his tanned complexion. The ship was intercepted by the British Navy at sea and escorted to Stornoway in the Hebrides, where the English subjected it to a thorough search. However, Casement's true identity was not detected. The couple arrived safely in Christiania on the evening of October 28. Roger had never felt better. If asked, he would have replied that, despite all the problems, he was a happy man.

However, at that very hour, minutes, when he believed he had captured that will-o'-the-wisp —happiness—, the most bitter phase of his life was beginning, that failure which he would later think tarnished all that was good *and* noble in his past. On the same day they arrived in the capital of Norway, Eivind informed him that he had been kidnapped for a few hours by unknown assailants and taken to the British consulate, where he was interrogated about his mysterious companion. He, naive, believed him. And thought that this episode provided him with a providential opportunity to expose the foul practices (the murderous intentions) of the British Chancellery. In reality, as he would later find out, Eivind presented himself at the consulate offering to sell him. This matter would only serve to obsess Roger and waste weeks and months on useless negotiations and preparations that ultimately brought no benefit to the cause of Ireland and, undoubtedly, were a source of mockery at the Foreign Office and British intelligence, who would see him as a pathetic apprentice conspirator.

When did his disappointment begin with that Germany, which, perhaps out of simple rejection of England, he had come to admire and call an example of efficiency, discipline, culture, and modernity? Not in his first weeks in Berlin. During the somewhat bizarre journey from Christiania to the German capital, accompanied by Richard Meyer, who would be his liaison with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kaiser, he was still full of hopes, convinced that Germany would win the war and that its victory would be decisive for the independence of Ireland. His first impressions of that

cold city, with rain and fog, which was Berlin that autumn, were good. Both the Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Arthur Zimmermann, and Count Georg von Wedel, head of the English section of the Chancellery, welcomed him warmly and showed enthusiasm for his plans for a Brigade formed by Irish prisoners. Both were supporters of the German government making a declaration in favor of the independence of Ireland. And, indeed, on November 20, 1914, the Reich did so, perhaps not in the explicit terms that Roger had hoped for, but clear enough to justify the stance of those like him who advocated for an alliance of the Irish nationalists with Germany. However, by that date, despite the enthusiasm brought by that declaration—a success of his, without a doubt—and that, finally, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs communicated to him that the high military command had already ordered that Irish prisoners of war be gathered in one camp where he could visit them, Roger was beginning to sense that reality would not conform to his plans, but rather would be intent on thwarting them.

The first indication that things were taking unexpected turns was learning, through the only letter from Alice Stopford Green that he would receive in eighteen months—a letter that took a transatlantic detour to reach him, stopping in New York, where it changed envelope, name, and recipient—that the British press had reported his presence in Berlin. This had sparked an intense controversy among the nationalists, with some approving and others disapproving of his decision to side with Germany in the war. Alice disapproved of it: she told him in no uncertain terms. She added that many staunch supporters of independence agreed with her. At most, Alice stated, a neutral stance of the Irish regarding the European war could be accepted. But to align with Germany, no. Tens of thousands of Irish were fighting for Great Britain: how would those compatriots feel knowing that prominent figures of Irish nationalism identified with the enemy that was shelling and gassing them in the trenches of Belgium?

Alice's letter struck him like a lightning bolt. The fact that the person he admired most and with whom he believed he aligned politically more than with anyone else condemned what he was doing and expressed it in those terms left him stunned. From London, things would appear differently, lacking the perspective of distance. Yet, despite granting himself all the justifications, something lingered in his conscience, troubling him: his political mentor, his friend, and teacher was disapproving of him for the first time and believed that instead of helping, he was harming the cause of Ireland. From then on, a question would echo in his mind with an ominous sound: "What if Alice is right and I've been wrong?"

In that same month of November, the German authorities made him travel to the battlefield in Charleville to discuss with military leaders about the

Irish Brigade. It was said of Roger that if he succeeded in establishing a military force that would fight alongside the German forces for the independence of Ireland, perhaps the scruples of many companions, like Alice, would disappear. They would accept that, in politics, sentimentalism was an obstacle, that the enemy of Ireland was England, and that the enemies of their enemies were friends of Ireland. Although the trip was short, it left him with a good impression. The high-ranking German officers fighting in Belgium were confident of victory. Everyone applauded the idea of the Irish Brigade. He did not see much of the war itself: troops on the roads, hospitals in the towns, lines of prisoners guarded by armed soldiers, distant cannon fire. When he returned to Berlin, good news awaited him. Agreeing to his request, the Vatican had decided to send two priests to the camp where the Irish prisoners were gathering: an Augustinian, Brother O'Gorman, and a Dominican, Brother Thomas Crotty. O'Gorman would stay for two months and Crotty for as long as necessary.

What if Roger Casement had not met Father Thomas Crotty? He probably would not have survived that terrible winter of 1914-1915, when all of Germany, especially Berlin, was buffeted by snowstorms that made roads and streets impassable, strong winds that uprooted shrubs and broke awnings and windows, and temperatures of fifteen and twenty degrees below zero that, due to the war, often had to be endured without fire or heating. Physical ailments once again beset him with fury: the pain in his hip and ilium made him shrink in his seat, unable to stand. Many days he thought he would be crippled forever here in Germany. He was troubled again by hemorrhoids. Going to the bathroom became a torment. He felt his body weakened and tired as if twenty years had suddenly weighed him down.

Throughout that period, his salvation was Father Thomas Crotty. "Saints exist; they are not myths," he would say. What else was Father Crotty? He never complained, adapting to the worst circumstances with a smile on his face, a sign of his good humor and vital optimism, his deep conviction that there were enough good things in life that made it worth living.

He was a man shorter than tall, with sparse gray hair and a round, flushed face, on which his light eyes seemed to sparkle. He came from a very poor farming family in Galway, and sometimes, when he was happier than usual, he sang in Gaelic lullabies he had heard from his mother as a child. Upon learning that Roger spent twenty years in Africa and nearly a year in the Amazon, he shared that since seminary, he had dreamed of going to a mission land in some remote country, but the Dominican order decided on a different destination for him. In the field, he became friends with all the prisoners because he treated everyone with the same consideration, regardless of their ideas and beliefs. As he noticed from the very beginning that only a tiny minority would be convinced by Roger's ideas, he

remained rigorously impartial, never taking a stand for or against the Irish Brigade. "All who are here suffer, *and are* children of God, and therefore our brothers, isn't that right?" he told Roger. In his long conversations with Father Crotty, politics rarely surfaced. They spoke a lot about Ireland, yes, about its past, its heroes, its saints, its martyrs, but in Father Crotty's words, the Irish who most frequently appeared were those long-suffering and anonymous laborers who worked from dawn to dusk to earn scraps, and those who had to emigrate to America, South Africa, and Australia to avoid dying of hunger.

It was Roger who brought Father Crotty to talk about religion. The Dominican was also very discreet in this regard, undoubtedly thinking that Roger, as an Anglican, would prefer to avoid a contentious issue. But when Roger expressed his spiritual bewilderment and confessed that he had been increasingly drawn to Catholicism, the religion of his mother, Father Crotty willingly accepted that they discuss the topic. Patiently, he absolved his curiosities, doubts, and questions. Once, Roger dared to ask him outright: "Do you believe I am doing the right thing, or am I mistaken, Father Crotty?" The priest became very serious: "I don't know, Roger. I wouldn't want to lie. I simply don't know."

Roger, now, didn't know either, after those first days of December 1914, when, after walking through the Limburg camp with the German generals De Graaf and Exner, he finally spoke to the hundreds of Irish prisoners. No, reality did not conform to his expectations. "How naïve and foolish I was," he would say, remembering, with his mouth suddenly tasting of ashes, the faces of confusion, distrust, and hostility of the prisoners when he explained, with all the fervor of his love for Ireland, the reason for the existence of the Irish Brigade, the mission it would fulfill, and how grateful the homeland would be for that sacrifice. He recalled the sporadic cheers for John Redmond that interrupted him, the disapproving and even threatening murmurs, the silence that followed his words. The most humiliating part was that, after finishing his speech, the German guards surrounded him *and* escorted him out of the camp because, although they might not have understood the words, the attitudes of most of the prisoners suggested that it could culminate in an aggression against the speaker.

And that was exactly what happened the second time Roger returned to Limburg to speak to them, on January 5, 1915. On this occasion, the prisoners were not satisfied with just giving him sour looks and showing their displeasure with gestures and signs. They whistled and insulted him. "How much did Germany pay you?" was the most frequent shout. He had to silence himself because the uproar was deafening. He had started to receive a hail of small stones, spit, and various projectiles. The German soldiers quickly escorted him out of the venue.

He never recovered from that experience. Its memory, like a cancer, would gnaw at him from within, without respite.

—Should I give this up, in light of that widespread rejection, Father Crotty?

—You must do what you think is best for Ireland, Roger. Your ideals are pure. Unpopularity is not always a good indication for deciding the justice of a cause. Since then, he would live in a heartbreaking duplicity, pretending to the German authorities that the Irish Brigade was underway. It was true that there were still few adherents, but that would be different when the prisoners overcame their initial distrust and understood that the convenience of Ireland, and therefore of themselves, was friendship and collaboration with Germany. Deep down, he knew very well that what he was saying was not true, that there would never be massive support for the Brigade, that it would never go beyond being a symbolic little group.

If that was the case, why continue? Why not turn back? Because that would have meant suicide, and Roger Case ment did not want to commit suicide. Not yet. Not in that way, in any case. And so, with ice in his heart, in the early months of 1915, while he continued to waste time on the "Findlay issue," he negotiated with the authorities of the Reich the agreement concerning the Irish Brigade. He demanded certain conditions, and his interlocutors, Arthur Zimmermann, Count Georg von Wedel, and Count Rudolf Nadolny, listened very seriously, taking notes in their notebooks. In the next meeting, they informed him that the German government accepted his demands: the Brigade would have its own uniforms, Irish officers, would choose the battlefields where it would engage in action, and its expenses would be reimbursed to the German government by the republican government of Ireland as soon as it was established. He knew as well as they did that all of this was a pantomime because by mid-1915 the Irish Brigade did not even have enough volunteers to form a company: it had recruited barely forty and it was unlikely that all would persevere in their commitment. Many times he wondered: "How long will the farce last?" In his letters to Eoin MacNeill and John Devoy, he felt compelled to assure them that, although slowly, the Irish Brigade was becoming a reality. Little by little, the number of volunteers was increasing. It was essential that they send him Irish officers to train the Brigade and lead the future sections and companies. They promised him, but they also failed: the only one who arrived was Captain Robert Monteith. Although, it is true, the unbreakable Monteith was worth a battalion by himself.

The first signs of what was to come were noticed by Roger when, after winter had ended, the first green shoots began to appear on the trees of Unter den Linden. The Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs, during one of his regular meetings, abruptly informed him one day that the German military high command had no confidence in his aide Eivind Adler Christensen. There were indications that he might be reporting to British intelligence. He had to be distanced immediately.

The warning took him by surprise and, at first, he dismissed it. He asked for evidence. They replied that the German intelligence services would not have made such a statement if they did not have compelling reasons to do so. Since Eivind wanted to go to Norway for a few days to see relatives, Roger encouraged him to leave. He gave him money and went to say goodbye at the station. He never saw him again. Since then, another source of distress was added to the previous ones: could it be possible that the Viking god was a spy? He searched his memory, trying to find in those last few months, during which they had lived together, any fact, attitude, contradiction, or lost word that would give him away. He found nothing. He tried to reassure himself by saying that this falsehood was a maneuver by those prejudiced and puritanical Teutonic aristocrats who, suspecting that his relationship with the Norwegian was not innocent, wanted to distance him from him using any ploy, even slander. But the doubt returned and troubled him. When he learned that Eivind Adler Christensen had decided to return to the United States from Norway, without returning to Germany, he felt relieved.

On April 20, 1915, the young Joseph Plunkett arrived in Berlin as a delegate of the Volunteers and the IRB, after making a convoluted journey through half of Europe to escape the nets of British intelligence. How had he made such an effort in his physical condition? He was no more than twenty-seven years old but was skeletal, partly crippled by polio, with a tuberculosis that was devouring him and occasionally giving his face the appearance of a skull. The son of a prosperous aristocrat, Count George Noble Plunkett, director of the National Museum of Dublin, Joseph, who spoke English with an aristocratic accent, dressed in a haphazard manner, with baggy trousers, a frock coat that was much too big for him, and a hat shoved down to his eyebrows. But it was enough to hear him speak and converse a bit with him to discover that behind that clownish appearance, that ruined physique, and his carnival attire, there was a superior intelligence, penetrating like few, an enormous literary culture, and a fiery spirit, with a vocation for struggle and sacrifice for the cause of Ireland that greatly impressed Roger Casement during the times they conversed in Dublin, at the Volunteers' meetings. He wrote mystical poetry, was, like Patrick Pearse, a devout believer, and knew the Spanish mystics by heart, especially Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint John of the Cross, from whom he recited verses in Spanish from memory. Like Patrick Pearse, he had always aligned himself, within the Volunteers, with the radicals, which brought him closer to Roger. Listening to them, he often thought that Pearse and Plunkett seemed to be seeking martyrdom, convinced that only by squandering the heroism and disregard for death that those titanic heroes had, who marked Irish History, from Cuchulain and Fionn and Owen Roe to Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmet, and by immolating themselves like the Christian martyrs of primitive times, would they spread to the majority the idea that the only way to conquer freedom would be by taking up arms and

making war. From the immolation of the sons of Eire would be born that free country, without colonizers or exploiters, where law, Christianity, and justice would reign. The somewhat crazed romanticism of Joseph Plunkett and Patrick Pearse had frightened Roger at times, in Ireland. But these weeks, in Berlin, listening to the young poet and revolutionary, on those pleasant days when spring filled the gardens with flowers and the trees in the parks regained their greenness, Roger felt moved and eager to believe everything that the newcomer told him.

He brought exciting news from Ireland. According to him, the division of the Volunteers due to the European war had clarified matters. It was true that a large majority still followed John Redmond's thesis of collaborating with the Empire and enlisting in the British Army, but the minority loyal to the Volunteers counted many thousands of people determined to fight—a true united Army, compact, clear about its objectives, and resolved to die for Ireland. Now there was close collaboration between the Volunteers and the IRB, as well as the Irish Citizen Army, the People's Army, formed by Marxists and trade unionists like Jim Larkin and James Connolly, and the Sinn Féin of Arthur Griffith. Even Sean O'Casey, who had fiercely attacked the Volunteers calling them "bourgeois and mommy's boys," showed support for collaboration. The Provisional Committee, led by Tom Clarke, Patrick Pearse, and Thomas MacDonagh among others, was preparing the insurrection day and night. The circumstances were favorable. The European war created a unique opportunity. It was essential that Germany assist them by sending about fifty thousand rifles and launching a simultaneous action by its Army on British territory attacking the Irish ports militarized by the Royal Navy. The joint action might decide the German victory. Ireland would be independent and free, at last.

Roger agreed: this had been his thesis for a long time and it was the reason he came to Berlin. He insisted that the Provisional Committee establish that the offensive action of the Navy and the German Army was a condition *sine qua non* for the Rising. Without that invasion, the rebellion would fail, as the logistical strength was too unequal.

—But you, sir Roger —Plunkett interrupted him— forget a factor that prevails over military armament and the number of soldiers: the mystique. We have it. The English do not.

They were talking in a half-empty tavern. Roger was drinking beer and Joseph a soft drink. They were smoking. Plunkett told him that Larkfield Manor, his home in the Kim-mage neighborhood in Dublin, had become a forge and an arsenal, where grenades, bombs, bayonets, pikes were made and flags were sewn. He said all of this with exaggerated gestures, in a trance state. He also told him that the Provisional Committee had decided to hide the agreement about the Rising from Eoin MacNeill. Roger was surprised. How could it be kept

secret such a decision before the one who had been the founder of the Volunteers and continued to be their president?

—We all respect him, and no one doubts the patriotism and honesty of Professor MacNeill —explained Plunkett—. But he is soft. He believes in persuasion and peaceful methods. He will be informed when it is too late to prevent the Rising. Then, there is no doubt, he will join us on the barricades.

Roger worked day and night with Joseph preparing a thirty-two-page plan detailing the Rising. Both presented it to the Chancellery and the Admiralty. The plan argued that the British Military Forces in Ireland were dispersed in small garrisons and could be easily overcome. The German diplomats, officials, and military personnel listened in awe to this malformed young man dressed like a *clown*, who, when speaking, transformed and explained with mathematical precision and great intellectual coherence the advantages of a German invasion coinciding with the nationalist revolution. Those who spoke English, in particular, listened intrigued by his poise, fierceness, and the exalted rhetoric with which he expressed himself. Even those who did not understand English and had to wait for the interpreter to translate his words were astonished by the vehemence and frantic gesticulation of this battered emissary of the Irish nationalists.

They listened to him, taking notes on what Joseph and Roger were asking them, but their responses did not commit them to anything. Neither to the invasion nor to the sending of fifty thousand rifles with the respective ammunition. All of that would be studied within the global strategy of the war. The Reich approved the aspirations of the Irish people and intended to support their legitimate desires: they did not go further.

Joseph Plunkett spent almost two months in Germany, living with a frugality comparable to that of Casement himself, until June 20 when he left for the Swiss border, returning to Ireland via Italy and Spain. The young poet was not struck by the small number of supporters that the Irish Brigade had. Moreover, he showed not the slightest sympathy for it. What was the reason?

—To serve in the Brigade, prisoners have to break their oath of loyalty to the British Army —he told Roger—. I have always been against our people enrolling in the ranks of the occupier. But once they did, an oath made before God cannot be broken without sinning and losing honor.

Father Crotty heard this conversation and remained silent. He was like a sphinx the whole afternoon that the three spent together, listening to the poet, who monopolized the conversation. Then, the Dominican commented to Casement:

—This boy is undoubtedly someone extraordinary. Due to his intelligence and his commitment to a cause. His Christianity is that of those Christians who died in the Roman circuses devoured by wild beasts. But it is also like that of the crusaders who reconquered Jerusalem by killing all the impious Jews and Muslims they encountered, including

women and children. The same fiery zeal, the same glorification of blood and war. I confess to you, Roger, that people like this, although they are the ones who make History, instill in me more fear than admiration.

A recurring theme in the conversations between Roger and Joseph during those days was the possibility that the insurrection could erupt without the German Army simultaneously invading England, or at least shelling the ports protected by the Royal Navy in Irish territory. Plunkett was in favor, even in that case, of continuing with the insurrection plans: the European war had created an opportunity that should not be wasted. Roger believed it would be suicide. No matter how heroic and daring they were, the revolutionaries would be crushed by the machinery of the Empire. It would take advantage of the situation to carry out an unrelenting purge. The liberation of Ireland would take fifty more years.

—Should I understand that if the revolution breaks out without German intervention, you will not be with us, sir Roger?

—I will be with you, of course. But knowing that it will be a futile sacrifice.

The young Plunkett looked long into his eyes, and Roger thought he could see a feeling of pity in that gaze.

"Let me speak frankly, sir Roger," he finally murmured, with the seriousness of one who knows he possesses an irrefutable truth. "There is something you seem to have misunderstood. It's not about winning. Of course, we are going to lose that battle. It's about enduring. About resisting. Days, weeks. And about dying in such a way that our death and our blood multiply the patriotism of the Irish until it becomes an irresistible force. It's about ensuring that for every one of us who dies, a hundred revolutionaries are born. Did that not happen with Christianity?"

He didn't know how to respond. The weeks that followed Plunkett's departure were very intense for Roger. He continued to ask Germany to release Irish prisoners who, due to health reasons, age, their intellectual and professional status, and their conduct, deserved it. This gesture would create a good impression in Ireland. The German authorities had been reluctant, but they began to relent. Lists were made, names were discussed. Eventually, the military high command agreed to free a hundred professionals, teachers, students, and reputable business people. There were many hours and days of discussions, a tug-of-war that left Roger exhausted. On the other hand, troubled by the idea that the Volunteers, following the theses of Pearse and Plunkett, would trigger an insurrection before Germany decided to attack England, he pressured the Chancellery and the Admiralty for a response regarding the fifty thousand rifles. They responded with vague answers. Until one day, in a meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Count Blicher told him something that discouraged him:

—Sir Roger, you do not have a proper idea of the proportions. Examine a map objectively and you will see how little Ireland represents in geopolitical terms.

No matter how much sympathy the Reich has for its cause, other countries and regions are more important to German interests.

—Does this mean we will not receive the weapons, Countess? Does Germany rule out the invasion altogether?

—Both matters are still under consideration. If it were up to me, I would rule out the invasion, certainly in the immediate future. But the specialists will decide. You will receive a definitive response at any moment.

Roger wrote a long letter to John Devoy and Joseph McGarrity, explaining his reasons for opposing a rising that did not have simultaneous German military action. He urged them to use their influence with the Volunteers and the IRB to dissuade them from rushing into a reckless action. At the same time, he assured them that he continued to make all kinds of efforts to secure the weapons. But the conclusion was dramatic: "I have failed. Here I am useless. Allow me to return to the United States."

During those days, his illnesses worsened. Nothing was effective against the pain of arthritis. Continuous colds, accompanied by high fevers, often forced him to stay in bed. He had lost weight and suffered from insomnia. To make matters worse, in this condition, he learned that *The New York World* had published a story, likely leaked by British counterintelligence, stating that sir Roger Casement was in Berlin receiving large sums of money from the Reich to promote a rebellion in Ireland. He sent a letter of protest — "I work for Ireland, not for Germany" — which was not published. His friends in New York urged him to abandon the idea of a trial: he would lose it, and the Clan na Gael was not willing to waste money on legal proceedings.

Since May 1915, the German authorities had agreed to a persistent demand from Roger: that the volunteers of the Irish Brigade be separated from the prisoners of Limburg. On the 20th, the fifty or so brigadiers, who were being harassed by their companions, were transferred to the small camp of Zossen, in the vicinity of Berlin. They celebrated the occasion with a mass officiated by Father Crotty, and there were toasts and Irish songs in an atmosphere of camaraderie that somewhat lifted Roger's spirits. He announced to the brigadiers that they would receive the uniforms he had designed within a few days and that a handful of Irish officers would soon arrive to lead the trainings. They, who made up the first company of the Irish Brigade, would go down in History as the pioneers of a feat.

Immediately after this meeting, he wrote a new letter to Joseph McGarrity, informing him about the opening of the Zossen camp and apologizing for the pessimism of his previous letter. He had written it in a moment of discouragement, but now he felt less pessimistic. The arrival of Joseph Plunkett and the Zossen camp were an encouragement. He would continue working for the Irish Brigade.

Although small, it had significant symbolism in the context of the European war.

At the beginning of summer in 1915, he set off to Munich. He stayed at the Basler Hof, a modest but pleasant hotel. The Bavarian capital depressed him less than Berlin, although he led an even more solitary life here than in the capital. His health continued to deteriorate, and the pains and colds forced him to stay in his room. His reclusive life was one of intense intellectual work. He drank many cups of coffee and relentlessly smoked black tobacco cigarettes that filled his room with smoke. He wrote continuous letters to his contacts in the Chancellery and the Admiralty and maintained a daily, spiritual, and religious correspondence with Father Crotty. He re-read the priest's letters and kept them as a treasure. One day he tried to pray. It had been a long time since he had done so, at least in this way, concentrating, trying to open his heart to God, sharing his doubts, his anxieties, his fear of having made mistakes, asking for mercy and guidance on his future conduct. At the same time, he wrote brief essays on the errors that an independent Ireland should avoid, taking advantage of the experiences of other nations, so as not to fall into corruption, exploitation, and the vast distances that separated the poor from the rich, the powerful from the weak. But at times he became discouraged: what was he going to do with those texts? It made no sense to distract his friends in Ireland with essays about the future when they were submerged in such an overwhelming present.

At the end of summer, feeling somewhat better, he traveled to the camp in Zossen. The men of the Brigade had received the uniforms designed by him, and they all looked good with the Irish insignia on their caps. The camp appeared organized and operational. However, the inactivity and confinement were undermining the morale of the fifty or so brigadiers, despite Father Crotty's efforts to lift their spirits. He organized sports competitions, contests, lessons, and discussions on various topics. Roger thought it was a good time to light the spark of action before them.

He gathered them in a circle and presented a possible strategy that would take them out of Zossen and restore their freedom. If at that moment it was impossible for them to fight in Ireland, why not do so under other skies where the same battle for which the Brigade was created was being fought? The world war had extended to the Middle East. Germany and Turkey were fighting to drive the British out of their Egyptian colony. Why wouldn't they participate in that struggle against colonization, for the independence of Egypt? Since the Brigade was still small, they would need to integrate into another Army unit, but they would do so while retaining their Irish identity.

The proposal had been discussed by Roger with the German authorities and accepted. John Devoy and McGarrity were in agreement. Turkey would admit the Brigade into its Army, under the conditions described by Roger. There was a long discussion. In the end, thirty-seven brigadiers were

declared willing to fight in Egypt. The rest needed to think it over. But what concerned all the brigadiers now was something more urgent: the Limburg prisoners had threatened to inform the English authorities in order for their families in Ireland to stop receiving pensions as combatants from the British Army. If this happened, their parents, wives, and children would starve. What was Roger going to do about it?

It was obvious that the British Government would take this kind of retaliation, and it had not even occurred to him. Seeing the anxious faces of the brigadiers, he could only assure them that their families would never be unprotected. If they stopped receiving those pensions, the patriotic organizations would support them. That same day he wrote to Clan na

Gael requesting the creation of a fund to compensate the relatives of the brigadiers if they became victims of that retaliation. But Roger had no illusions: as things were going, the money entering the coffers of the Volunteers, the IRB, and Clan na Gael was for purchasing weapons, the primary priority. Distressed, he told himself that it was his fault that fifty humble Irish families would go hungry and perhaps be decimated by tuberculosis next winter. Father Crotty tried to calm him, but this time his reasoning did not soothe him. A new concern had been added to those that tormented him, and his health suffered another relapse. Not only his body but also his mind, as in the most difficult periods in the Congo and the Amazon. He felt he was losing his mental balance. At times, his head seemed like a volcano in full eruption. Was he going to lose his mind?

He returned to Munich and from there continued sending messages to the United States and Ireland about economic support for the families of the brigadiers. Since his letters, to confuse British intelligence, passed through several countries where envelopes and addresses were changed, the responses took one or two months to arrive. His anxiety was at its peak when Robert Monteith finally appeared to take military charge of the Brigade. The officer brought not only his impetuous optimism, decency, and adventurous spirit but also the formal promise that the families of the brigadiers, if they were the target of reprisals, would receive immediate assistance from the Irish revolutionaries.

Captain Monteith, who, upon arriving in Germany, immediately traveled to Munich to see Roger, was taken aback to find him so ill. He admired him and treated him with great respect. He mentioned that no one in the Irish movement suspected that his condition was so precarious. Casement had prohibited him from reporting on his health and traveled back to Berlin with him. He introduced Monteith to the Chancellery and the Admiralty. The young officer was burning with impatience to start working and expressed a steadfast optimism about the future of the Brigade, which Roger, in his innermost self, had lost. During the six months he stayed in Germany, Robert Monteith was, like Father Crotty, a blessing for Roger. Both prevented him from sinking into a despair that might have driven him to madness. The cleric and the military

were very different and yet, Roger often told himself, they both embodied two prototypes of Irish: the saint and the warrior. Alternating with them, he recalled some conversations with Patrick Pearse, when he mixed the altar with weapons and claimed that from the fusion of these two traditions, martyrs and mystics and heroes and warriors, would arise the spiritual and physical strength that would break the chains binding Eire.

They were different, but both had a natural cleanliness, a generosity, and a commitment to the ideal that, many times, seeing that Father Crotty and Captain Monteith did not waste time on mood swings and discouragements, like him, Roger felt ashamed of his doubts and indecisiveness. Both had charted a path and followed it without veering off course, without being intimidated by obstacles, convinced that, in the end, triumph awaited them: God's over evil and Ireland's over its oppressors. "Learn from them, Roger, be like them," he repeated to himself, like a mantra.

Robert Monteith was a man very close to Tom Clarke, to whom he also professed a religious devotion. He spoke of this man's tobacco shop—his clandestine headquarters—on the corner of Great Britain Street and Sackville Street as a "sacred place." According to the captain, the old fox, a survivor of many English jails, was the one who directed the entire revolutionary strategy from the shadows. Wasn't he worthy of admiration? From his small shop in a poor street in the center of Dublin, this small-framed, thin, frugal veteran, worn down by suffering and years, who had dedicated his life to fighting for Ireland, having spent fifteen years in prison for it, had managed to establish a clandestine military and political organization, the IRB, that reached all corners of the country, without having been captured by the British police. Roger asked him if the organization was really as solid as he claimed. The captain's enthusiasm overflowed:

—We have companies, sections, platoons, with their officers, their weapon depots, their messengers, their codes, their slogans—he declared, gesticulating euphorically—. I doubt there is a more efficient and motivated Army in Europe than ours, sir Roger. I'm not exaggerating one bit.

According to Monteith, preparations had reached their peak. The only thing missing was the German weapons for the insurrection to erupt.

Captain Monteith got to work immediately, instructing and organizing the fifty or so recruits from Zossen. He frequently went to the Limburg camp to try to overcome the resistance of the other prisoners against the Brigade. He managed to win a few over, but the vast majority continued to show him total hostility. Nothing could demoralize him. His letters to Roger, who had returned to Munich, overflowed with enthusiasm and provided encouraging news about the tiny Brigade.

The next time they met in Berlin, a few weeks later, they dined alone in a small restaurant in Charlottenburg filled with Romanian refugees. Captain

Monteith, gathering his courage and being very careful with his words to avoid offending him, suddenly said:

—Sir Roger, do not consider me intrusive and insolent. But you cannot continue in this state. You are too important for Ireland, for our struggle. In the name of the ideals for which you have done so much, I beg you. Consult a doctor. You're struggling with your nerves.

It is not uncommon. Responsibility and worries have taken their toll. It was inevitable that it would happen. You need help.

Roger muttered some evasive words and changed the subject. But the captain's recommendation frightened him. Was it so evident that he was unbalanced that this officer, always so respectful and discreet, dared to say such a thing? He took heed. After some inquiries, he mustered the courage to visit doctor Oppenheim, who lived outside the city, among the trees and streams of Grunewald. He was an elderly man and inspired confidence, as he seemed experienced and assured. They had two long sessions in which Roger shared his condition, his problems, sleeplessness, and fears. He had to undergo mnemonic tests and detailed interrogations. Finally, doctor Oppenheim assured him that he needed to enter a sanatorium and undergo treatment. If he did not do so, his mental state would continue on the path of deterioration that had already begun. He himself called Munich and secured an appointment with a colleague and disciple, doctor Rudolf von Hoesslin.

Roger did not admit himself to the clinic of doctor Von Hoesslin, but he visited him a couple of times a week over several months. The treatment did him good.

—I'm not surprised that with the things you've seen in The Congo and in the Amazon and with what you do now, you suffer from these issues —the psychiatrist said to him—. The remarkable thing is that you are not a furious madman or that you haven't committed suicide.

He was still a young man, passionate about music, vegetarian, and a pacifist. He was against this war and all wars, and he dreamed that one day universal brotherhood —"Kantian peace," he used to say— would be established around the world, borders would fade away, and men would recognize each other as brothers. After the sessions with doctor Rudolf von Hoesslin, Roger left calm and in good spirits. But he was not sure he was improving. He always felt that sense of well-being when he encountered a healthy, good, and idealistic person along his path.

se tratados como prisioneros? Las cosas estaban mejorando, pero el trato cruel y denigrante que recibían los brigadistas de parte de los soldados alemanes seguía siendo inaceptable. Robert Monteith no iba a descansar hasta que se asegurara de que sus hombres tuvieran el respeto y la dignidad que merecían.

treated as enemies? So far, those attempts had not yielded the slightest result.

Roger filed a protest. He had a violent scene with General Schneider, the commander of the garrison in Zossen, who told him that more freedom could not be granted to those displaying indiscipline, who were prone to fights and even committed thefts in the field. According to Monteith, these accusations were false. The only incidents were due to insults that the brigadiers received from the German sentinels.

Roger Casement's last months in Germany were marked by constant arguments and moments of great tension with the authorities. The feeling that he had been deceived only grew until his departure from Berlin. The Reich had no interest in the liberation of Ireland, never took seriously the idea of a joint action with the Irish revolutionaries, and the Chancellery and the Admiralty had exploited his naivety and good faith by making him believe things they had no intention of doing. The project for the Irish Brigade to fight with the Turkish Army against the English in Egypt, studied in great detail, was frustrated just when it seemed about to materialize, without any explanation being given to him.

Zimmermann, Count Georg von

Wedel, Captain Nadolny, and all the officers involved in the plans suddenly became elusive and evasive. They refused to meet him, offering flimsy excuses. When he managed to speak with them, they were always incredibly busy, only able to spare a few minutes; the matter regarding Egypt was not their concern. Roger resigned himself: his desire for the Brigade to become a small symbolic force in the Irish struggle against colonialism had gone up in smoke.

Then, with the same fervor with which he had admired Germany, he began to feel a dislike for this country that turned into a hatred similar to, or perhaps greater than, what he felt for England. He expressed this in a letter to lawyer John Quinn in New York, after recounting the mistreatment he received from the authorities: "That's right, my friend: I have come to hate the Germans so much that, before dying here, I would prefer the British gallows."

His state of irritation and physical discomfort forced him to return to Munich. Doctor Rudolf von Hoesslin insisted that he be admitted to a rest hospital in Bavaria, using a compelling argument: "You are on the verge of a crisis from which you will never recover unless you rest and forget everything else. The alternative is that you will lose your sanity or suffer a mental breakdown that will render you useless for the rest of your days."

Roger listened. For a few days, his life entered a period of such peace that he felt like a disembodied being. The sleeping pills made him sleep for ten to twelve hours. Then, he took long walks in a nearby forest of maples and ashes, on still chilly mornings of a winter that refused to leave. He had been taken off tobacco and alcohol and was eating simple vegetarian diets. He had no energy to read or

write. He spent hours with a blank mind, feeling like a ghost.

This lethargy was violently broken by Robert Monteith on a sunny morning in early March 1916. Due to the importance of the matter, the captain had obtained a permit from the German government to come see him. He was still under the effect of the impression and spoke in a rush:

—An escort came to take me out of the Zossen camp and brought me to Berlin, to the Admiralty. A large group of officers was waiting for me, including two generals. They informed me as follows: "The Irish Provisional Committee has decided that the uprising will take place on April 23." That is to say, in a month and a half.

Roger jumped out of bed. It seemed to him that fatigue vanished suddenly and his heart became a drum beat furiously. He could not speak.

—They are asking for rifles, riflemen, artillerymen, machine guns, ammunition —Monteith continued, stunned by emotion—. The ship must be escorted by a submarine. The weapons must arrive in Fenit, Tralee Bay, in County Kerry, on Easter Sunday at around midnight.

—So, they are not going to wait for the German armed action —Roger finally said. He thought of a catastrophe, of rivers of blood staining the waters of the Liffey.

—The message also brings instructions for you, sir Roger —Monteith added—. You must remain in Germany as ambassador of the new Republic of Ireland.

Roger sank back onto the bed, overwhelmed. His companions had informed the German Government of their plans before him. Moreover, they ordered him to stay here while they would be killed in one of those outbursts favored by Patrick Pearse and Joseph Plunkett. Did they distrust him? There was no other explanation. Since they were aware of his opposition to a rising that did not coincide with a German invasion, they thought that, over there, in Ireland, he would be a hindrance, and preferred him to stay here, with his arms crossed, holding the extravagant title of ambassador of a Republic that this rebellion and this bloodbath would make more remote and unlikely.

Monteith was waiting, silent.

—We are leaving for Berlin immediately, captain —said Roger, sitting up again—. I will get dressed, pack my suitcase, and we will depart on the first train.

They did so. Roger managed to write a few hurried lines of gratitude to Dr. Rudolf von Hoesslin. Throughout the long journey, his head crackled incessantly, with small intervals to exchange ideas with Monteith. Upon arriving in Berlin, he was clear about his course of action. His personal problems took a backseat. The priority now was to channel his energy and intelligence into securing what his companions had requested: rifles, ammunitions, and German officers who could effectively organize military actions. Secondly, he would leave for Ireland himself with the shipment of weapons. There, he would try to

convince his friends to wait; with a bit more time, the European war could create more favorable situations for the insurrection. Thirdly, he needed to prevent the fifty-three members enrolled in the Irish Brigade from departing for Ireland. As "traitors," the British Government would execute them without hesitation if they were captured by the Royal Navy. Monteith would decide what he wanted to do, with complete freedom. Knowing him, it was certain he would go to die with his comrades for the cause to which he had devoted his life.

In Berlin, they stayed at the Eden Hotel, as usual. The following morning, negotiations began with the authorities. The meetings took place in the dilapidated and ugly building of the Admiralty. Captain Nadolny greeted them at the door and led them to a room where there were always people from the Chancellery and military personnel. New faces mingled with those of old acquaintances. From the very first moment, they were categorically informed that the German government refused to send officers to advise the revolutionaries.

In contrast, they agreed on the issue of weapons and ammunition. For hours and days, they calculated and studied the safest way to ensure their arrival at the designated place on the scheduled date. Finally, it was decided that the shipment would go on the *Aud*, a British ship that had been seized, refurbished, and painted to fly a Norwegian flag. Neither Roger, nor Monteith, nor any brigadier would travel on the *Aud*. This matter sparked discussions, but the German government did not relent: the presence of Irish aboard would compromise the subterfuge of passing the ship off as Norwegian, and if the deception were discovered, the Reich would find itself in a delicate position before international opinion. Then, Roger and Monteith insisted they be provided with a way to travel to Ireland simultaneously with the arms, separately. Hours of proposals and counterproposals passed in which Roger tried to convince them that by going there, he could persuade his friends to wait until the war tilted more in Germany's favor because under those circumstances, the Rising could be combined with a parallel action by the Navy and German infantry. Finally, the Admiralty accepted that Casement and Monteith would travel to Ireland. They would do so on a submarine and take a brigadier as a representative of their comrades.

Roger's decision to refuse the Irish Brigade's participation in the insurrection led to strong clashes with the Germans. However, he did not want the brigadiers to be summarily executed without even having the chance to die fighting. It was not a responsibility he would take upon himself.

On April 7, the high command informed Roger that the submarine they would travel on was ready. Captain Monteith chose Sergeant Daniel Julian Bailey to represent the Brigade. He was provided with false papers under the name of Julian Beverly. The high command confirmed to Casement that, although the revolutionaries had requested fifty thousand rifles, twenty thousand rifles, ten machine guns, and five

million ammunitions would be north of Innis-tooskert Island, Tralee Bay, on the specified day, starting at ten at night: a pilot should wait for the ship with a boat or launch that would identify itself with two green lights.

Between the 7th and the day of departure, Roger did not sleep. He wrote a brief will asking that if he died, all his correspondence and papers be delivered to Edmund D. Morel, "an exceptionally just and noble being," so that with those documents he could organize a "memoir that saves my reputation after my transition."

Monteith, although like Roger he sensed that the Uprising would be crushed by the British Army, was burning with impatience to leave. They had a private conversation for a couple of hours on the day Captain Boehm handed them the poison they had requested in case they were captured. The officer explained that it was amazonian curare. The effect would be instantaneous. "Curare is an old acquaintance of mine," Roger explained, smiling. "In Putumayo, I indeed saw Indians paralyze birds in mid-air with their darts soaked in this poison." Roger and the captain went to have a beer at a *kneipe* nearby.

—I imagine it hurts you as much as it hurts me to leave without saying goodbye or explaining anything to the brigadiers—said Roger.

—I will always carry it in my conscience—Monteith nodded—. But it is the right decision. The Rising is too important to risk a leak.

—Do you think I will have any chance of stopping it?

The officer shook his head.

—I don't think so, sir Roger. But you are very respected here and, perhaps, your reasons will prevail. In any case, you must understand what is happening in Ireland. We have been preparing for this for many years. What am I saying, years.

Centuries, rather. How long are we going to continue being a captive nation? And in the middle of the 20th century. Moreover, there is no doubt, thanks to the war, this is the moment when England is weakest in Ireland.

—Are you not afraid of death?

Monteith shrugged.

—I have seen it up close many times. In South Africa, during the Boer War, very close. I imagine we all fear death. But there are deaths and deaths, sir Roger. Dying fighting for one's country is as honorable a death as dying for your family or your faith. Don't you think?

—Yes, it is —Casement nodded—. I hope that, should the occasion arise, we die that way and not by swallowing this Amazonian potion, which must be indigestible.

The evening before the departure, Roger went for a few hours to Zossen to say goodbye to Father Crotty. He did not enter the camp. He called for the Dominican, and they took a long walk through a forest of fir and birch trees that were beginning to turn green. Father Crotty listened to Roger's confessions, pale, without interrupting him once. When he finished speaking, the priest crossed himself. He remained silent for a long time.

After he finished speaking, the priest crossed himself. He remained silent for a long time.

—Going to Ireland, thinking that the Rising is doomed to fail, is a form of suicide—he said, as if thinking aloud.

—I intend to stop it, Father. I will speak with Tom Clarke, with Joseph Plunkett, with Patrick Pearse, with all the leaders. I will make them see the reasons why this sacrifice seems useless to me. Instead of accelerating independence, it will delay it. And...

He felt his throat tighten and fell silent.

—What's wrong, Roger? We are friends, and I am here to help you. You can trust me.

—I have a vision that I can't get out of my head, Father Crotty. Those idealists and patriots who are going to be torn apart, leaving families shattered, in misery, subjected to terrible reprisals, at least they are aware of what they are doing. But do you know who I think about all the time?

He told him that, in 1910, he had gone to give a talk at The Hermitage, the venue in Rathfarnham, on the outskirts of Dublin, where St. Enda's, Patrick Pearse's bilingual school, operated. After speaking to the students, he donated an item he had kept from his trip to the Amazon—a huitoto blowgun—as a prize for the best composition in Gaelic by the students in their final year. He had been greatly impressed by how excited those dozens of young people were with the idea of Ireland, the militant love with which they remembered their history, their heroes, their saints, their culture, and the state of religious ecstasy in which they sang the ancient Celtic songs. And, as well, the deeply catholic spirit that reigned in the school at the same time as that fervent patriotism: Pearse had managed to fuse both things into one in those young people, as they were in him and in his siblings Willie and Margaret, who were also teachers at St. Enda's.

—All those young people are going to get killed; they are going to be cannon fodder, Father Crotty. With rifles and revolvers they won't even know how to shoot. Hundreds, thousands of innocents like them facing cannons, machine guns, officers and soldiers of the most powerful Army in the world. For nothing. Isn't it terrible?

—Of course it's terrible, Roger—the religious man nodded—. But it may not be accurate to say they will achieve nothing.

He took another long pause and then began to speak slowly, pained and moved.

—Ireland is a deeply Christian country, you know that. Perhaps due to its particular situation as an occupied country, it was more receptive than others to the message of Christ. Or because we had missionaries and apostles like St. Patrick, who were tremendously persuasive, the faith took root more deeply there than in other places. Ours is a religion primarily for those who suffer. The humiliated, the hungry, the defeated. That faith has prevented us from disintegrating as a country despite the force that crushed us. Central to our religion is the

martyrdom. To sacrifice oneself, to be immolated. Didn't Christ do that? He incarnated and submitted to the most horrific cruelties. Betrayals, tortures, death on the cross. Was it all in vain, Roger?

Roger remembered Pearse, Plunkett, those young men convinced that the struggle for freedom was both mystical and civic.

—I understand what you mean, Father Crotty. I know that people like Pearse, Plunkett, even Tom Clarke, who is famous for being realistic and practical, know that the Rising is a sacrifice. And they are sure that by getting themselves killed, they will create a symbol that will stir all the energies of the Irish. I understand their willingness to martyrdom. But do they have the right to drag people who lack their experience, their clarity, young people who do not know they are going to the slaughterhouse just to set an example?

—I do not admire what they do, Roger, I have already told you —Father Crotty murmured—. Martyrdom is something a Christian resigns to, not an end that one seeks. But has not History advanced humanity in that way, with gestures and sacrifices? In any case, the one I am worried about now is you. If you are captured, you will not have the opportunity to fight. You will be tried for high treason.

—I got into this, Father Crotty, and my obligation is to be consistent and go all the way. I will never be able to thank you enough for everything I owe you. May I ask for your blessing?

He knelt down, Father Crotty blessed him, and they woke up with an embrace.

When Fathers Carey and MacCarroll entered his cell, Roger had already received the paper, pen, and ink he requested, and, with a steady hand, without hesitation, he had written two brief letters in one go. One to his cousin Gertrude and another, collective, to his friends. Both were very similar. To Gee, in addition to some heartfelt phrases expressing how much he had loved her and the good memories of her that his mind retained, he wrote: "Tomorrow, St. Stephen's Day, I will have the death I have sought. I hope God forgives my mistakes and accepts my pleas." The letter to his friends had the same tragic undertone: "My last message to everyone is a *sursum corda*. I wish all the best to those who are going to take my life and to those who have tried to save it. They are all now my brothers."

Mr. John Ellis, the executioner, always dressed in dark and accompanied by his assistant, a young man who introduced himself as Robert Baxter and appeared nervous and frightened, came to take his measurements —height, weight, and neck size— to, he explained naturally, determine the height of the gallows and the strength of the rope. While he measured him with a rod and noted in a notebook, he mentioned that, besides this trade, he was still working as a barber in Rochdale and that his clients tried to extract secrets about his job from him, but that he, regarding this subject, was a sphinx. Roger was glad that they departed.

Shortly after, a sentry brought him the last delivery of letters and telegrams that had already been reviewed by the censorship. They were from people

he did not know: they wished him luck or insulted him, calling him a traitor. He barely glanced through them, but a long telegram caught his attention. It was from the rubber dealer Julio C. Arana. Dated in Manaus and written in a Spanish that even Roger could notice was full of errors. It urged him "to be just by confessing his sins before a human tribunal, known only by Divine Justice, regarding his actions in Putumayo." It accused him of having "invented facts and influenced Barbadians to confirm unconscious acts that never occurred" with the sole aim of "obtaining titles and fortune." It ended like this: "I forgive you, but it is necessary that you be just and now declare fully and truthfully the true events that nobody knows better than you." Roger thought: "This telegram was not drafted by his lawyers but by him personally."

He felt at peace. The fear that had suddenly sent chills down his spine in the previous days and weeks had completely dissipated. He was sure he would face death with the same serenity that Patrick Pearse, Tom Clarke, Joseph Plunkett, James Connolly, and all the brave ones who sacrificed themselves in Dublin that week in April to make Ireland free had undoubtedly possessed. He felt unburdened by problems and anxieties and ready to settle his affairs with God.

Father Carey and father MacCarroll came in looking very serious and shook his hands affectionately. He had seen Father MacCarroll three or four times but had spoken little with him. He was Scottish and had a small tic in his nose that gave his expression a comical tilt. In contrast, he felt comfortable with Father Carey. He returned the copy of the *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis.

—I don't know what to do with it, give it to someone. It's the only book I've been allowed to read in Pentonville Prison. I have no regrets. It has been good company. If he ever gets in touch with Father Crotty, tell him he was right. Thomas à Kempis was, as he told me, a holy man, simple and full of wisdom.

Father MacCarroll told him that the *sheriff* was taking care of his civilian clothes and would soon bring them to him. In the prison's storage, they had become worn and dirty, and Mr. Stacey himself was concerned about having them cleaned and pressed.

—He is a good man —Roger said—. He lost his only son in the war and has been half-broken with grief, too.

After a pause, he asked them to now concentrate on his reintegration into Catholicism.

—Reintegration, not conversion —Father Carey reminded him once again—. He was always catholic, Roger, by the decision of that mother he loved so much and whom he will soon see again.

The narrow cell seemed to have narrowed even more with the three people inside. They barely had space to kneel. For twenty or thirty minutes, they prayed, initially in silence and then aloud, pa-

Our Fathers and Hail Marys, the clergy at the beginning of the prayer and Roger at the end.

Then, Father MacCarroll withdrew so that Father Carey could hear Roger Casement's confession. The priest sat at the edge of the bed, and Roger remained on his knees at the beginning of his long, incredibly lengthy list of his real or supposed sins. When his first tears erupted, despite his efforts to hold back, Father Carey made him sit beside him. Thus continued this final ceremony in which, while he spoke, explained, remembered, and asked, Roger felt that, in fact, he was getting closer and closer to his mother. For brief moments, he had the fleeting impression that the slender silhouette of Anne Jephson was materializing and disappearing into the reddish brick wall of the cell.

He cried many times, in a way he couldn't remember ever crying before, no longer trying to hold back the tears, because with them he released his tensions and bitterness, and he felt that not only his spirit, but also his body became lighter. Father Carey allowed him to speak, silent and motionless. Sometimes, he would ask him a question, make an observation, or offer a brief reassuring comment. After indicating the penance and giving him absolution, he embraced him: "Welcome back to what has always been your home, Roger."

Very shortly afterward, the door of the cell opened again and Father MacCarroll entered, followed by the *sheriff*. Mr. Stacey was holding in his arms his dark suit and white collared shirt, his tie and waistcoat, while Father MacCarroll carried the boots and stockings. This was the clothing that Roger had worn the day the Tribunal of Bailey's Hearing sentenced him to be hanged. His garments were immaculately clean and pressed, and his shoes had just been polished and shined.

—Thank you very much for your kindness, *sheriff*.

Mr. Stacey nodded. He had his usual puffy and sad face. But now he avoided looking him in the eyes.

—May I take a bath before putting on this clothing, *sheriff*? It would be a shame to soil it with this filthy body I have.

Mr. Stacey nodded, this time with a small knowing smile. Then, he left the room.

Squeezing together, the three managed to sit on the cot. They remained thus, sometimes silent, sometimes praying, sometimes talking. Roger spoke to them about his childhood, his early years in Dublin, in Jersey, and the vacations he spent with his siblings at their maternal uncles' place in Scotland. Father MacCarroll was pleased to hear him say that the Scottish vacations had been for little Roger the experience of Paradise, that is, of purity and happiness. In a low voice, he hummed some of the children's songs that his mother and uncles made him learn, and he also recalled how the feats of the light dragons in India, as recounted by Captain Roger Casement when he was in a good mood, made him and his siblings dream.

Then, he gave them the floor, asking them to share how they became priests. Had they entered the

seminary driven by a calling or pushed by circumstances, hunger, poverty, the desire for education, as was the case with so many Irish religious? Father MacCarroll had been orphaned before he could reason. He was taken in by elderly relatives who enrolled him in a small parochial school where the pastor, who cared for him, convinced him that his calling was the Church.

—What else could I do but believe him? —reflected Father MacCarroll—. In truth, I entered the seminary without much conviction. The call from God came later, during my later years of study. I was very interested in theology. I would have liked to dedicate myself to studying and teaching. But, as we know, man proposes and God disposes.

The case of Father Carey was very different. His family, well-off merchants from Limerick, were Catholics in name more than in practice, so he did not grow up in a religious environment. Nevertheless, he felt the call at a very young age and could even point to an event that might have been decisive. An Eucharistic Congress when he was thirteen or fourteen years old, where he heard a missionary priest, Father Aloyssus, recount the work being done by the religious men and women he had spent twenty years of his life with in the jungles of Mexico and Guatemala.

—He was such a good speaker that he dazzled me — Father Carey said—. Because of him, I am still in this situation. I never saw him again, nor did I hear from him. But I always remember his voice, his fervor, his rhetoric, his very long beards. And his name: *father* Aloyssus.

When they opened the door to the cell, bringing him the usual meager dinner —soup, salad, and bread—, Roger realized that they had been talking for several hours. The sunset was fading, and night was beginning, although some sunlight still shone through the bars of the small window. He rejected the dinner and remained only with the little bottle of water.

And then he remembered that, during one of his first expeditions in Africa, in the first year of his stay on the dark continent, he had spent a few days in a small village of a tribe whose name he had forgotten (the bangui, perhaps?). With the help of an interpreter, he talked to several locals. This is how he discovered that the elders in the community, when they felt they were going to die, would make a small bundle of their few belongings and, discreetly, without saying goodbye to anyone, trying to go unnoticed, would venture into the jungle. They sought a quiet place, a little beach by the shores of a lake or river, the shade of a large tree, a hill with rocks. There, they would lie down to wait for death without disturbing anyone. A wise and elegant way to depart.

The Carey and MacCarroll parents wanted to spend the night with him, but Roger did not allow it. He assured them that he was well, calmer than in the last three months. He preferred to stay alone and rest. It was true. The clergymen, seeing the serenity he displayed, agreed to leave.

When they left, Roger spent a long time contemplating the clothes that the *sheriff* had left him. For some strange reason, he was sure that he would bring him those clothes he was captured in that desolate dawn of April 21 in that circular fort of the Celts called McKenna's Fort, made of rotting stones, covered with leaves, ferns, and moisture, and surrounded by trees where birds sang. Just three months, and it felt like centuries. What would become of those clothes? Had they archived them as well, along with his file? The suit that Mr. Stacey ironed and in which he would die in a few hours had been bought for him by the lawyer Gavan Duffy so that he would appear presentable before the Tribunal that judged him. To avoid wrinkling it, he stretched it under the small mattress of the bed. And he lay down, thinking that he was in for a long night of sleeplessness.

Amazingly, after a short while, he fell asleep. He must have slept for many hours because when he opened his eyes with a slight start, although the cell was in shadows, he noticed through the barred little square of the window that dawn was beginning to break. He remembered dreaming of his mother. She had a saddened face, and he, as a child, consoled her by saying, "Don't be sad, we will see each other again soon." He felt calm, unafraid, eager for it to be over at last.

Not long after, or perhaps it was a long time, but he had not realized how much time had passed, the door opened and, from the doorway, the *sheriff*—with a tired face and bloodshot eyes as if he hadn't slept at all—said to him:

—If you want to take a bath, it must be now

. Roger nodded. As they walked down the long corridor of darkened bricks towards the bathrooms, Mr. Stacey asked him if he had been able to rest at all. When Roger said he had slept for a few hours, he murmured, "I am glad for you." Then, as Roger anticipated the pleasant sensation of receiving the stream of fresh water on his body, Mr. Stacey told him that at the prison gate, many people had spent the whole night praying, holding crucifixes and posters against the death penalty, including some priests and pastors. Roger felt strange, as if he was no longer himself, as if another person was replacing him. He stayed under the cold water for a good while. He carefully washed with soap and rinsed off, scrubbing his body with both hands. When he returned to the cell, Father Carey and Father MacCarroll were already there again. They told him that the number of people gathered at the doors of Pentonville Prison, praying and brandishing banners, had grown significantly since the previous night. Many were parishioners brought by Father Edward Murnaue from the little church of Holy Trinity, where local families attended. But there was also a group that was cheering for the execution of the "traitor." This news left Roger indifferent. The clergy waited outside the cell for him to get dressed. He was struck by how much weight he had lost. His clothes and shoes felt loose on him.

Escorted by the two priests and followed by the *sheriff* and an armed guard, he went to the chapel of Pentonville Prison. He did not know it. It was small and dark, but there was something welcoming and calm about the oval-ceilinged space. Father Carey officiated the mass, and Father MacCarroll served as the altar boy. Roger followed the ceremony with emotion, although he was unsure if it was due to the circumstances or because he was going to receive communion for the first and last time. "This will be my first communion and my viaticum," he thought. After receiving communion, he tried to say something to Fathers Carey and MacCarroll but could not find the words and remained silent, trying to pray.

Upon returning to the cell, they had left breakfast next to his bed, but he did not want to eat anything. He asked for the time, and this time they did tell him: it was eight forty in the morning. "I have twenty minutes left," he thought. Almost instantly, the prison governor arrived, along with the *sheriff* and three men dressed in civilian clothes, one of whom was undoubtedly the doctor who would certify his death, some official from the Crown, and the executioner with his young assistant. Mr. Ellis, a rather short and stocky man, also wore dark clothing like the others, but rolled up the sleeves of his jacket for more comfortable work. He had a rope coiled on his arm. In his polite, hoarse voice, he asked him to put his hands behind his back because they needed to be tied. While he was being tied, Mr. Ellis asked him a question that seemed absurd: "Am I hurting you?" He shook his head.

Father Carey and father MacCarroll had begun to pray litanies aloud. They continued praying as they accompanied him, each by his side, on the long journey through parts of the prison that were unfamiliar to him: stairs, corridors, a small courtyard, all deserted. Roger barely noticed the places they were leaving behind. He prayed and responded to the litanies, feeling content that his steps were steady and that not a sob nor a tear escaped him. At times he closed his eyes and asked God for mercy, but the face that appeared in his mind was that of Anne Jephson.

Finally, they emerged into a sun-drenched clearing. A squad of armed guards awaited them. They surrounded a square wooden frame, with a small set of stairs of eight or ten steps. The governor read a few phrases, undoubtedly the sentence, to which Roger paid no attention. Then he asked if he wanted to say anything. He shook his head, but murmured under his breath: "Ireland." He turned to the priests, and both embraced him. Father Carey gave him the blessing.

Then, Mr. Ellis approached and asked him to bend down so he could blindfold him, as Roger was too tall for him. He leaned down, and while the executioner was placing the blindfold that plunged him into darkness, it seemed to him that Mr. Ellis's fingers were now less steady, less in control of themselves, than when they tied his hands. Taking him by the arm, the executioner made him climb the steps to the platform, slowly so he wouldn't stumble.

He heard some movements, prayers from the priests, and finally, once again, a whisper from Mr. Ellis asking him to lower his head and lean a bit, *please, sir*. He did so, and then felt that the rope had been placed around his neck. He still managed to hear one last whisper from Mr. Ellis: "If you hold your breath, it will be quicker, sir." He obeyed. Epilogue

*I say that Roger Casement
Did what he had to do. He
died upon the gallows, But
that is nothing new.* W. B. YEATS

The history of Roger Casement projects, fades, and is reborn after his death like those fireworks that, after soaring and bursting into the night in a rain of stars and thunders, extinguish, fall silent, and, moments later, revive in a trumpet fanfare that fills the sky with flames.

According to the doctor who attended the execution, doctor Percy Mander, it was carried out "without the slightest obstacle" and the death of the condemned was instantaneous. Before authorizing his burial, the doctor, following orders from the British authorities who wanted some scientific assurance regarding the executed man's "perverse tendencies," proceeded, putting on plastic gloves, to examine his anus and the beginning of the intestine. He noted that, "at first glance," the anus showed a clear dilation, as did "the lower part of the intestine, up to where my fingers could reach." The doctor concluded that this examination confirmed "the practices to which the executed man apparently was inclined."

After being subjected to this manipulation, the remains of Roger Casement were buried without a tombstone, cross, or initials, next to the also anonymous grave of doctor Crippen, a famous murderer who had been executed some time ago. The unformed mound of earth that was his grave was adjacent to the Román Way, the path through which, at the beginning of the first millennium of our era, the Roman legions entered to civilize that lost corner of Europa that would later become England.

Then, the story of Roger Casement seemed to eclipse. The negotiations with the British authorities undertaken by the lawyer George Gavan Duffy on behalf of Roger's brothers to have his remains returned to his family for a Christian burial in Ireland were denied, at that time and at all other times over the course of half a century whenever his relatives made similar attempts. For a long time, except for a restricted number of people—among them the executioner, Mr. John Ellis, who, in the memoir he wrote shortly before committing suicide, stated that "of all the people I had to execute, the one who died with the most courage was Roger Casement"—

, no one spoke of him. He disappeared from public attention, in England *and* in Ireland.

It took a long time for him to be admitted to the pantheon of the heroes of the Independence of Ireland. The winding campaign launched by British intelligence to discredit him, using fragments of his secret diaries, was successful. Even now, it does not completely dissipate: a gloomy halo of homosexuality *and* pedophilia accompanied his image throughout the 20th century. His figure was uncomfortable in his country because Ireland, until a few years ago, officially maintained a very strict moral code in which even the mere suspicion of "sexual deviant" plunged a person into ignominy and expelled them from public consideration. For a large part of the 20th century, the name and the deeds and hardships of Roger Casement were confined to political essays, journalistic articles, and biographies by historians, many of whom were English.

With the revolution of customs, mainly in the sexual domain, in Ireland, little by little, although always with reluctance and coyness, the name of Casement began to establish itself until it was accepted as what it was: one of the great anti-colonialist fighters and defenders of human rights and the cultures of Indigenous people of his time *and* a sacrificed combatant for the emancipation of Ireland. Slowly, his compatriots resigned themselves to accepting that a hero *and* a martyr is not an abstract prototype or a paragon of perfection but a human being, made of contradictions *and* contrasts, weaknesses *and* greatnesses, since a man, as José Enrique Rodó wrote, «is many men», which means that angels and demons mix in his personality inextricably.

Never has the controversy over the so-called *Black Diaries* ceased, nor will it probably ever cease. Did they really exist, and did Roger Casement write them by hand, with all their pestilent obscenities, or were they forged by the British secret services to morally and politically execute their former diplomat, in order to make an exemplary punishment and deter potential traitors? For decades, the English Government refused to authorize independent historians and graphologists to examine the diaries, declaring them state secrets, which gave rise to suspicions and arguments in favor of forgery. When, relatively few years ago, the secrecy was lifted and researchers could examine them and subject the texts to scientific tests, the controversy did not cease. It will probably last a long time. Which is not bad. It is not bad that a climate of uncertainty always lingers around Roger Casement, as proof that it is impossible to definitively know a human being, a totality that always slips away from all the theoretical and rational nets trying to capture it. My own impression—that of a novelist, of course—is that Roger Casement wrote the famous diaries but did not live them, at least not integrally, as there is much exaggeration in them and

fiction, that wrote certain things because she would have liked to but could not experience them.

In 1965, the English Government of Harold Wilson finally allowed the remains of Casement to be repatriated. They arrived in Ireland on a military plane and received public tributes on February 23 of that year. They were displayed for four days in a lying-in-state at the Garrison Church of the Saved Heart like those of a hero. A massive crowd estimated at several hundred thousand people passed by to pay their respects. There was a military procession to the Pro-Cathedral, and military honors were rendered before the historic Post Office building, the headquarters of the 1916 Rising, before carrying his coffin to Glasnevin Cemetery, where he was buried on a gray and rainy morning. To deliver the tribute speech, Eamon de Valera, the first president of Ireland, a prominent fighter in the 1916 insurrection and friend of Roger Casement, rose from his deathbed and said those moving words often used to bid farewell to great men.

Neither in the Congo nor in the Amazon has there been a trace of the one who did so much to denounce the great crimes committed in those lands during the rubber times. In Ireland, scattered across the island, some memories of him remain. In the heights of the *glen* of Glenshesk, in Antrim, descending toward the small cove of Murlough, not far from the family home of Magherintemple, Sinn Féin erected a monument that radical unionists from Northern Ireland destroyed. The fragments remain scattered on the ground. In Ballyheigue, Co. Kerry, in a small square overlooking the sea stands the sculpture of Roger Casement sculpted by the Irish Oisín Kelly. In the Kerry County Museum in Tralee is the camera that Roger took in 1911 on his trip to the Amazon and, if requested, the visitor can also see the rough wool coat he wore in the German submarine U-19 that brought him to Ireland. A private collector, Mr. Sean Quinlan, has in his house in Ballyduff, not far from the mouth of the Shannon into the Atlantic, a boat that (he insists emphatically) is the same one in which Roger, Captain Monteith, and Sergeant Bailey landed at Banna Strand. In the Gaelic language school "Roger Casement," in Tralee, the principal's office displays the ceramic plate on which Roger Casement ate in the Public Bar Seven Stars, on the days he went to the London Court of Appeals that decided his case. At McKenna's Fort there is a small monument in Gaelic, English, and German—a column of black stone—where it is remembered that he was captured there by the Royal Irish Constabulary on April 21, 1916. And, at Banna Strand, the beach where he arrived, stands a small obelisk featuring the face of Roger Casement alongside that of Captain Robert Monteith. The morning I went to see it, it was covered with the white feces of the raucous seagulls fluttering around and wild violets, which so deeply moved him, were seen everywhere.

dawn when he returned to Ireland to be captured, tried, and hanged.

Madrid, April 19, 2010
Acknowledgments

I could not have written this novel without the collaboration, conscious or unconscious, of many people who helped me during my travels in the Congo and the Amazon, as well as in Ireland, the United States, Belgium, Peru, Germany, and Spain. They sent me books, articles, facilitated access to archives and libraries, provided testimonials and advice, and above all, their encouragement and friendship when I felt overwhelmed by the challenges of the project I was working on. Among them, I would like to highlight Verónica Ramírez Muro for her invaluable assistance in my journey through Ireland and in preparing the manuscript. I alone am responsible for the shortcomings of this book, but without these individuals, any successes it may have had would have been impossible. Thank you very much to:

In the Congo: Colonel Gaspar Barrabino, Ibrahima Coly, Ambassador Félix Costales Artieda, Ambassador Miguel Fernández Palacios, Raffaella Gentilini, Asuka Imai, Chance Kayijuka, Placide-Clement Mananga, Pablo Marco, Father Barumi Minavi, Javier Sancho Más, Karl Steincker, Dr. Tharcisse Synga Ngundu from Minova, Juan Carlos Tomasi, Xisco Villalonga, Emile Zola, and the "Poets of the Renewal" from Lwemba.

In Belgium: David van Reybrouck.

In the Amazon: Alberto Chirif, Father Joaquín García Sánchez, and Roger Rumrill.

In Ireland: Christopher Brooke, Anne, Patrick Casement, Hugh Casement, Tom Desmond, JeffDudgeon, Sean Joseph, Ciara Kerrigan, Jit Ming, Angus Mitchell, Griffin Murray, Helen O'Carroll, Séamas O'Siocliain, Donal J. O'Sullivan, Sean Quinlan, Orla Sweeney, and the staff of the National Library of Ireland and the National Photographic Archive.

In Peru: Rosario de Bedoya, Nancy Herrera, Gabriel Meseth, Lucía Muñoz-Nájar, Hugo Neira, Juan Ossio, Fernando Carvallo, and the staff of the National Library.

In New York: Bob Dumont and the staff of the New York Public Library.

In London: John Hemming, Hugh Thomas, Jorge Orlando Meló, and the staff of the British Library.

In Spain: Fiorella Battistini, Javier Reverte,
Nadine Tchamlesso, Pepe Verdes, Antón Yeregui, and
Muskilda Zancada.

Héctor Abad Faciolince, Ovidio Lagos, and
Edmundo Murray.

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This book was completed
printing at Dédalo Offset
Graphics Workshop, S.L.,
Pinto, Madrid (Spain) in the
month of November 2010.