

frits Bernard



**COSTA
BRAVA**

SOUTHERNWOOD PRESS

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By Frits Bernard

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COSTA BRAVA:

A NOVELLA

By Frits Bernard

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PART ONE

Many are the ways...

I

The sea looked like a grey oil-slick alongside the golden yellow sand. The water was as smooth as a mirror, and the rays of the setting sun tinted the white houses of the village orange. The little church stood serene and peaceful on its rock beside the sea, like a stake arising from the water. It was one of the very warm summer days, and the siesta of the inhabitants was prolonged somewhat beyond the customary duration. The few small beach cafes beneath the slender palm trees were still deserted, with the curtains drawn in their windows. In the village itself, people were occupied in pushing aside the canvas awnings that had been hung between the roofs across the narrow streets in order to keep out the sunshine, and others were sprinkling water on the sandy and irregular pavements.

In the distance, the melancholy song of a flamenco-singer accompanied by the plaintive chords of a guitar softly recalled his dear Andalusia... *en Cordoba la sultana y en Seuilla la giralda...* A cart supported by two high wheels and drawn by two mules, one behind the other and both wearing straw hats with their ears poking through, carried locally-picked grapes to one of the houses. After unloading, they would be trampled underfoot and in due course become the local wine. A farmer drove three donkeys heavily-laden with fruit and vegetables before him in the direction of the little market. On the beach, the fishermen began to get their boats ready for the night. At ten o'clock—as usual—they would make sail for the part of the Mediterranean that was their fishing ground, and at seven o'clock the next morning they would be back with their catch, part of which would then be sold on the beach there.

In the meanwhile, the sun had set. I crossed over the path beside the beach and looked into the calm water, which was changing colour at that

moment. The village had now become busy; the time for the evening promenade had arrived. People sauntered along the footpath and the beach cafes were quite crowded. Voices rang clearly through the evening air, which had become appreciably cooler. I went and sat down on a stone bench in order to let the atmosphere and the peace have their effect on me. A beggar came up to me with dignity and asked me for alms. He expressed his gratitude with the words: “may the good Lord repay you” and disappeared among the crowd.

A book about Catalonia lay open on my knees, but I could not be bothered to read it. There was much so much to see, so much to observe. I had scarcely been in Spain for two weeks, and before going to the south of the country I intended to spend a few more weeks at the Catalan coast. This was the plan I had made before leaving Venezuela, my homeland. How much had I looked forward to seeing something of the land of my ancestors Spain! A dream-wish of many Venezuelans: one which is seldom fulfilled, however. And now it was being fulfilled so far for me. My grandfather had emigrated from this Catalan coast to South America, like so many others from the Iberian peninsula had done at that time. There were innumerable links, in fact, between the two territories: Spain the motherland and her South American offspring. Here I sat and looked out over the sea just like my forefathers had once done.

A sea-breeze arose. In the meanwhile, it had become completely dark and the stars twinkled in the sky above: the Great Bear, the Milky Way and Orion. Moonlight bathed the landscape, the hills, the flat roofs of the village and the apparently boundless Mare Nostrum. The voices of the fishermen made a monotonous sound as they strained with their shoulders against the hulls of their boats to propel them across the beach—on short rollers thrust beneath the keel—and into the water. One, two... one, two... One after another the boats slid into the sea. This was not always achieved without difficulty; sometimes they got stuck in shallow water, and then it was a big job to get them afloat again. The purr of the rhythmically drumming motors could be heard for a long time. Later on a cluster of small lights appeared on the horizon; the fishing operation had begun.

My thoughts then turned to my own small motor-boat, which lay on the little beach about a hundred miles to the north, surrounded by steep rocks. It had been lying there a week before, after a visit I had made to a fellow-countryman who had a country-house there on the Costa Brava and spent

his summer there. I had bought the boat cheaply, second-hand, through a relative when I arrived in the country, in order to be able to make short trips along the coast during my stay—mainly so that I could take photographs and shoot some scenes. It was my intention to go and fetch it in the near future.

After walking some more and drinking a glass of vermouth with sodawater, I made my way to a small restaurant under the palm-trees behind the fishermen's beach and ordered a paella, one of the local specialties, made of rice with chopped fish, meat, poultry, vegetables and spices. It was brought to the table steaming, and its delicious fragrance mingled with that of the sea. The house wine that was served with it was not bad. Everything was so restful and peaceful; nobody was in a hurry—people didn't eat before ten or eleven o'clock in the evening.

At midnight I went to the open-air cinema, which was situated in the back-garden of a cafe somewhere in the middle of the village. A canvas sheet was suspended above the simple wooden seats, to keep out the moonlight. The main film had not yet begun and it did not last long or there was an interval. A couple of peanut vendors appeared, calling out cacahuetes, cacahuetes...

Beside the rows of seats there was an oblong pond surrounded entirely by blue tiles, with a fountain at one end spraying fine jets of water round about. It had a cooling effect, and reminded me of a Moorish garden. The influence of the southern neighbours was unmistakable.

The Spanish main film interested me—as the manager of a Venezuelan film company—very much. Although most Spanish films are also screened in South America, I had not seen this one. It was about the life of a priest and the secrets of the confessional. All of a sudden the projector stopped, a great sigh came from the audience, and the noise of shelling peanuts ceased, only to begin again at once, unlike the show, because there was a power-cut and the village lay in darkness, apart from where it was relatively light thanks to the bright moon. The cinema show thus ended early.

I strolled for some time through the narrow streets that ran up and down between the many neat white houses with their mostly blue doors and windows. It had become silent in the village. The passers-by seemed unreal in the moonlight, especially because you didn't hear them coming nearer on their alpargatas—linen shoes with rope soles and straps.

This was my first really long holiday for many years and I discovered that here in these surroundings I was at peace and new ideas could come to me. There were two films to be made during the coming year, one of which dealt with the links between Spain and Venezuela. The script was almost ready, but not yet fully worked out in all detail. I had made up my mind to shoot some of the outdoor scenes right here.

With a candle which I had got from the night-porter in my hotel in my hand, I made my way to my bedroom, where I undressed and put on my swimming-costume and a short dressing-gown. I left the hotel again, crossed the beach-side path and ran across the beach. A few moments later I was swimming in the dark sea, still unaware that this was one of the last restful days that I would enjoy in this part of the world.

II

It was 20th July 1936. In a few days' time everything was changed: the civil war was raging in Spain. The tension was unbearable, with one rumor circulating after another.

Connections were broken, everything seemed to be disorganized. Nobody was able to predict how it would all turn out. Men wearing overalls with guns over their shoulders peopled the streets. The church on the rock was burnt down... The country was divided into two camps; the Republicans on one side and Franco's supporters on the other. Catalonia belonged to the former, the "red" side.

The land-owning class and the clergy were hit hard. People went into hiding, or disappeared to safer places if that seemed to be possible. There were murders, buildings were set on fire...

A British cruiser appeared off the coast, in order to carry the British subjects away to safety. That was a bad sign.

These developments prevented me from putting my plans into effect; there was now no question of a journey further south. What should I do? Could my Ford—with its Caracas number-plate—take me back to France via Barcelona and Port Bou, or La Junquera? Normal railway services no longer existed, only troop trains. As a foreigner I had nothing to fear directly, I belonged to the privileged few. My car was also not requisitioned. I had painted "Venezuela" in large white letters on the sides of

the bodywork, and a Venezuelan flag fluttered above the left-hand mudguard.

My suitcases were packed, and already lying in the boot of the car. Only a few necessities remained in a bag in my room at the hotel. I was prepared for all possibilities. The next few days brought no improvement in the general situation, indeed everything was more confused. Groups of whispering people were all over the streets... Shots were heard in and around the little square, and from the distance came the sound of a machine-gun. Food became scarcer and more expensive.

I sat once again on the stone bench and stared at the deep blue sea, which sparkled in the bright sunlight as if nothing was the matter. The beach that had once been so jolly lay abandoned, and the pretty white and coloured sails were no longer to be seen. The British cruiser had disappeared along with the British subjects.

Slowly, with his head bowed forward, a boy came towards me. He was alone. A few yards in front of my bench he stood still and looked around, as if he were afraid of something. He then made his way to the bench and sat down. To judge by the cloth of his *fresco*—very thin summer-wear—he was not poor. There was something proud about his bearing, despite his sombre expression. His dark brown eyes looked into mine. They troubled me. He smiled, and in the smile there was something so intimate that I had the feeling that I had known him a long time. What a remarkable encounter. We looked at each other several times, and the same feelings occurred again...

“Señor, can you help me?” he asked and looked in front of him.

Whether I wanted to help him. What was the matter then with this boy? He related his story, his tragedy, to a stranger in this dangerous time. His father had been killed a few days before, he was left all alone... His mother was no longer alive. His father had told him that—if anything should happen—he must try to escape to France... He had eaten nothing since the previous day, his money had run out... could I give him something to eat, bread would be enough...

He carried himself bravely, like a proud Spaniard. I seized his hand and shook it.

“What’s your name, *amigo*?”

“Juan José.”

“How old are you?”

“Twelve.”

Twelve years old, in such tragic circumstances. As I took Juan José to the hotel, I thought how trivial were my own difficulties in comparison with this boy's. I felt sorry for Juan José, who sat still facing me across the table, looking very attractive. His slim boyish hands handled the knife and fork, and he even seemed to forget his misery. His almost, black hair, which he wore combed straight back, his slightly thick—but beautifully curved—lips gave him a somewhat sensual appearance. His shoulders were broad for his age, and his muscles well-developed. You could see that he enjoyed sports. The colour of his skin was too dark for that of a Catalan, but typical of that of a person from Andalusia. I did not ask him for any more details; that seemed to me to be indiscreet during a civil war. I really knew nothing about him—not even his surname—it was just as if he was a close friend with whom I felt at home. We looked at each other understandingly.

The waiter brought us *arroz a la cuhana*: white rice with tomato sauce, eggs, pieces of ham and fried banana. Considering the circumstances, the food was remarkably good, indeed exceptionally good. The ordinary holidaymakers had disappeared from the hotel and now only various *milicianos* sat in the dining-room with their weapons leaning against the tables and chairs. Some of them had not shaved for days, they spoke a lot and noisily, mainly about the situation and the new times that were to come.

There were some more shots in the distance. Juan José stared straight in front, his fork fell from his right hand and he toyed with a lump of bread with his other hand. He wanted to say something, but his lips remained cramped together. I got the feeling that he was no longer there, that his thoughts were somewhere else...

The waiter brought fresh coffee, and looked with surprise at the boy. I got up from my seat and seized Juan José by the arm. I turned to the waiter and said "He's not feeling well, it must be the stomach-ache again. I'll take him upstairs and drink my coffee later."

Juan José climbed the stairs vacantly with me. Once in the bedroom I laid him on the bed, took off his *alpargatas* and served some brandy in the water-glass. Even before I had time to give him a little to drink, he burst into tears and hid his face in the white cushions. The reaction to all he had gone through—and had borne so bravely—came, and he wept and wept... From time to time he stammered a few words... *papá... no puedo más.*

No, he could take no more, it was too much. I sat on the end of the bed and leant over. "I will help you, Juanjo."

I ran my fingers through his thick black hair. He was more restful. He had completely stopped crying. He drank a tot of brandy.

"Try and get some sleep."

His eyes had returned to their normal expression, and he looked understandingly in my direction.

"Yes—I'll try."

Sitting at the table in front of the window, I looked out through a chink in the shutters. It was getting on for four o'clock, the sun's rays illuminated the path differently from the sea. Not far away stood two open lorries with armed men in rolled-up shirt-sleeves. Some of them were still very young, almost children. One of them was rolling a cigarette, others were busy loading their guns. Each lorry had a big red flag beside the driving-cab. On the sides of the load compartment stood the letters F.A.I. The scene did not last long, as both lorries moved off and disappeared down the road. A small group of people remained on the pavement talking. They did not appear to be agreed about something, but I could not hear exactly what it was all about.

I glanced towards the bed. The young features lay relaxed, one hand over the edge of the mattress hung down, his head was turned slightly to the right and his breath came regularly. Juan José was asleep. His first sleep, since when? What was going on inside him? He was not safe here; his father had been killed for political reasons, he was afraid. Afraid of what? What would anyone do to him? Put him in a camp, as he was afraid they might? Or...

He wanted to go to France, to an uncle who was living in Perpignan. That was his late father's last wish...

I reviewed the possibilities. How could he cross the frontier? Under the prevailing circumstances this did not seem to be feasible. There must be another solution. But what? I began to apply myself intensively to his problem; I had promised to help him. But how?

Sounds from outside put an abrupt end to my meditation. I peered through the shutters, a small crowd was shouting in the street there. Two people—middle-aged men—were being taken away. It was a dispiriting sight. What a dreadful thing was this war between brothers. And it could be so beautiful here on the coast... Juan José remained fast asleep, he

heard nothing. His face had something so noble, something of an angel. He must be a good person.

There was a knock at the door. Footsteps sounded in the passage. I opened it gently.

“Identity-card, comrade!”

The Venezuelan passport was passed from hand to hand. Finally it reached someone who could read.

“Foreigner—from Venezuela! A good country.”

There were no more questions. They went on to the next door.

“Salud, camarada.”

I shut the door. Juan José had woken up, he was bathed in sweat, drops of which ran off his forehead onto the cushion.

“*Señor*,” he began nervously, “you got rid of them that time! Had they come for me?”

I pushed a cane chair to beside the bed and sat down next to the boy.

“No, don’t worry, it wasn’t important,” and after a short pause I added “don’t call me ‘señor’; my friends call me Santiago.”

He put out his hand and shook mine.

“Thank God I met you,” he continued emotionally. “Friendship is the most wonderful thing in the world and it helps us come through everything; I never appreciated that more than I do right now. You didn’t know me at all, and yet you do everything for me. I feel myself to be so safe beside you. Despite all the misery, despite this revolution, the last moments have been wonderful and incomprehensible.”

He took the words out of my mouth. He spoke like a man. “Listen to me for a moment, Juanjo; while you were asleep I was thinking about the possibilities for getting you out of here. I didn’t get very far, but perhaps we can do better if we go over it together. As far north as Tamariú, I have a small motorboat on the Costa Brava. With the car—it has foreign licence plates we could try to get to Tamariú, and then make an attempt to sail to France in my boat. All this is clearly not a simple business in war-time, but it is worth having a try. Of course we must think about food and above all about fuel, but that, too, can be arranged...”

He interrupted—“You are a good friend—and that’s why I don’t want you to run a risk for me. If they catch you, you’ll be in real trouble, even if you are a foreigner. And I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

He sat up straight and looked at me trustingly. His eyes had a special brightness. I felt uncertain; a strange feeling came over me. Despite the tragedy, I felt quite happy. What kind of boy was this, who spoke in this way? He made me feel small and insignificant.

“I have no choice, Juanjo, just because I too feel this friendship, I can’t leave you in the lurch. I could never forgive myself. I must. It will all be all right...”

There was another knock at the door. The waiter stood in the doorway and asked if the young man was feeling any better. He had brought the coffee with him.

I filled the time with one thing and another. I went downstairs and sat down to drink a soda in the small hall leading to the way out. It was getting on for six o’clock, and the heat still hung heavily over the street onto which I looked out. The door stood open, and a bead curtain with a maritime scene hung in the opening. It showed a little fishing-boat under sail, such as are often seen in this part of the Mediterranean Sea. It was made up of numerous colours with a bright blue background. In no sense could it be called artistic—an artist would have had a fit—but it gave a cheerful effect, and so achieved its purpose. A young girl carrying a wicker-work basket full of melons and water-melons came in, and the beads rattled merrily as she went by. She came past me, modestly averting her eyes from me, as is customary in the Latin countries, and walked elegantly through a door marked *servicio* into the kitchen. A few moments later she came back through the same door with the same charm, walked past me again and went out through the bead curtain. I could still perceive her slim silhouette faintly between the beads until she disappeared behind a high cart.

The evening paper lay open on a table; it consisted of only a single sheet with big black headlines giving the news about the progress of the front. In order to keep abreast of what was being written in the press I began to read it. The revolt had grown into a full-scale civil war, and everything suggested that it would not be a minor affair. Poor country; as a Venezuelan I had sympathy with the territory that once was the *tierra madre*—the motherland—for the South American states.

Some people had come into the adjoining dining-room without my noticing. The radio was switched on; they were waiting for the news-bulletin from Barcelona. Marching music could be heard. The announcer introduced his colleague from the news department. He read the

news nervously. The whole of Spain appeared to be in rebellion, from the Canaries to the Pyrenees. Then followed a series of announcements for the civil population. It was alarming. The military music that followed raised the enthusiasm of the listeners to a peak. It seemed to be a winning battle... More or less unnoticed, twilight had fallen. The sun had become a fireball, the air was red and orange. A plume of smoke appeared on the horizon. The villagers stood looking at it in groups; they were afraid of being bombarded from the sea. The air was again buzzing with rumours.

I then went out for a walk beside the beach, which had become my habit at that time as it was for the villagers. A light breeze from the sea refreshed me, and produced little white-horses in the bay. During the walk I would take a decision. Had I really considered everything fully? Was it not an unnecessarily risky adventure? Would it really help Juan José? Anyway, it was necessary to act quickly; what the next few days would bring could not be foreseen.

At the window of a watchmaker's I halted. A collection of Swiss wristwatches was displayed in it, and I went inside, without really knowing why. An old woman sat behind the counter; she stood up as I came in. She looked at me in a friendly manner and asked:

“What can I do for you?”

While I examined the watches that interested me, the old woman complained about the situation. She was older than I thought; she said she was over seventy. She was not afraid—what could happen to her now—but some of her children and grandchildren were on one side and some on the other, and they were drawn into fighting each other... She paused, and sighed.

The woman looked at the gold wristwatch that I was wearing and was somewhat surprised when my final choice fell on a similar one. It was still wrapped up in an elegant little box with pretty paper and a multi-coloured cloth wrapping, as was the custom in feudal times. Her old fingers were still nimble and she knew her business; she knew human character too. By sticking on a label bearing a picture of St. George and the dragon, she completed the whole.

As she handed over the package, she said with a smile: “I hope the wearers of both watches will be very happy...”

I thanked her, and left the shop. When I was in the street, I looked back and saw a large picture of St. George and the dragon, Catalonia's patron

saint, above the door. The shop bore the name *San Jorge*.

After a quick drink at one of the open-air cafes, I went straight back to my hotel. I had made up my mind; we would leave that night. And there was no time to lose.

III

Juan José sat on the cane chair in the bedroom. He had had a shower and looked refreshed. The shutters were open and the night air was flowing in.

“We’re leaving this evening, Juanjo.”

He looked at me with eyes that glowed with gratitude. I had the evening meal served in the bedroom, with the excuse that the boy was not wholly restored to health. We did not eat much; the excitement was playing tricks on us. We sat opposite each other as we ate, each with his own thoughts.

After paying the bill, and giving a good tip to the waiter—who accepted this capitalistic gesture without scruples—we got into the car. At eleven o’clock we drove off in the darkness. There were no problems in the village; everything was quiet, with only a few people to be seen in the streets. Once we had reached the main road, which twisted its way through the mountainous countryside beside the sea, we were accompanied by the moon and the stars. One bend followed another, we climbed, and on the right the sea glittered below us. The petrol tank was full and in the boot were two jerry-cans with five gallons in each. I had also to think of the boat. Its tank was also almost full, but that was certainly not enough to get us to the French frontier. Similarly, we would have to take care of drinking water and food too, as there was only a tin of biscuits on board. A small compass, a chart and a few other things that were required for navigation had been left in the small cabin. The boat was many years old, but despite that she was still in a good seaworthy condition. At this time of year, storms were very rare, so that there was no great danger on that account. We could make sail under the cover of darkness, with our lights doused...

After a severe hairpin bend our progress was interrupted by a large barricade erected across the road; only a small passage remained open on the left, just broad enough to allow a car to pass. A *miliciano* waved a lamp

backward and forward and ordered us to stop. On the verge and at the barricade gun barrels could be seen.

“*Alto!*” said a voice.

I dimmed the lights and brought the car to a halt. A few moments later we were surrounded by a group of men.

“Your papers, comrade!”

The passport was passed from hand to hand; provoking praise for my country.

“And the boy?” I was asked.

The lamp was held high in front of the car, revealing the externally calm face of Juan José.

“Jie is my nephew,” I said; “his papers are in Barcelona. We are on our way to get them now.” I tried to keep my voice as ordinary as possible.

These circumstances did not appear to be for the best. The group considered what to do.

“You can go on, Señor, but the boy must get out.”

“I can’t leave my nephew behind on his own; I’m staying here too.”

This appeared to complicate matters. They would have to go and speak to the Commandant. The group disappeared, leaving only two men beside the car.

Juan José had grasped my hand, and he held it tightly in his own. We said nothing and sat next to each other. We understood without words. Five hundred feet beneath us little wavelets were breaking against the steep rock wall. In the distance a dog was barking monotonously. It seemed like a century before the reply came. Finally it did.

“The Commandant is at the next barricade, about a mile and half down the road. You can drive as far as there, but we don’t give much chance for the boy. Even if the Commandant lets him pass, he will still be stopped at the following barricade. Bon voyage.”

I started the motor quickly and drove through the small opening. There was only one thought that crossed my mind, the only possible solution. A couple of hundred yards down the road was another bend. I switched off the lights and stopped. Then I walked to the back of the car and took the luggage out of the boot and put it on the rear seat.

“Quick, Juan José, get into the boot; there’s a travelling rug in it, lie down on it!”

The boy disappeared in the cramped boot, and I shut the lid on him. A few minutes later I drove slowly up to the next barricade. Here, too, a lamp was waved to and fro.

“Good evening, comrade.”

My passport was taken to the Commandant. If only he had not been warned! I got out of the car and walked up and down beside it. My eyes were on the road that we had just come along. If a messenger should happen to come along it... These thoughts made me nervous. If they had sent somebody to follow us?

The commandant sent for me. I followed the half-uniformed *miliciano*. A young man wearing a beret was sitting on a crate in an improvised hut. He received me in a friendly manner and asked what the purpose of my journey was.

“I am on the way to my consulate, *Señor comandante*.” I wondered whether I should still use the word *Señor*, or if it was no longer acceptable in the present circumstances. I had no idea.

“What are you doing in Spain?”

“I am a tourist.”

He expressed regret that my visit had been spoilt.

Ten minutes later I was back in my Ford. Then I froze: two small lights were coming towards us down the road. A car was approaching us, slowly but surely. Would everything now be lost?

The engine wouldn't start, too... at last it did...

“Bon voyage!”

Before the other car had arrived, I had left the barricade behind me. I put my foot down, but not for long, as a new barricade soon appeared, and the same routine began again.

“Your papers!”

No difficulties arose. I kept my eye on the road behind by means of the rearview mirror. You never can tell. And if they were to telephone a post on the way in to Barcelona, telling it to stop the car with the Venezuelan licence-plates. What then?

I stopped on an isolated part of the road, ran to the back, opened the boot and leaned over to ask: “Have you enough air?”

“Yes, Santiago.”

“Everything is all right, my boy.”

The boot was shut again, and we were off once more through the mountains. It was already long after midnight. The moon was hidden behind a hazy cloud, the sea was less bright. A couple of mules crossed the road, accompanied by a farm-worker. They took fright at just the noise of the motor, and looked about in fear. Farther away a farm lay in darkness. Maize was hanging along a wall. Then came slopes covered with vineyards, a few palm-trees and grapevines again. A hamlet, a small street, a few rows of houses, all in deep slumber. The countryside changed; it became flatter and the road straighten. A few lorries passed in the opposite direction, heading southwards. On a crag on the left-hand side stood the Castelldefels—the castle of the faithful surrounded by agaves and cactus. And suddenly another barricade. Valuable minutes of delay. Then off again. And there were more of them.

The Ford was doing a good job. When I had decided to bring the car with me to Spain, I did not realize what a role the vehicle would play in these surroundings. My thoughts also went back to Caracas, on the other side of the ocean. How were the film studios doing? What a long way away all that was now, in another world. Did this all not seem like a film?

Ahead of me, the lights of the Catalonian capital, the metropolis Barcelona, were becoming brighter. The city with a million inhabitants and broad boulevards, tall buildings, the crowded Ramblas, the twin hills of Tibidabo and Montjuich, the Paralelo with its amusements and the statue of Columbus beside the harbour, pointing in the direction of America, the new world. We have a Barcelona in Venezuela, too...

A lamp, a pair of armed men, and another check-point.

“Get out of the car.”

I stood beside the car.

“We have to search your car for weapons; orders of the commandant.”

That was just what we needed! If only Juanjo would keep quiet! The bonnet was opened and a glance thrown to make sure that there was nothing hidden in it.

“What have you got in the boot? Will you open it?”

It was as if someone had given me a cold douche.

“There’s nothing in it, only a spare tire. Unfortunately I have lost the key and can’t open it any more. It’s a great nuisance.”

And the man tried the handle, but was unable to force it open. I had locked it. He looked inside the suit-cases. Suddenly he asked:

“Whisky?”

An idea shot through my mind. Perhaps this could save our lives.

“Yes, here you are—you can keep it, I’ll get some more in town.”

This struck home; the key to the boot was forgotten and we were off again towards the city. I drove through one of the suburbs, at some points the signs of past fighting were clearly visible: burnt-out trams and motor-cars, dead horses and broken-up streets. A few churches were still smouldering. A desolate sight. Occasional shots could be heard. The magnificent city lay like a wounded animal in the countryside; its injuries were many.

Gradually it got brighter, the stars grew pale and the air took on a grey tint. We had put the town and the working-class district of Badalona behind us, and the second part of the journey had begun. After we had passed the last houses—and left them a safe distance behind—I stopped the Ford beside the road, got out and took a deep breath. So far, all was well. The sun was just beginning to rise and the temperature to increase. After opening the boot I let Juan José get out. The boy was completely stiff as a result of having lain bent, and he needed a few minutes to recover. He walked back and forth and filled his lungs with fresh air, stretched himself several times and blinked in order to become reaccustomed to the light. We sat down on the running-board and gazed at the awakening countryside before us; the hills, the olive-trees and an abandoned broken-down house on which the letters P.O.U.M. had recently been painted. On one of the neighbouring hills stood an old tower, about ten feet high, which had been originally built by the Moors.

“I am a great nuisance for you, Santiago; without me you would already be at the border.”

I felt that he was getting anxious.

“No nuisance at all, Juanjo, it’s my pleasure, as you know.” I paused, then continued, “I’m awfully thirsty, and perhaps you would like to eat something.”

I took a thermos flask of coffee from the car and a few sandwiches that I had had made at the hotel.

Only when we began to eat, did we realise how far we had come. It did us good, and we continued our way refreshed, the boy in the back and I behind the wheel.

The traffic began to get thicker in both directions. The stream of refugees of the first days of the civil war had dried up, it now consisted of light vehicles and old trucks, as well as private cars with armed men in them. There were also all sorts of vehicles carrying food stuffs on the road. Beside it were various written messages. In some villages banners and portraits of the leaders were displayed. The form of greeting with raised left fist and the words *salud camarada* appeared to be the fashion. The number of red flags increased. By means of a screw driver jammed in between the lid of the baggage-compartment and the bodywork, a small opening was provided, almost invisibly, to let air and a small amount of light into the boot. In this way Juanjo could to some extent orient himself in the small space.

The road became worse, and holes in it more frequent. I had to reduce my speed significantly in order to avoid injuring the boy. Ultimately we were moving at barely walking-speed. There was a lot of dust on the road; after passing anything going the other way you could see little or nothing for a few seconds, until the cloud had settled.

In a small farming village, lying peacefully in a valley, I was able to obtain some more food: a bag of potatoes, some bread and maize. The little settlement lay so peacefully between the lovely hills that one could really not be aware here that a civil war was raging. There was not a single political slogan to be seen, nor any flags or weapons.

IV

It was the hottest hour of the day, and the sun was almost directly overhead the country home of my friend Esteban Munoz, on the Costa Brava. It stood on its own here on a crag beside the sea and could only be reached by means of a small private road. A few fruit-trees stood in the garden, as did some plane-trees and agaves. A series of irregular steps led down to the little beach, which was completely surrounded by sheer cliffs, and could only be reached by these steps from the land. It was shaded by pine trees and a few stunted olive-trees. The house was coated with white lime, and the brown shutters were closed at this hour of the day. On the north side stood a pergola with a view along the coast, the hinterground and the bright sea.

Because the house was situated on a rise, the panorama was indescribably beautiful. Our host was an artist, and he had picked out this site many years before. There was no electric light; the pergola was lit by candles in colourful Chinese lanterns.

On the great iron garden gate a piece of paper had been attached, bearing the words "*propiedad extranjera*"—foreign property. The Venezuelan flag was flying from the mast in this enclosed piece of ground...

Esteban was amazed at my return after so short a time. He had not thought it to be possible. There were so many tales to tell about it, but when I opened the luggage compartment, he had to laugh heartily.

"Welcome, my boy"—he said in a friendly voice.

We sat in the shade beneath the pergola. A row of red geraniums contrasted strongly with the white. Jaime, the butler, brought drinks. I lay down on a comfortable chaise longue and let the ambiance have its effect on me; here everything was suddenly so completely different. Juan José stretched his limbs and walked up and down a little. Esteban, seated in a rocking-chair, described the neighbourhood. His wife Elvira sat beside him, occupied with her handwork; she was a native of Catalonia.

I was too tired to talk much and I preferred to listen. At times events of the past twenty-four hours came into my mind, then my thoughts turned to what was yet to come. Jaime appeared and announced that the meal was ready to be served. We went indoors; it was more sheltered there, which gave a pleasant feeling of coolness and equilibrium. Esteban gave a toast to our friendship. In days gone by we had been at school together in Caracas, and he had later come to live here, mainly for the sake of his wife who had found it difficult to settle down anywhere else. In the course of time he had come to love the country like his own, so that it was more than a second homeland to him. His forte was painting landscapes and sea; only a few weeks before there had been an exhibition of his most recent works in a small gallery off the Paseo de Gracia in Barcelona. How that was doing now he did not know, nor did he care. Esteban was a born optimist; it had been just the same when he was at the primary school in Venezuela. Now Munoz belonged among the leading figures in the world of art, and his paintings had an international market.

The meal was served. Jaime waited at the table, wearing white gloves. The revolution had not yet penetrated here.

After the meal, coffee was served in an adjoining room. Esteban asked about my plans.

“I need your help, Esteban.”

“Whatever you want. I have never forgotten how, when we were still both children and I was younger and weaker than you, you came to my rescue when our schoolfellows wanted to throw me into the swimming-pool despite the fact that I was unable to swim. I was really scared to death and was almost in despair. I screamed, and you were the only one who appreciated my distress, who stepped into the breach and finally got me out of the hands of the boys. And thus ran the risk of reprisals. You have helped me more than once when I have been in need, you appreciated me so much.” He paused a moment, then continued: “I don’t think you have changed, for that matter.” He looked across at Juan José... “I have never been able to do something for you, and I have been waiting for this opportunity.”

Jaime came in:

“Don Esteban, it is almost time for the news-bulletin.”

“Thank you, Jaime.”

The radio was switched on, and the newsreader related the progress that had been made at the fronts.

Elvira and Juan José had retired for their siestas. The boy needed to sleep after the exertion of the drive. In the meanwhile, I discussed with Esteban the possibility of reaching France in the motorboat.

“A very risky experiment, dear Santiago; if they catch you, your foreign passport won’t do you much good, and the distance is very great for such a little old boat. All the same, if...” After a short pause, he continued, “What do you need? My reserves of fuel and food are at your disposal, you know I look on you as a friend.” A little later he added: “Now I am sure that you are still the same as you used to be.”

Esteban smiled and rang the bell which stood on the table beside the cups. Jaime appeared.

“My guest needs one or two things. Will you give him a hand this evening after the sun has set?”

“Yes, Don Esteban, I’ll take care of him.”

When the butler had disappeared, Esteban remarked, “A good and trusty servant, one of the old school, who considers it an honour to be of service.”

We then recalled a few memories of days long ago when we had been together. In conclusion we drank a glass of sherry under the pergola, and watched the sun disappear beneath the horizon. The gramophone played saetas, fandanguillos and fandangos from the southern provinces and sardanas from the neighbouring district softly in the background. It had been an unforgettable afternoon. Darkness fell swiftly, and it was time to act. I put Juan José on watch from the flat roof—armed with a telescope for carabineros or other unwelcome visitors. At his age this was something important, and I was convinced that he would do his best more than an adult would have done. With Jaime, I descended to the cellar and looked for what would be essential for the seajourney; first of all we filled several containers with fuel, which we three Esteban, Jaime and I carried down to the beach, where I began by filling the fuel tank to the brim. Then we stored the containers as well as possible within the ship. I had just put the last one on board when Juan José came up to us panting.

“Stop everything, at once!”

We hid ourselves in a cave as quickly as possible. Just afterwards we heard the faint noise of a motorboat and the beam of a searchlight swept over the rocks... We had got out of the way just in time, less than three seconds later the light shone onto the beach... The voices aboard the motorboat could be heard through the still air:

“Nothing unusual, a deserted beach with a little boat... That must surely belong to the artist.”

They were obviously searching for something else. The light went out and the boat continued towards the south. Juan José stood close beside me; I could feel and hear his heart beating, his head resting on my shoulder.

The danger had receded. Still frightened, we climbed up the irregular steps. The boy disappeared to his look-out post again, and we carried down tins filled with drinking-water. An hour later we had completed loading the stores. If only the boat did not seem to be too heavily laden. Well, in that case we could put something or other over the side. I felt my muscles; they were not accustomed to taking me up and down so many irregular steps, nor to carrying such loads.

Elvira had prepared hot coffee in thermos flasks, and she came again with a couple of bars of chocolate.

Everything was ready for the departure. I checked that nothing had been forgotten: compass, chart... Oh, yes, the flag that I had flown on my car,

that might well come in handy. I left the Ford in Esteban's hands.

The moment of departure approached. Esteban squeezed my hand. Elvira kissed Juan José on the forehead and said: "may God protect you." Esteban put his hand on his shoulder: "you are in very good hands."

We made a final round to see if everything was safe. Esteban and Jaime came down to the beach with us in order to help with pushing the boat into the water. We had some difficulty in getting it to move. I had put on my swimming-costume and stowed my clothes in the cabin, so that I could push the boat the first hundred yards to outside the little bay—without starting the motor. Everything was settled. Esteban and Jaime would return to the house as soon as the boat was launched, for any contingencies. Juan José was shown how to start the motor and how to use the oars. Elvira kept watch from above. The boat slipped into the water. The sea was very calm. The cold water did me good. Prudently I pushed the boat out of the bay, and a few minutes later I climbed on board. Juan José tried to start the motor; after a few misfires it caught and the boat began to move under its own power. Seconds later two shots sounded and a voice from the cliffs shouted:

"Halt!"

I pulled Juan José into the cabin and went to take the helm. The motor was doing its duty and the distance from the coast was increasing steadily. We heard a few more shots and a bullet struck the deck right beside my feet. Then it was quiet.

We were now well away from the coast. I thought anxiously about Esteban, Elvira and Jaime. If they were to get into any trouble...

On the ship's bow, the previous owner had had the word *Salvador*—Saviour—painted. I hoped it would be appropriate...

After setting the helm I went down into the cabin to get the compass. Juan José took one look at me and blurted out: "You're bleeding, Santi!"

A trickle of blood was running down my left arm. I looked at the wound; the bullet that had struck the deck had also grazed my arm, fortunately, it had caused only superficial damage. In the excitement I had not noticed it.

Juan José washed the wound and wrapped a bandage around it. I sat down on the edge of the small bunk. The boy was putting so much care and devotion into his work!

"You have done this sort of thing before, Juanjo."

“No, but if you like somebody, you know just what to do, it comes naturally...”

We looked at each other and laughed.

V

The water lapped gently against the wooden hull of the fragile vessel, which rocked slightly on the calm sea. The motor made the only mechanical noise with its monotonous purring at that time of night, beneath the starry sky which now seemed to be brighter than the land. We had first sailed a few miles out to sea, and now we were heading northwards. The coast was no longer in sight. Sometimes a fish would come into view, then it would disappear with a flick of its tail into the depth. The *Salvador* bore herself according to all the rules of the art; we had indeed to put part of the stores overboard, as she lay too deep and was thus unable to make full speed ahead. We doused the lamp on board, as it was not needed and might also reveal our position. During the voyage, a weak wind got up. It was indeed beneficial. Juan José sat on the foredeck—a triangular space adjoining the cabin—and peered silently over the water. What was he thinking about, the past or the future?

I lay comfortably on a pair of red cushions beside the helm, my head did not protrude above the gunwale and my left hand resting on the tiller. My feet were wedged against the sill of the low cabin door, which stood ajar. The green superstructure of the cabin contrasted with the yellow planks of the fore and afterdecks. The previous owner had kept her in good repair, you could tell by the paint. A sail could be hoisted on the short mast, and in favourable wind that could be important. Although the distance that had to be covered was not very great, it was doubtful whether the fuel would be sufficient. There was a bench on the left of the cabin, which could also serve as a bed. A mattress and other bedding were available. On the right was a folding-table on which the chart of the coastal area lay open, with a few books—and a folding-chair with a collapsible back-rest. The associated cushions were hanging on the wall beside a picture of the holy Saviour. A small blue tile with a portrait of the black ‘Virgin of Montserrat’ was inlaid on the right side of the front bulkhead. Swinging gently next to it on a little chain was a small wrought-iron candle-holder. The slender, finely-made

candle had already been used. Nothing in the interior had been altered since I had owned it, apart from the new oil-lamp at the ceiling.

The outer walls were partly white and green. A small anchor hung from the bow. The motor was located at the stern and was of British make.

We had been travelling for several hours, and it was after midnight. It was cooler, even fresh. The dark, slim—though sturdy—boy's figure stood up and came astern, past the mast above the cabin. A little later he sat down on the cushions beside me, put on a poncho, and pressed his head against my chest. I had put on a woolen jersey shortly before, and lit my pipe. The aroma of the tobacco mingled with the sea air. Beside me was a thermos flask that Elvira had filled before our departure. I unscrewed the top and discovered a piece of paper inside. By the light of a match I read the following message in Catalan: *Deu vos guard*—"may God protect you." I read it out aloud and poured out the coffee. We drank it turn and turn about.

"You have good friends, Santi," said Juan José looking up at me. "I had already seen the little bay where the *Salvador* was kept, you know," he added.

"How was that?"

"In a painting at home. It was by Esteban Munoz; I looked at the signature on the canvasses yesterday afternoon and compared them with that of the painting at my home."

The boat began to roll; a light south-west wind had arisen. Juan José snuggled a bit closer to me and put his arm around my shoulder.

"Santi, there is such a lot I want to tell you." He paused, then continued: "You don't even know my last name."

It was a very well-known name. His father apparently had become a prominent figure in political life, on the far right. A few hours before he had been taken away he had had a talk with his son on whom he had impressed the need to try to reach France if anything went wrong. His father intended to leave that day, to stay with acquaintances and remain in hiding there, but was too late. Juan José recounted all this with difficulty, at times the words appeared to stick in his throat.

"Then they came to take him away... several men pushed him out of the house... I stood beside the stairs... when they came past me, my father again said... do what I told you..." He burst into tears. I hugged the boy to me and let him continue his story.

“A few hours later he was found by the roadside... shot dead... finally I made up my mind to run away, without knowing exactly what I was doing...”

I poured out some more coffee and let him drink. It restored him somewhat.

“For a couple of days I wandered about... nothing could make anymore difference to me...”

He took another swallow of coffee, put his head close beside mine, and said softly: “and then came my salvation. I felt that something must happen, anyway when I was walking along the beach path I saw a stone bench with you sitting on it. I wavered. You looked at me in such a friendly way that I was quite at ease... I felt something very special inside me... something that was new to me... and can't be expressed in words... it really came down to feeling safe and secure. I did not know that anything so sudden could exist, merely as soon as our eyes first met, before we had exchanged a single word. I had the feeling I would be helped... and I was not mistaken.”

He kissed me lightly on the forehead, got up quickly and disappeared into the cabin. I understood his sudden reaction; he was feeling ashamed. A few moments later, when I had checked the course and set the helm, I descended the few steps down to the cabin too.

“I could not have put it better myself, Juanjo; indeed I could not. I, too, had the same feelings, and I too had never felt them so strongly before; if you had not suffered so much misery—and if the country was not at war—those hours would have been the happiest of my life,” I added, with a smile. “You speak the language of Cervantes like an adult, you have a gift for it.”

“I am one year older today: today is my thirteenth birthday.”

I stood up and looked out to see if there were any ships in the neighbourhood. I then lighted the candle beside the tile with the picture of the Virgin of Montserrat. The cabin became somewhat sombre, yet festive. Out of a box I took a small elegantly wrapped package with a multi-coloured ribbon around it and a label from San Jorge on the side. I presented it to my young friend.

“Happy birthday, Juanjo!”

His dark eyes sparkled and widened in the candle-light. He eagerly opened the package with his fine dark fingers. The golden watch glittered...

“Santi, you shouldn't have! You are really too kind...”

I took the watch, and fastened it around his small boyish wrist. It was a bit loose, but he pushed it enthusiastically up his arm and then it fitted. I was reminded of the words spoken by the old woman in the shop, which now made sense: that the wearers of both watches would be very happy.

We drank a glass of red wine from the forecastle. It gave Juanjo a touch of colour. I suggested that he should get a couple of hours' sleep, so that he could then take the helm while I took a rest.

"Telling you about myself has done me so much good that now I feel quite relieved, almost, a new person."

A few minutes later he was asleep. The night gave way to the first glimmerings of dawn. I took a small telescope to scan the horizon. The coastline was faintly visible in the West, probably a prominent rock. In any case, we were on the right course, that was the most important thing. A tunny kept pace with the *Salvador*, swimming back and forth or diving and then surfacing again. It was as if the fish enjoyed looking at the boat from all angles. It was a large specimen, and sometimes it swam so close to the boat that its wake sprinkled the deck.

The sail was hoisted in order to take advantage of the south-western wind, and so to save fuel. Juanjo had already been asleep for five hours; I couldn't bring myself to waken him as he lay there so peacefully and confidently.

The new day was not so bright as the previous one had been.

We were already further north, which showed itself in the climate. The sea was somewhat rougher. At about eight o'clock a plume of smoke could be seen on the eastern horizon. I quickly took down the sail and altered course slightly. Just as it appeared that things were going to turn out badly, the vessel, which looked like a warship, suddenly stopped coming towards us and steamed off into the distance.

I prepared coffee and toast in the small galley. Juan José awoke in the meanwhile and looked proudly at his watch.

"Why didn't you wake me earlier?"

The toast and coffee tasted good. I explained how to hold the right course and hung the spyglass around the boy's neck.

"Sleep tight" he told me in his clear voice. A few moments later I dropped like a log onto the bunk, having had no sleep for the past two nights.

My dreams were confused to begin with, later I saw attractive landscapes with lush vegetation, where it was good to be alive... peace on earth, said the people... a golden gondola lay on a beach with a handsome boy standing upright on it, calling to me in a friendly voice... graceful birds flying in the clear blue sky... Caracas, my street and my flat... a friendly boy on the doorstep...

It was midday when I awoke. Through the door I saw Juan José sitting with the tiller in his hand, keeping a lookout in all directions. Everything had been cleared away, plates and glasses washed and put away. My arm hurt. The boat rolled and through one of the portholes I saw a threatening sky in the east. I stood up and put the water on to cook a couple of pounds of potatoes that had not been thrown overboard. I opened a tin of meat.

Juan José had maintained a good course and was proud of it.

“Did you know that you spoke in your sleep, Santi?”

“What did I say then, I wonder.”

He did not answer, but began to talk about other things. We ate our meal on the rear deck. The tunny had deserted us, and the *Salvador* sailed on alone towards the French coast.

VI

Dark threatening clouds hung over the sea. It was already several hours since it had been blue, and now it consisted of a great moving mass with white tops. The freshening wind made the waves rise higher, and in the distance summer lightning flickered from time to time. The thunderstorm came steadily nearer and we could hear the thunder roll above the noise of the sea. The *Salvador* rolled on the storm-tossed water; the bow dipped sharply and then rose again with a jerk from time to time, the propeller coming right out of the water occasionally and causing the motor to scream as the speed rose when the load was removed. The sail had been taken down, and the cushions and other loose items on deck put in the cabin. Below decks, the table and chair had been stowed away and everything fastened down as far as possible, the oil-lamp and candleholder put into a box, the tins of fuel and food tied down, portholes and cabin-door shut tight. Occasionally the top of a wave broke over the foredeck. The

wind was from the north and the boat had difficulty in making any way against the storm.

At about noon there was a heavy rain-shower. The water streamed down, as was often the case in that part of the world. You could not see for more than a few hundred yards, which represented a danger for a vessel sailing close to the rocky coast of the Costa Brava. Flashes of lightning lit up the sea again and again, and the thunder was deafening.

There was no question of cooking now. The boat began to rock heavily from side to side and the joints creaked as one wave after another came over the deck. It was with difficulty that we kept her heading into the waves. We ate some old bread and drank milk from a tin.

The anchor had worked loose, and was hanging a few feet under water. With difficulty we hauled it aboard the fore-deck and lashed it fast. The motor, which had kept going well so far, began to run warm and its exhaust note became irregular.

The storm drove fiercely over the boiling water. Suddenly, the rain stopped and it started to get brighter, but the force of the wind did not diminish, however. The waves were like hills which rolled threateningly down onto us. Fortunately neither of us had more than a touch of seasickness, which would have made our situation considerably worse. I had attached the boy to a cord so that he was free to move about but could not fall overboard. Although he could swim, it would have been very difficult to fish him out of the water again.

Then came the moment that I will never forget: the motor stopped and we ceased moving through the water, which made the boat difficult to steer. She drifted round to lie parallel to the direction of the waves, and the danger that she might overturn was not imaginary. Like a toy ball she had become the plaything of the waves, completely off her course. With the greatest difficulty I managed to bring her head round to face into the waves again. It began to look very black for us and I reproached myself.

Had I not been stupid and gambled with Juan José's life and my own? Had I not been too rash? The boy appeared to read my thoughts and took my hand in his own. "Don't reproach yourself, Santiago," he said.

How remarkable all this was. We only had known each other for such a short time, and yet it was as if we had been together for our whole lives. Chance had brought us together, on a stone bench, one summer's day beside the blue Mediterranean Sea. We were created for each other; I was

increasingly conscious how great my affection for this boy was. Despite the dangers we had encountered, we remained completely calm and unworried—we were above all together. Could anything more beautiful exist?

At about four o'clock the storm had reached its peak. A few planks of the deck had worked loose and the water began to leak into the cabin. We took turns at bailing; the water was about four or six inches deep and if it were not stopped the worst could be expected.

The storm abated quite suddenly at sunset. The rough sea was transformed quickly into calm water, the wind dropped and the clouds disappeared. Standing on the afterdeck, we had just the time to see the sun go down like a ball of fire, then darkness fell rapidly and the stars came out. The helm was back in its former place, but it was too dark to repair the motor without a lamp. We therefore sat in the dim light cast by the oil lamp. Fortunately the motor was of a simple design, so that anyone with a little technical knowledge could see how it worked. Nonetheless it took us several hours to get it running again. With less than half power the *Salvador* set off again; various pipes leaked and the fuel consumption had increased alarmingly, so that we would soon run short. But we were not worried about that then, we were so happy that we had come through the storm intact. With the help of the compass we took up the correct course again, although we did not know our position.

We took turns to sleep, four hours at a time. The motor was running irregularly, but the *Salvador* crept forward. The next morning the weather was superb: the clothes dried in the sun, as did the cushions that had been soaked. We repaired the deck as well as possible and fixed the loose planks in place again. The vessel had really suffered in the storm.

My thoughts were occupied with the boy's future. What would he become—a refugee? Where would he ultimately go? He had not spoken much about his uncle, whom he knew only slightly as he had met him only once, many years before in Barcelona. Could I not take him with me back to Venezuela? He could complete his *bachillerato* secondary school—studies there. One thing seemed to be likely: that the civil war would continue for quite a long time, especially now that foreign intervention was being talked about, according to the latest bulletins. Was it not the case that the boy wanted to stay with me? He was intelligent, adroit, and above all balanced. Was he not turning the cruel blow that fate had struck him into something positive? How had I come to do all this so suddenly for some

other person? It remained evenly balanced until I took a decision. Yes, I would let him be educated in Caracas in a direction that he himself would choose, and in an environment of peace he could work in future. Was this boy's future not in my hands... Was I not responsible? But how to make all this into practical reality. Could the official agencies supply the necessary papers? It would not succeed... Yes, it must succeed; as soon as we arrive in France I will go and arrange everything with the French officials—and at my consulate. But I needed his family's authorization. As his parents were no longer alive, his uncle would have to provide it...

Without my noticing it, Juan José had come and sat down close beside me on the afterdeck. Suddenly I heard his tender voice:

“Santi, I scarcely dare to ask you, you have already done so much for me, even putting yourself into danger. Can I come with you to South America?”

Were we so close to each other than our thoughts passed between us? I bent over, looked him straight in the eyes and whispered in his ear:

“I shall do everything to make it possible.”

“Thank you—*querido* Santiago.”

With a tranquil and contented expression he gazed over the water towards the north, where a new life would begin at the invisible coast. His hand remained in mine.

“Have you ever thought about the distant future? What do you want to be when you grow up?”

He did not reply at once.

“I don't want to be a burden to you, Santi, I will find work as quickly as possible so that I can earn money and...”

“That's not what I meant, *querido* Juanjo; you are no burden, on the contrary I will help you willingly as I feel myself linked with you in such a special way. My only wish is that all will go well with you and that you become whatever you can be happy at being.”

“Nobody has ever appreciated and understood me so well before. I didn't know that any such thing really existed, but thought that it was possible only in fantasy.”

“Yes, Juanjo, despite the present circumstances we are enjoying something that is very beautiful and sublime.” After a hot meal which consisted of an omelette, rice and tinned vegetables, I made my way to the cabin for my siesta. Through the doorway I saw my young friend sitting

proudly at the helm, with his slim muscular left arm on the tiller and his right arm on a cushion. With complete confidence, I fell asleep a few minutes later.

VII

Another night drew on. The fuel was nearly exhausted... and still the French coast did not come into sight. We had peered with great hopes to the north through the telescope, but in vain. The *Salvador* must have been driven some distance east by the storm. We didn't even approximately know our position. As the wind had dropped, the sail hung limply from the mast, and due to a weak current we drifted southwards. The worst thing was the decrease in the stock of drinking-water, so that this was rationed. By my reckoning we might end up somewhere to the south of Port Vendres—just past the Spanish frontier...

Juan José sat on the fore-deck in order to keep a look-out, with a white towel over his shoulders contrasting with the brown colour of his young limbs. He had made himself a hat out of an old newspaper in order to protect his head from the sunshine. I could watch him like that for hours without becoming bored, there was always something new. Sometimes he would look around with a smile, so his pearly-white teeth gleamed in the sunlight, and in a boyish way he would raise his right hand in a sign of greeting. On his left wrist glittered the gold watch at which he glanced from time to time like a child. Later on he went and lay on his back on the cabin roof, clad only in a brief coloured loincloth; his well-built youthful body had something fascinating about it. His right hand played with a piece of cord that had come loose from the sail. His thick black hair was matted, and hung in clumps over his forehead; his dark brown eyes scanned the skies, his long black eyelashes stood out clearly from the skin, like fine whiskers, his just visible ribs rose and fell with his breathing; his long slim bones and well-shaped muscles were continually in motion. He made me think of a noble thoroughbred... From time to time he turned his head, without raising it, towards me and asked questions like:

“What did you do when you were thirteen?”

I had to think about my answer.

“I had already been living in Caracas for several years, and I was going to school there. I was born in Merida, in the interior. We moved to Caracas because my father got a government job there. He had become a minister some time before. We lived in a large house in the suburbs.”

Juan José began to recount his own life in detail. It was a pleasure to listen to his beautiful Spanish; his lips moving quickly and his elegant hands gesticulating gracefully. At the end of his story he became aware of his situation again, and the so fatal early days of the civil war came back into his mind. He stood up slowly and came towards me, sat down and leant his head against my shoulder. He said, falteringly:

“My poor father—I will never forget him... I said so many things against him that I shouldn’t have... and had rows with him sometimes... now I can do nothing about it, never put things right... I feel so ashamed... Oh, Santi, how miserable can anyone feel.”

“Yes, Juanjo, we all do things like that. Later we are sorry but we cannot change things afterwards, no matter how much we would like to. It’s always the same story. You aren’t the only one. You probably don’t see things in proportion now; time will change that, and heal a lot. By seeing things in proportion I mean that you put too much emphasis on particular events, as if you saw them through a magnifying glass. Just tell me what is on your mind.”

Still leaning against me, he continued talking. It had to come out, he had to tell somebody. I listened attentively, without saying a word. When he had finished he looked at me and said gently:

“Santi, your eyes are wet, you’re crying.”

He went down into the cabin and got a handkerchief which he held lovingly against my eyes. I took his head in both hands and kissed his luxuriant hair...

“You are an angel, Juanjo.”

A gentle breeze began to blow, and the sail caught it so that the *Salvador* got slowly under way. The water gurgled softly again against the bow, and from time to time small fish would leap out of the water not far away. Despite the so-peaceful scene, I began to get more and more anxious; no land had yet come into sight, just water and still more water. Where were we? Could the *Salvador* really have drifted so far? I had now set course in a westerly direction instead of heading north. My plan was to sail as far north as necessary once the coast was in sight. We could

keep going for a couple of meals more, then our drinking water would run out... The food appeared to be sufficient for several more days. We kept the daily ration of drinking water in a bottle hanging overboard at the end of a cord, so that it was pulled through the seawater. The day wore on without incident.

In the evening, Juan José toasted some old bread over the open flame of the little cookstove and opened a tin of butter. I put him on watch; in that way he could be usefully occupied and express his devotion.

Afterwards, he brought the cooled water back on board and filled two glasses with it. We then sat on the deck to eat while the day drew to its close. That was a particularly delightful evening; at sunset the sky continually changed colour. I lit a cigarette, inhaled deeply, and blew the smoke out in front of me with a sigh.

“Can I have one too, Santi?”

I had pleasure in his smoking. He exhaled the smoke in short puffs...

“Did you ever do something you shouldn’t have done in the past?” He looked at me in a special way as he asked me this question.

“All boys do that, indeed that is normal...”

We drank our glasses dry as if it were the most precious wine. In fact, that was the case. Juan José cleared the things away and hung another bottle in the sea, softly humming a tune which resounded with a subtly arabian effect over the surrounding water. Suddenly he was silent and pointed to something.

“Santi, I can see land, a rock!”

With emotion I took the telescope and looked. Yes indeed! There was something that seemed like a rock, sticking out of the water. The *Salvador* drew slowly nearer to it. In the meanwhile, it had become quite dark. The little speck got bigger and appeared to move... there was something floating on the water... it looked like a little boat. We looked at each other in astonishment. No reply came to our shouts...

When we came alongside, we could see by the light of the oil-lamp that there was nobody aboard her; the little boat had deliberately had holes shot in her and was drifting in an unseaworthy state. What drama had been played aboard her? The name *Margarita* was painted on her transom in small letters. Soon afterwards we left the wreck behind.

The next morning found the *Salvador* among low-lying white clouds that seemed to float upon the water and almost completely obstructed all

sight. It was as if we were gliding; everything seemed unreal, even our voices sounded strange... It was humid, and everything was damp. The wind had dropped again, and the sail hung limp and useless from the mast.

The mist remained unchanged, as if it wanted never to go away. Suddenly, a silver bird flew over our heads, and we looked up in surprise. In the distance a fog-horn sounded... We held our breath and listened attentively, eagerly trying to identify the direction of the sound.

Without any warning, a threatening black shadow loomed out of the mist and headed rapidly in our direction.

I grasped the boy by the arm, ready to jump. A collision seemed to be inevitable...

PART TWO

VIII

It was ten years later, August 1946. The din of heavy traffic flowed in through the open windows of my office in one of the main arteries of Caracas, an office arranged on modern lines on the fifth floor of a tall new building. The town had been growing rapidly; oil and everything connected with it had made that possible. There were extensive plans for whole new residential areas on the site of old ones... Modern schools and hospitals were springing up. The North American influence was increasingly apparent on the architecture.

In the avenues beneath my windows the cars were following each other in files; sometimes traffic jams were unavoidable. A large insurance company had established its headquarters on the other side of the road. The evenings were animated by the neon signs flashing on and off.

The office was bright and cool. On the grey steel desk lay the day's correspondence. Some photographs and a painting of Rio de Janeiro decorated its walls. There was a knock on the door and my secretary came in.

"Señor Capmany, will you sign this letter too, please; it's about our Mexican contract."

Her very well-looked-after fingers with painted nails placed the paper to be signed on the blotter in front of me with a familiar gesture. She remained—as always—waiting while my eyes ran over the text. In the meanwhile she arranged some curls of her hair with her right hand. She was an accurate worker who took pleasure in her duties and who, without doubt had a certain affection for her boss, without however ever thinking about it...

"Señorita Jimenez, everything is as it should be; you can send the letter."

I signed it and leaned back in my chair. With satisfaction she took up the letter with her supple hands and in a voice that indicated agreement, she said:

“Yes, Señor Capmany, I will have it posted at once; it will still catch the evening plane.”

She disappeared with careful steps on her high heels through the leather-panelled door, which she closed quietly behind her. Señorita Jimenez had been my secretary for several years, and was now an indispensable asset. The telephone rang and I picked up the handset. It was apparently a long-distance call, from Maracaibo. A business contact wanted some information about a film.

In my usual way I drove home that evening to my flat on the outskirts of the town. Sitting on the balcony there I read the evening paper and looked at a few pages dealing with the cinema. As I lived on the top floor the view included an unobstructed sight of the sea of rooftops, and after sunset there were tens of thousands of little lamps twinkling around me. It was just the right kind of place for meditating and philosophising...

The maid, Enriqueta, brought me the whisky and a soda syphon at about ten o'clock. I switched the radio on and listened to Argentinean tangos, sung by Carlos Gardel. The melancholy, but also stimulating music gave a very definite frame to the whole. Deep in thought, I looked out before me towards the Venezuelan capital and the starry firmament.

The years slipped away the scene changed. The Catalonian adventure... Dear me, how long ago all that was. The Spanish civil war came to an end in 1939; the last communique was issued on the first of April that year. After almost three years of turmoil. Who would have thought so in the days of July 1936...

General Franco's troops had ultimately won, the country had taken a right turn. Slowly it recovered from its deep wounds. A quite considerable number of refugees remained abroad, in South France, North Africa and Mexico. A government in exile was formed.

Shortly afterwards, still in 1939, the second world war broke out, in which a whole series of countries were involved. The atomic age began. Now everything was peaceful again, humanity breathed again.

With a certain melancholy my thoughts went back—after all those years—to the Costa Brava.

What a wonderfully delightful experience that had been. A photograph of a small boy stood on my writing-table, a smiling Juan José. He still occupied a large place in my now somewhat older heart. From time to time I saw the events again—as in a film our first meeting, our sea-voyage, the Salvador, our so-extraordinary rescue... our jumping into the water after the collision... the helpful crew... the friendly face of the captain of the *Villa d'Oran*, the steamship making its way from Algiers to Marseille... our great delight on arriving in France.

The attempts to be able to take the boy with me... my return journey to South America... and then the letter from Juan José's uncle in Perpignan, with the terrible contents which made me despair... the boy had unexpectedly died after a short illness... I could not accept it, it was too bad...

Time heals all wounds, at least partially. The memory remains.

My whisky-glass was dry and the radio programme had come to an end. I stood up and switched off the set. It was already late at night and the town was asleep. I took a couple of deep breaths and went to bed.

The next week I was fully occupied by business; it was one thing after another, and scarcely any day went by without a business lunch or dinner. Señorita Jimenez, who was never unwell, had to stay in bed for a fortnight because of an ear inflammation. One of the typists, Señorita Vargas, did her work for better or for worse. She was of a completely different type, somewhat on the stout side, who did not have such an elegant way of putting letters on my desk for signature. However, she possessed a number of positive qualities.

Somewhat later in the month a cousin of mine and her husband came from Merida to spend a few days in the capital, where they stayed at the Hotel Imperial. We spent the last weekend in August together at a small resort on the Caribbean coast, where we went water-skiing with her friends. I took the opportunity, however, to go and see Esteban, who had left Spain with Elvira during the civil war after his country retreat near Tamariú had been completely looted by the mobs. They had now been living here for several years, although Elvira was occasionally nostalgic for her homeland.

Esteban sat on the terrace with his easel, working on a painting of some fishingboats. He was glad to see me.

“Welcome—Santiago, it’s already six months since you were last here. How’s everything doing, old chap?”

Elvira came outside. She still looked quite young for her age, although she had indeed changed considerably since when she was at Tamariú.

“*Deu vos guard,*” she said in Catalan.

Sitting there we quickly got into animated conversation. Her nine-year-old daughter, Pepita, was playing with some friends in the garden.

“How are the sales of your paintings going, Esteban?”

“I can’t complain; this week I received a commission to do a seascape for the new town hall. It must be going in the entrance-hall.”

Elvira took up her needlework, just as she had on the Costa Brava...

The same evening I returned to the city with my relations from Merida.

The fresh air and the water-sports had given me a healthy feeling of tiredness. When I got home, I relaxed, took a shower, and went to bed. On the bedside table, beside the latest issue of *Time* magazine, was a volume of poems by Ramirez which I had bought at a kiosk a few days before. I took the book, and began to read. The poems expressed so great a sensitivity, and I was taken by them to such an extent, that I had not switched the light off several hours later. A short poem entitled *to a dead friend* was the best that I had ever read. It was certainly as good as anything by Walt Whitman.

IX

It was October and the *fiesta de la raza*, the day on which the whole Spanish-speaking world commemorates its collective heritage. Although the former extensive Spanish colonial territory had split up into a series of independent states in Central and South America during the nineteenth century the Spanish stamp remained on the region, in particular through the language and the religion. Brazil is the exception here, because of its Portuguese origins.

This day fell during my holidays; I had decided to take a week’s rest at home, rather than travel as I usually did. Enriqueta had already set breakfast in the *comedor*—dining room. A little later I got up, and after a refreshing shower I sat down at the table with the morning newspaper. I was principally interested in the list of the day’s events; it appeared that

there were plenty of things to do. The fan hummed above my head in its usual way, doing its best to provide some cooling. After a visit to the hairdresser's, I lunched with some friends in the club. The conversation, and the subsequent discussion, was in the domain of philosophy, and about Ortega y Gasset and his book *The Revolt of the Masses* in particular. The ladies present preferred to talk about the latest fashions.

Afterwards, I drank a cup of black coffee with a dash of cognac beneath a sunshade. Not very far away the traffic held my attention, especially the latest models of cars from the United States. How their bodywork design had changed during the past few years. It was good to be sitting and relaxing here, on the terrace, which was occupied by only a few small tables and surrounded by plants in tubs. It was that afternoon that I had the most remarkable—both surprising and at the same time delightful—experience of my life.

The waiter had just brought me a second cup of coffee when my eyes fell on a young man sitting reading at a table to my right, I don't know why... he reminded me of somebody... no, that was impossible...! Suddenly he pushed the sleeve of his left arm up a little way with his right hand and looked at his watch... my heart began to pound... I was no longer puzzled... it was the golden watch from the shop with San Jorge over the door... and that gesture, which I had seen so many times before, could only mean that it was...

The young man suddenly glanced in my direction, as if he also felt my anxiety, doubt, fear and hope. His dark eyes looked straight at me... I felt as if I could sink through the floor...

He stood up slowly and walked hesitantly towards my table. Without warning he greeted me:

“Santiago...”

“But this is crazy... Juanjo... how on earth... no...”

I stood up automatically and we shook hands, as we had done more than ten years before and many thousand miles away somewhere on the Mediterranean sea...

We both had difficulty in controlling our emotions, tears filled our eyes. We didn't understand...

Juan José was the first to speak.

“Why did my uncle get a letter in 1936 that you... were dead? I...”

“Oh, dear Juanjo, I received a letter like that too, telling me that you had died unexpectedly... and for ten long years I have been living with the belief that you were no longer alive...”

“I think I am beginning to understand a bit better.”

He looked straight in front of him and reflected. A great bitterness came into his face, similar to hate. I had never seen him look like that before.

“I suspect my uncle did it. Yes, I’m virtually sure it was him. That was really something for him. Look, Santiago, he disliked the link between us, he couldn’t stand you and so he thought of this... How could anybody be so rotten. I never want to see him again, never again!”

“In other words, you think he staged the whole business? That he really murdered both of us somewhere, Juan José?”

His uncle had thus given Juan José false news and had written me a false letter. That was how the link had been broken; there could have been no more effective method.

We sat down again; he joined me at my table. We needed to get accustomed to the situation, it was too unexpected, too sudden. We felt a certain tension. So there he sat, my Juanjo, ten years older, a grown man. His features were still handsome, his eyes even darker and deeper, but they lacked the sparkle of childhood. His hands, although elegant and supple, had become more robust. His hair was not tidily parted. The...

He interrupted my meditations.

“Yes, Santi, fate struck us a cruel blow. I can read your thoughts.” He added, with a smile, “I used to do that before, do you still remember? But we are not now sitting holding like we did then...”

“Ah, yes, Juanjo, how different everything could have been!”

We were silent for a few minutes. The traffic and people continued to pass by. We did not see them.

“Yes, Santiago, when my uncle told me the dreadful news I didn’t eat for days, and I couldn’t sleep at night. Why was that man so cruel as to do such a thing to a child—as I still was at the time? Your name was continually on my lips... Santi... Santi... I felt so lonely and abandoned. I relived the days we spent on board our faithful *Salvador*, our saviour, again and again. I dreamed about it at night until it became a nightmare. I missed you dreadfully. I knew that that was love, really deep love... I must tell you something, Santiago, my heart really ached...”

The waiter brought the sherry we had ordered and put the glasses down in front of us. Juan José continued:

“I had set all my hopes on South America.”

After a short pause he suddenly said:

“And I have never even been able to thank you properly for all that you did for me. Your love must have been deep too.”

We told each other how life had treated us. Juan José had got married not long before, to a Chilean girl he had met in Barcelona. He had a bookshop on the Diagonal, and also wrote poems. The Spanish Government had awarded him a money-prize for one of his collections of poems, and he and his wife were making this journey to Venezuela on the strength of it.

“I don’t need to tell you why we chose this country...”

I interrupted him:

“Are you Ramirez?”

“Yes, that is my pen-name. How did you guess?”

“A couple of months ago I bought a copy of your prizewinning collection in a kiosk. One evening I read some of it and enjoyed it, particularly the poem entitled *to a dead friend...*”

A little later, I continued: “Do you remember, Juanjo, that I once complimented you on your beautiful Spanish? I said then that you were talented...”

“Quite right, I still remember it clearly. I gave you a kiss on the forehead that evening, and was embarrassed...”

We had so much, so very much, to tell each other and we didn’t know where to begin. Our love had developed into friendship, true friendship. If it had not been for the separation of over ten years, this transformation would have occurred gradually and harmoniously; it would have run its natural course. Now we had to speed up the process, to compress it into a few hours.

Suddenly Juan José looked at me questioningly, waited a moment and said:

“Do you still feel the same way as you used to do?”

“Yes, Juanjo, exactly the same; some people are the same throughout life...”

In his case, things were different; he had just got married.

“That’s the way it has to be, Juan José; we few are there to offer support and help to boys of a certain age, to boys to whom we are attracted. That is

how we perform the task that is given to us by nature. That is our mission, our so delightful and responsible duty.”

It was already the evening when we got up. Juan José looked at his watch and said with a laugh: “How the time has gone by, Santi...”

We ran through the town. The lights had gone on and the neon signs gave the streets a gay appearance with their many colours and shapes. In the hotel, Juan José presented me to his wife, to whom he first explained the extraordinary event that had occurred only a few hours before. He had previously told her a lot about me. She was a particularly charming and attractive young woman, the daughter of a manufacturer.

In the main hall of the hotel she offered me her hand. I bowed and kissed it. Her first words were:

“Thank you for all that you have done for Juan José. If it was not for you, we would probably not be here now. Two of his cousins were sent to Russia at that time, and they never came back. We know nothing about what happened to them. You had such a lot of influence on Juan José that he has you to thank for the successes in his life. I am so happy that you are alive and well.”

We dined together in one of the restaurants in the city center. The band played boleros, rumbas and tangos. Our table was beside the window, and we looked out onto a public garden.

I felt very happy. My Juan José was on the right road and had found his place in life. He had the makings of a great poet, and he was on the way to becoming a famous man. It had not all been in vain...

It was late when we returned to the hotel. Juan José accompanied me to the car-park. He walked round my Chevrolet and stopped beside the baggage-compartment...

“This is a bit more comfortable than the one we had ten years ago... it is remarkable what fate can bring...”

Lost in thought, he gazed into the distance, just as he had done long ago... I felt that he wanted to say something to me, but was unable to.

“What is it, Juanjo?”

We were standing near a lamp-post, and the light shone obliquely onto his face. There was something melancholy about his eyes.

“Santi, please don’t consider what I am going to tell you as a reproach. But it is something that I wanted to say ten years ago, yet never dared to.

Now, as an adult who has had rather more insight and experience of life, I can choose my standpoint better.”

He fell silent and looked again like he had done when, as a thirteen-year-old boy, he had peered across the water towards the French coast, hoping for rescue...

“Santiago, at that time with me, you could have... Do you understand what I mean? I have always felt it to be lacking, as something that should have happened in order to achieve complete harmony. I am a little poorer, not as rich as I could have been. If we had only experienced it once, then we would have had the memory of it... It was an unnecessary obstacle—for a few years—while I was growing up. You might say that I had missed part of my adolescence. I believe that our tragedy—if I may call it that—lies in the fact that it is now too late and we cannot turn the hands of the clock back... Therefore the gold watch that you gave me is also a splendid symbol; the noblest metal, and the time factor that plays such an important role... In other words, the most noble sentiments, but don't let the right moment go by...”

He had put his hand on my shoulder. My eyes were damp.

Twenty minutes later I was at my front door. On my writing-table stood a photograph of a small boy: a laughing Juan José.

The cars drove past one after the other below my window.

There was a knock at the door. Señorita Jimenez came in.

“Good morning, Mr. Capmany Here is the post.”

The carefully looked-after hands laid the letters on the writing-pad. While I ran my eyes over their contents, she fiddled with a few curls of her hair, as usual.

After dictating a few replies to her, she disappeared on her high heels through the leather-clad door, which she closed almost noiselessly behind her.

The film studios were working at their full capacity. We had a bright future ahead of us.



Afterword

Costa Brava was written in the summer of 1958. At that time, the theme of this novel—boylove—had scarcely become the subject of public discussion. *Costa Brava* was published in Rotterdam by the Enclave International Press, and right from the beginning it was a much demanded book. The monthly magazine of the Netherlands Association for Sexual Reform (N.V.S.H.) *Rational Parenthood* said, in the issue for December 1960, it is: “a well-written and straightforward story about people whom you might meet any day. (...) Specially recommendable because the attempt to give the reader an insight into socially unacceptable feelings is decidedly a complete success.” Part of the book appeared as a short story under the title “The Storm” in *Der Weg* (February-March 1963).

The daily and weekly press in the Netherlands also reviewed the book, notably *De Haagse Courant* and *Elsevier*.

Costa Brava lives on. This is emphasized regularly. The periodical *N.I.K.S.* (the integration of child-sexuality, published by the N.V.S.H.) mentioned my book, as follows: “One can really only come to the conclusion that human love is experienced in all possible variations. There are no deviant forms of behavior. *Costa Brava* confirms this conclusion... It is well worthwhile... to read *Costa Brava*.”

More recently, *Costa Brava* was mentioned in the English-language magazine *Pan* in June 1979, and the chapter “The Storm” was reprinted in Joachim S. Hohmann’s historicaliterary survey entitled “*Der heimliche Seam*” (The Secret Sex), presented by the editor in the section on “homosexual fiction from 1900 to 1970” and mentioned in a detailed essay illustrated with photographs.

My story has even found its way into the scientific literature. Thus, it is mentioned in the *Lexikon der Sexualitdt* by Willhart S. Schlegel, volume 1 of the series “Mensch und Sexualitat” published in Munich in 1969.

The historian E. O. Born mentions the publication of *Costa Brava* in his *Pedofiele Intgratie na 1959* (Utrecht 1973).

Furthermore, the story is quoted as an example of a happy depiction of a boylove relationship in specialist publications such as *Sexualmedizin*,

Betrifft: Erziehung and Arcadie, Revue litteraire et scientifique.

The Dutch-language edition, which was published twenty years ago, has brought me into contact with a large number of readers at home and abroad, both in person and by correspondence. From them I have learnt that the book is a moral support to numerous people. It is therefore opportune that an illustrated English edition is now being published by *Gay Sunshine*.

Frits Bernard, 1982

Frits Bernard

COSTA BRAVA

Geschichte einer
jungen Liebe

