Pedro and the Captain

(1979)

by Mario Benedetti

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PROLOGUE

Originally, I conceived of *Pedro y el Capitán* as a novel, and I'd even given it a title: *El Cepo*, for the ropeand-stick torture device that's used to squeeze prisoners' arms against their bodies. I remember telling the Uruguayan critic Jorge Ruffinelli, when he interviewed me in 1974 and asked about my future projects, that I had in mind a novel called *El Cepo*. and what I said, more or less, was that it would be "a long conversation between a torturer and his prisoner, in which torture won't be present per se, but will be there as a great shadow weighing on the dialogue. I'm thinking of taking the torturer and the person being tortured beyond the prison or military base, to where their private lives figure into the mix." Well, there you have it: *Pedro and the Captain*.

I see the play as a dramatic inquiry into the psychology of a torturer, a sort of answer to the question of what it takes, what has to be going on, for an ordinary person to become a torturer. While torture is the ostensible theme of the play, it never comes onto the stage as a physical act. I've always believed that torture has its place as an artistic subject in literature or film, but in theatre its aggression is felt too directly, and this makes it difficult for the spectator to keep a needed distance. If the torture is there only indirectly, however, as an evil yet unseen presence, then the audience is able to be more objective,

and if what we are judging is the degradation of a human being, objectivity is essential.

The work isn't a confrontation between a monster and a saint, but rather one between two men, two flesh and blood beings who both have their points of vulnerability and resistance. For the most part the distance between the two of them is ideological, and this perhaps holds the key to their other differences—the moral, the spiritual, the sensitivity to human pain, the complex terrain that lies between courage and cowardice, the lesser or greater capacity for sacrifice, the gap between betrayal and loyalty.

Something else that should be stressed is that, in a way, the work suggests a relationship between torturer and victim that often comes up in situations of true repression, at least as it is practiced in the Southern Cone, though this has hardly been touched upon in theatre. In Pedro and the Captain, the four acts are mere intermissions, times of truce between one bout of torture and another, brief periods in which the "good cop" receives the prisoner, who has just been brutally tortured and is therefore presumed to have his defenses down. But the person who has been tortured is not necessarily a defenseless victim condemned to an unavailing defeat or a betrayal of others; he or she can also be (and recent history proves that thousands of political militants have faced it this way) a person who can vanquish a seemingly absolute power, a person who uses silence almost as a shield and negativity almost as

a weapon, who would rather die than betray others. In order to sustain this wholly incorruptible dignity, though, prisoners must develop personal defenses so real as to convince themselves that they will never have to give in. When Pedro thinks up the metaphor that in reality he's already a dead man, most of all what he's inventing is a trench, a barricade behind which he can safeguard his loyalty to his comrades and his cause.

In the play there are two transformative processes crossing each other: the military man who has been changed from a "good boy" into a torturer, and the prisoner who starts out as a simple man and becomes a *consciente* martyr. But perhaps the real dramatic tension lies not in the dialogue, but rather in the inner being of one of the characters: the captain.

I haven't wanted the prisoner to come across as a militant of some particular political tendency. The extreme repression in Uruguay has swept over virtually the entire Left and even reached further, into other sectors of the opposition like the Church and traditional political parties. Pedro is simply a political prisoner of the Left who doesn't inform on anyone, and who, although he is in agony, somehow humiliates his interrogator and vanquishes him. Each one of the four acts ends with a *No*.

I should add that, even in times of defeat like the one we're living through at present, I don't favor a literature—and even less, a theatre—that is defeatist or weepy, aimed at inspiring pity or sympathy. We have to reclaim objectivity, as a way of reclaiming truth. And we have to reclaim the truth as one of the prerequisites for deserving victory.

-- Mario Benedetti 1979

PART ONE

Barren set: a straight-backed chair, a table, a comfortable swivel-chair with armrests. On the table is a telephone. On one wall a sink with soap, glass, a towel, etc. A high window with bars. Still, it should not give the impression of a cell, but rather of an interrogation room.

Pedro enters, tied up and hooded, presumably pushed in by guards or soldiers, though we can't see them. It's obvious he's been beaten, that he's just had a preliminary, fairly light, going-over. Pedro stands where they left him, motionless, as if expecting something—more torture perhaps. After a few minutes the Captain enters, uniformed, impecably groomed, bareheaded, hair neatly combed, looking quite sure of himself. He approaches Pedro and gently takes his arm. Instinctively, Pedro recoils.

CAPTAIN

Don't be scared. I'm just showing you where the chair's at.

He leads Pedro to the chair and sits him down. Pedro is rigid, seems wary.

The Captain goes over to the table, leafs through some papers, then sits down in the swivel-chair.

Looks like they roughed you up some. And obviously, you didn't talk.

Pedro says nothing.

CAPTAIN

It's always like that in the first session, even a good thing if you don't talk right off the bat. Me, I wouldn't talk in a first session either. After all, it's not so hard to put up with a few punches, and it helps a guy feel good about himself. Don't you think? I bet you feel pretty good for not talking.

Silence from Pedro.

CAPTAIN

Later on it's different, because the torture gets worse and worse. And in the end, everybody talks. To tell you the truth, the only time I think it makes sense to keep quiet is in the first session. You keep quiet after that, you're a glutton for punishment. What you've got to figure out is the point when you ought to begin talking: should you start when they're knocking your teeth out, or when they pull out your fingernails, or when you're vomiting blood, or when

... But why go on? You guys know the whole repertoire, you never leave out a single detail. They all talk, pal. It's just that some of them wind up in better shape than others. I'm talking physical shape, of course. It all depends on when they decide to open up. How about you, buddy? You decided yet?

Silence from Pedro.

CAPTAIN

Look, Pedro . . . or would you rather I called you Rómulo, your name in the underground? Naw, I'm going to call you Pedro, because this here is the moment of truth, and I've always been a straight-up kind of guy. Look here, Pedro, I understand your predicament; I know this isn't easy for you. You were leading a pretty normal life, or, you know, normal considering the times: a good looking young wife, a healthy baby, the old folks still up and about, a good job at the bank, that little house you worked so hard to build. (Changing his tone) Speaking of which, why is it that middle class people like you and me are so stuck on this thing about owning our own homes? Did you guys ever think about that when you talked about doing away with private property? Hey—on that point at least, nobody's ever going to side with you, not if it means giving up their houses. (Getting back to the point) Yeah, you had a good life, simple,

but with everything you could ask for. Then boom, some guys knock on your door in the middle of the night and yank you out of all that goodness, and on top of that they beat the shit out of you. I can put myself in your shoes; you'd have to be an animal not to understand, and I assure you, I'm no animal. But I'll tell you, some of 'em around here come close. You haven't run into them yet, but you might. I'm not talking about the ones last night who broke you in. No, there are some other ones who are really awful. I swear, I couldn't do that dirty work. To be a savage you've got to have been born a savage, and I wasn't born like that. But somebody's got to do it; that's war. Probably you guys've got your clean work and dirty work too. Isn't that right? Maybe I'm just lazy, but me, I'll stick to the clean stuff. Like now, sitting down for a little talk with you—no beatings, none of that waterboarding or forced standing or hanging by your wrists—no, just a reasonable conversation. My specialty is discussion, not the stick. Anybody can go poking someone with an electric prod, but to carry on a rational discussion takes some expertise. Don't you think? That's why I also make a little more money than the electricians. (He smacks himself on the forehead, as if surprised by his own cleverness) Electricians! You get it? How come nobody ever thought of calling them that before? Tonight, in the Casino, I'll have to remember to tell the colonel; he's got a sense of humor, he'll love it. (The Captain stops talking for a moment. He looks at Pedro, who still hasn't moved or said a word) If you're tired of that position you can cross your legs. (Pedro doesn't move) Looks like you're trying the Gandhi trick, passive resistance. But that scrawny Gandhi and those Indians against the British, that was one thing, while you guys against us are something else altogether. Nowadays, passive resistance doesn't accomplish a thing. It's useless; it's what you call an anachronism—been that way since the Yankees' came in...did you notice I said Yankees, just like you guys? Ever since they came down here with their hit men and high voltage, passive resistance hasn't been worth shit. It's gloves off on dissent, amigo. That's why I think, even at this point, it's a waste of time to resist. And you're not even answering me when I ask you something. That's no good. Because as I'm sure you've noticed, I'm not here to hurt you, I just want to talk. So why this silence? Is it a put down? Okay, let's say it is. Here, in this war, we all do some of that: you put us down, we put you down. There's a good reason we're enemies, but you know, we've also got some respect for each other. Like, we on our side really have to hand it to you, the way you commit yourselves to a cause, the way you'll risk everything for it; how you'll give up your creature comforts, your families, your work, your lives even. We can't see much sense in that kind of sacrifice, but I assure you we respect it.By the same token, I have the impression that

you've got some respect for how much it hurts us when we have to work you over, sometimes to the point of doing you in completely—'cause after all, not only are you our fellow citizens, but you're so young. You think that's not such a big deal? We're human, you know, and we'd much sooner be at home taking it easy, chilling out, reading a good detective story or watching TV. But instead, we've got to stay here, putting in overtime to make people suffer, or, in my case, to talk with those people between the acts. My part's the intermezzo. Get it? (Changing his tone) Hey, you like music? Opera maybe? Okay, so you're not about to answer . . . for now. (Getting back to the point) But what I was getting at, is that I suspect you guys appreciate—I don't know if it's conscious or unconscious—but you appreciate how we're dedicated to our work, too. Right? (For the first time the tone of the question begins to sound threatening. Pedro neither responds nor moves) Say something! Look, I don't have to explain the rules of the game to you; you know the rules. From what I hear, you guys even take courses in how to deal with situations like you're in right now. Or didn't you know that we've got "bad" interrogators, animals almost, who are capable of ripping the prisoner to shreds, and we've also got "good" ones, who get the prisoner when he comes in exhausted from the brutal treatment, and who soften him up little by little. You know that, right? So you must have noticed that

I'm the "good" one. Well, you ought to take advantage of that. I'm the only one who can get you a break from the beatings, relief from the stress positions. I'm the one who can put a stop to the electric prod and get you better food, a cigarette now and then. And at the very least, you know that while you're here with me, your nerves and muscles don't have to be all tensed up as you wait for the next blow, as you try to guess when it's coming, or from where. I'm a sort of rest, a breather for you. You with me? So I don't think it's wise for you to stay locked up in that absurd silence. Like my old man used to say, when people talk, they can understand one another. He was an auctioneer, he had good reason to put his trust in words. I'm telling you all this so you'll know your place, and won't step out of line and go overboard about "rights." You wouldn't want me to go "beyond the line of duty," so to speak. With a person like me, who would not think of laying a hand on you, you can exercise your right to keep your mouth shut, but I want you to know I have no intention of playing the fool, reciting the same speech over and over while you sit there like a bump on a log. Just because I'm the "good guy" doesn't mean you should expect the impossible, especially if the "good guy" happens to know some of the particulars of your political career, Pedro, alias Rómulo. And by the way, just so you don't add to the torture you're in for by torturing yourself, I can

tell you that you're not going to have to talk about Tomás or Cassandra, or about Alfonso, either. For those three we've got every single piece of the story; we're not missing so much as a comma or a period not even a parenthesis. Why should we bust your head asking you for things we've already got and already verified? That would be sadistic, and we're not sadists; we're pragmatists. But take Gabriel, Rosario, Magdalena, and Fermín: about them we know relatively little, in some cases we don't even have their real names and addresses. Think of how much there is for you to help us out with! And since we know with scientific certainty that you're the key man to fill us in on these four cases, we're prepared not me, personally, but we, as an institution—we're prepared to break you: not just your head, but your balls and your lungs and your liver, clear up to that saintly halo you've sometimes tried to put on, only it's too big for you. As you can see, I'm putting my cards on the table. You can't say I was crooked or shady; this is how it is. And since I somehow sort of like you, I'm telling you plain and clear so you'll know what's what. But just because I like you, don't think that means I feel sorry for you, or pity you. And of course, here in this military unit (you're never gonna know which one it is) there are people who on principle, without knowing a thing about you, don't like you, and are prepared to go to the limit with you—and not just with you! Those hard-liners,

they sometimes like to bring in the wife of the accused and—how shall I put it?—"drill" her in front of him. There are even some who go in for the Brazilian technique, of torturing the children in front of their parents, especially the mother. You realize, I'd never do anything like that; I think those things are positively inhuman. But if we're going to tell it like it is, we've got to admit that these extremes exist, they're possible. And I wouldn't feel right if I hadn't warned you, and then one day you met up with some baboons like the guys who broke you in last night, and you had to watch them rape that sweet little lady of yours, right in front of your eyes. Aurora, isn't that her name? For that you can be sure they'd take off your hood. They're apes, all right, but they can get pretty fancy. How long you been married? Was last October 22nd really your eighth anniversary? Did Aurora like that gold pin you bought her on Calle Sarandí? And what would you say if they brought in little Andresito and beat him to a pulp right in front of you? Like I said, that one hasn't been approved yet, but our advisors are considering it, and of course there'll always be somebody who's got to be the first to try it out. I'll never be in favor of methods like that, because when two human beings come faceto-face, I totally trust the power of persuasion. In fact, I think the reason the electricians resort to cattle prods is because they don't have enough faith in their own powers of persuasion. And besides, they

think of the prisoner as an object, as something you've got to squeeze mechanically to get all the juice out. I, on the other hand, never forget that the prisoner is a human being like myself. Wrongheaded, but a human being! You, for instance, the way you are, all silent and motionless, you could be just another object, a thing. Maybe you're trying to turn yourself into something I'll think of as an object. But even if you don't move a muscle or say a word, I know you're not just a thing; I know you're human, and a sensitive human, a human being with sensitive spots. Sensitive spots that, well, objects obviously don't possess. (He pauses) Hey, you were thinking of your balls just now, weren't you? Whenever anybody talks about sensitive spots, it goes without saying: women all think of their tits, and men think of their balls. No minor detail! Dan Mitrione had this figured out to a "T." Back in Indiana, before the Yankees ever sent him down here, poor guy, he'd already put it together. He used to say, "the precise pain, in the precise place, in the precise amount, for the desired effect." Now clearly, for a man with your high principles, it's a real stretch to think about talking and turning information over to us. It's not so nice to be thought of as a snitch, or a traitor. But there's an element here you might be overlooking a "treatment" we dispense only to those we like, like you, my friend. We've got a way for you to help us out and at the same time stay in good with your

comrades. What do you say to that? Maybe you think it's not possible. Pardon my vanity, but for us, nothing is impossible. You want me to explain it to you? It's a four-part plan. Part One: you talk—the sooner the better; that way we don't have to get physical. You tell us everything, every thing, about Gabriel, Rosario, Magdalena, and Fermín. Hey, we could have given you a list of 20 names, but nice guys that we are, we made it just four. Four. You got that? A cinch. Second, we do some follow-up on the information you've spontaneously—you understand? spontaneously-shared with us. That lets us know, among other things, whether you're really cooperating or you're trying to put something over on us. (I'd advise against that second alternative). Now, if we can see that you're cooperating, we're obviously not going to release you right away. That's for your own good, so your comrades don't suspect anything. We wait for a reasonable amount of time to go by, and then we let you out. Nice, huh? Third. We invent a key document, or a phone list, or something else we'll figure it out together—and then we go public with it, saying the raid was possible only because of the lucky discovery of that list, or whatever, and above all, thanks to our own powers of deduction. That way, we look good and you're off the hook: since you guys have everything compartmentalized, every cell will think that the list came from someplace else. Fourth, we let you go, and when you finally get back

to the others you tell them you denied everything so vehemently that you convinced us you were innocent. What do you think? (Pedro remains motionless) I'm telling you, really, you can't hope for a better way out of this than what I'm proposing to you. And listen, we've never used this plan before, so any suspicions about you will blow away like the wind. In fact, I have a hunch that in terms of prestige and authority, you're going to come out way ahead, and at the same time you'll be free of all this crap. You're awfully young to get yourself destroyed for nothing, to ruin your life, when you could go home, back to Aurora and your kid. Doesn't it just make your mouth water? Aurora would welcome you back like a hero, and sure, you'd have some regrets at first, but with a woman like you've got, those regrets will go up in smoke the minute you two get into bed. You've really got to give me an answer on this. Up to now I've put up with your not saying anything. But very few prisoners have the privilege of getting an offer as generous as this. (How is it I've taken such a liking to you?) You're going to have to give me an answer now, so you and I know where we stand. How about we call it a deal? You and me, with this proposal. Are you ready to talk? Ready to give us the information we're asking for? (A long silence. Pedro remains motionless. The Captain raises his voice) Are you ready to talk? (Pedro's hood nods a negative)

PART TWO

The same set, deserted. After some minutes, Pedro (still tied, and with a hood) is thrown back on stage, as in the previous scene but more violently. He is in worse condition now. It is obvious that he has been severely tortured. Pedro gropes for the chair. Finally he finds it and with much effort sits down. From time to time a wheezing sound, barely audible, escapes from his mouth. The Captain enters: same appearance and dress as before. He pauses to observe Pedro, as if taking an inventory of his new bruises and wounds.

CAPTAIN

(Standing, with his legs apart and his arms crossed) You see? The crescendo has begun. You can't say I didn't warn you. Look at what beasts those underlings are! And we've got to let them do it. If not, they could turn around and lay into us. (He pauses) Did you believe that? I was just kidding. But to tell you the truth, there actually are some higher-ups who are scared of them. (He pauses) So how are you, boy? I gave you time so you could think. Did you think? (Silence and immobility from Pedro) I've got some advice for you. You shouldn't get the idea that we're going to spend a whole lot of time spinning our wheels like this, going nowhere. For one thing, physically, I don't think you'll hold up for very long; you're not exactly what we'd call an athlete. Of course, I'm

not talking about holding up under my questions; I'm talking about the electricians. (Changing his tone) Which reminds me, the Colonel was pretty amused by my joke. Not only did he laugh, but he said to me, "Captain, we've got to be sure we don't have any power failures." It wasn't all that funny but I laughed—like I was supposed to. (Getting back to the point) What was I telling you? Oh, yes, that we were stuck. I, for one, want to get moving, and I've got a hunch you do too, and that's why I've decided to bring something new into the situation. (He pauses) Doesn't that pique your curiosity? What'll it be, eh? A witness? Somebody who's already ratted you out? (He pauses again, to hold Pedro in suspense) No, it's nothing like that. The new element for the situation is your eyes. I want you to see, and for me to be able to watch when you do that. (He approaches Pedro and snatches off his hood. Pedro's face has wounds and bruises from beatings. Blinded by the light, he blinks several times) Good, good. (The Captain smiles) How do you do? It's better seeing our faces, don't you think? I've never much enjoyed talking to a burlap bag. Some of my colleagues don't want to be seen by the prisoners, and for good reason: beatings beget resentment, and one never knows what the future might bring. Who says the situation wouldn't be reversed some day and you would be interrogating me? If that should happen, I promise I'll be a little more cooperative than you are. But don't kid yourself:

it's not going to happen. We've taken all the precautions to assure that it won't happen. And anyway, it doesn't worry me if you know what my face looks like. The most you can hold against me is that I kept questioning and questioning you, but that doesn't breed resentment, I don't think. Or does it? (He pauses) Without the hood it's a little harder for you not to talk. Right?

PEDRO

Yes.

CAPTAIN

Wow! A one-syllable word. What a concession. Bravo!

PEDRO

(He has difficulty talking because of the swelling of his mouth) I want to make it clear that your not participating directly in my torture is no guarantee of my not hating you, or of hating you less.

CAPTAIN

(A little surprised, but reacting) All right. I like a clean game.

No, you don't like it, but never mind. I want to tell you, too, that with the hood on I did not open my mouth because there's some minimum amount of dignity I'm unwilling to give up, and the hood is an insult.

CAPTAIN

(After a silence) That thing about hate, why'd you say that?

PEDRO

Why did I say it?

CAPTAIN

Yes, I can understand that you feel that way. But I can't understand your coming right out and saying it like that, so brazenly. I'm the one who's on top here, and you, buddy, are on the bottom. Or did you forget that?

PEDRO

No, I didn't forget it.

	And	to	show	hatred	breeds	hatred.
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PEDRO

Of course.

CAPTAIN

I'm warning you, I'm not going to play that game. I'm a Christian, but I'm not used to turning the other cheek.

PEDRO

Naturally. I'm the one turning the other cheek, and look where it got me. My cheeks, my back, my legs, my fingernails.

CAPTAIN

And tomorrow your balls.

PEDRO

If you say so.

I say so. I give the orders and the others obey. What do you think of that? (*Pedro grimaces. The Captain lets out a nervous titter*) Anyway, I advise you not to provoke me; I've got a short fuse. You know?

PEDRO

I know. I may even know more about you than you know about me.

CAPTAIN

(With irony) You don't say!

PEDRO

Yes, I say. In your zealousness to get out of me what I know and what I don't know, you don't realize how much you're revealing about what you're like.

CAPTAIN

And what am I like?

Bah.

CAPTAIN

It seems to me I asked you what I'm like.

PEDRO

Yeah, right, but it's absurd. You throw me in jail, fix it so they'll beat the shit out of me, and on top of that you require that I be your analyst. No way.

CAPTAIN

Well anyhow, I already know what I'm like.

PEDRO

Then I agree with your self-diagnosis.

CAPTAIN

And if I think of myself as a decent and honorable man?

You know what's going on? That's a bill of goods you can't even sell to yourself. (*He pauses very briefly*) You wouldn't even know the meaning of decent and honorable.

CAPTAIN

(Shouting) Shut up!

PEDRO

What? Didn't you want for me to talk? And here I've decided to talk . . .

CAPTAIN

(Not so loud, but more intensely) Shut up, you idiot.

PEDRO

All right.

CAPTAIN

(After a while, calmer, as if pulling himself together) Okay, so maybe I don't consider myself all that honorable and decent. But who cares about my honor and

decency, anyway? Eh? Who cares?

PEDRO

Seems to me, you ought to care. I could care less . . .

CAPTAIN

Is that in the instructions too? Establish a safe distance from the interrogator?

PEDRO

It is you who are establishing the distance, Sir. How can there be any communication, exchange, dialogue, etcetera, between a person who is being tortured and his torturer?

CAPTAIN

(With alarm) I've never so much as touched you!

PEDRO

Yes, I know. You're the "good guy." But are there really both "good guys" and "bad guys" here? Like there's some difference between you and the Nean-derthal who drowns me on the waterboard? Between you and the animal who shocks me with the electric

prod? Like your "rendition" has a different tune? Can you really believe that there's a difference?

CAPTAIN

You've got a big mouth.

PEDRO

Then I'll go back to being silent.

CAPTAIN

(After a silence) Don't you want to ask me anything?

PEDRO

(Surprised) Me, ask questions?

CAPTAIN

Yeah, you; you can ask.

PEDRO

What is this, anyway? Some new post-Mitrione technique?

Maybe.

PEDRO

(Thinking it over) Okay, I'm going to ask you: Do you have a family?

CAPTAIN

(Surprised in turn) What's that to you?

PEDRO

It's nothing at all to me. Who it ought to be something to, if you've got one, is you.

CAPTAIN

Are you threatening me?

PEDRO

Ha! A knee-jerk projection! You guys, when you talk about somebody's family, it's always as a threat.

Then why do you want to know?

PEDRO

Because if you've got parents and a wife and children, it must be pretty fucked up to go home at night.

CAPTAIN

(Shouting) What did you say?

PEDRO

Let me explain: if you've got wife and kid, it must be really fucked up to come home and give them a little kiss, after interrogating somebody who's just been tortured.

The Captain jumps up, losing all composure, and punches Pedro in the mouth.

PEDRO

(He tries to move his lips, and speaks with more difficulty than before) It's a good thing you're the good guy.

Everything has its limits.

PEDRO

You're going to get yourself busted, Captain. Don't forget that the "good guy" cannot and must not throw punches at a man who's tied up. (He pauses) But anyway, I can tell you, you're no match for your colleagues on the night shift. They do it a lot better. And it figures: what they do electrically, you do with your bare hands. No comparison.

CAPTAIN

I told you, that's enough.

PEDRO

Won't they dress you down when they find out you lost your cool? You broke the rules, Captain.

CAPTAIN

(Speaking through his teeth) Look, you snothead, shut up.

You didn't like that bit about the family, eh? That means, first, you've got one; and second, you're not so insensitive.

CAPTAIN

(Calmer) You'll talk then?

PEDRO

I'm talking, aren't I?

CAPTAIN

You know what I'm talking about.

PEDRO

Captain, don't jump to foolish conclusions.

CAPTAIN

(Disoriented) But why? Why? (Pedro makes a face) Don't you see, you idiot, that they're using you? Don't you see that while others stick to ideas, they've got you sticking your neck out?

That's a good line. Where'd you get it? (He pauses) It might even be true sometimes.

CAPTAIN

So?

PEDRO

So, nothing. What matters is not the effect of an individual act . . .

CAPTAIN

(Completing the sentence) . . . but the collective will. Paragraph 7, section (a), of the internal declaration you drafted in August.

PEDRO

And if you know about the August Declaration, why this farce?

CAPTAIN

The Declaration's one thing, you're another.

So we've got an informer.

CAPTAIN

Why not? What did you expect?

PEDRO

And how is it they didn't tell you all about Gabriel, Rosario, Magdalena, and Fermín?

CAPTAIN

Because he didn't know about them.

PEDRO

Oh.

CAPTAIN

He knew about you, though, and that's how you wound up getting detained. What's more, he told us that you knew about the others.

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CAPTAIN

(After a long silence) Tell me something. Do you know what's in store for you?

PEDRO

I can imagine.

CAPTAIN

It could be a lot worse than the worst you can imagine. We're getting better all the time.

PEDRO

What I imagine is always worse.

CAPTAIN

What're you, suicidal?

Not at all, I like being alive.

CAPTAIN

Alive and all busted up?

PEDRO

No, simply alive.

CAPTAIN

I'm offering you the chance to be simply alive.

PEDRO

No, not simply. You're offering me the chance to live as a dead person. And before I'll do that I'd rather die as a living one.

CAPTAIN

Shit, slogans.

I said that on purpose. I thought you liked slogans. You people, when you make speeches, always sound like you're talking in italics.

CAPTAIN

(After a silence) You asked me before about my family. I do have a wife. And a house. A boy seven and a little girl, five. It's true that sometimes when I get home from work it's hard to face them. I don't do any torturing in this place, but I do overhear a lot of moans and heartrending screams, all those howls of desperation. Sometimes I get home, my nerves are shattered, my hands are shaking. I'm not really cut out for work like this, but I'm caught up in it. And when I think about what I'm doing I can only see one justification for it—one single justification: to get the prisoners to talk, to get them to give us the information we're after. Obviously I always prefer the ones that talk without anybody having to touch them. But we don't get that kind anymore, they don't exist. Nowadays whenever we get results, it's always through torture, and when you see somebody suffering, you suffer too. Like you said—and you were right—I'm not insensitive. So look, in order to redeem myself in front of my children I've got to think that at least I'm accomplishing what we're here

to do: to get information—even if we've got to destroy you guys to get it. It's a matter of life or death: either destroy or be destroyed. Life or death. You poked your finger in an open sore when you mentioned my family, but you also reminded me that one way or another, I've got to get you to talk. Because only then can I feel all right in front of my wife and children. I can only feel all right if I'm fulfilling my function, achieving my objectives. I've got to do it. Otherwise, I'm just some kind of brute, or sadist, or monster. I'd have had you tortured for nothing. And that's disgusting. I can't bear it!

PEDRO

(Looking at him with a certain curiosity, an almost scientific interest, as if he were examining an extinct species)

Anything else?

CAPTAIN

Yes, one question. It's the same as before, but I hope that now, understanding it better, you'll realize how my whole life depends on the outcome: Are you going to talk?

(Still dumbfounded by the Captain's speech, but as firmly as ever)

No, Captain.

PART THREE

The same set. The Captain, rocking in the armchair, seems completely distracted. He has lost the composure and neatness of the earlier scenes. His hair is uncombed, his shirt has come untucked, his tie is loose. He leans toward the table and picks up the phone.

CAPTAIN

Bring 'em in! (He hangs up)

He goes back to rocking in his chair. At times he seems to have trouble breathing. Several minutes go by. Sounds can be heard near by. Pedro is thrown into the room. He is hooded. His clothes are torn and full of blood stains. He lies spread out on the floor, motionless.

The Captain approaches him. Without removing the hood he examines him, looking at his multiple cuts and bruises. When he lifts one of the arms a plaintive snort can be heard. He lets go of the arm. He seems bewildered, and backs away from the body on the floor.

CAPTAIN

Pedro!

The body does not respond, but it tries to move.

The Captain comes back closer to it, and this time forcibly picks it up and takes it to the chair. But Pedro's body falls over to one side.

The Captain props it up.

When he's finally satisfied that it's stable, he returns to his chair and rocks some more.

Noises begin to issue from under the hood, but at first it's not clear whether these are laughing sounds or crying sounds. A shudder runs through the body.

The Captain quits rocking and waits, tense. But the sounds continue, ambiguous, confusing. Then he gets up, goes over to Pedro and yanks off the hood. Only then is it clear that Pedro is laughing. His face is completely swollen and deformed, but he is laughing.

CAPTAIN

What are you laughing at, stupid?

PEDRO

(Babbling, as if the Captain had not spoken to him) And right in the middle of the electroshock the power went out—the same power failure your goddam Colonel predicted. And the poor things, the

Neanderthals, didn't know what to do, because without current, they're nothing. And there was that woman, with the prod in her vagina, and when the power went off I don't know how, but she managed to give them a kick. And the beast lit a match, but the prod (he laughs) doesn't run on matches. (He bursts out laughing) It doesn't run on matches. (From now on, throughout most of the scene, Pedro will give the impression of being delirious, or perhaps of faking delirium. It is important that this remain ambiguous) There was still the bucket, of course, with its shitty water and its floating turds, but it's hard to use it in the dark. The bucket isn't electric, y'know, though sometimes it can be a bit shocking. And it's not convenient, pushing heads into a bucket in the middle of a power outage. In the dark you can't tell when the guy can't take any more. The doctor needs good light to diagnose when a cardiac arrest is coming. So they had to call off the session.

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Pedro.

PEDRO

Call me Rómulo.

No, your	name	is	Pedro.	

PEDRO

Why not? Rómulo, alias Pedro!

CAPTAIN

Don't mix me up. Pedro, alias Rómulo.

PEDRO

Nothing.

CAPTAIN

What?

PEDRO

Nothing. I've got no name, and no alias. Nothing.

CAPTAIN

Pedro.

Pedro Nothing. Nothing is my last name. You didn't know that, Captain? At this very moment I am revealing it. Aren't you going to call the stenographer? It's an important declaration. Or have you got a tape recorder running? Pedro Nothing. And my second surname, my mother's family name, is Left. Or to say it all together: Pedro Nothing Left. (He laughs with difficulty)

CAPTAIN

(He waits till Pedro finishes laughing) What's the matter with you?

PEDRO

What's the matter is the matter, and what's the difference? I'm dead, so ciao. But at this point being dead makes no difference to me.

CAPTAIN

You're alive. And you can be even more alive.

You're mistaken, Captain, I'm dead. We're like, at my wake.

CAPTAIN

Don't act delirious. Those theatrics won't fly with me.

PEDRO

It's not theatre, Captain, I'm dead. You don't know what contentment came over me when I realized I was dead. That's why it doesn't matter to me now if they apply the electric shocks, or if they submerge me in shit, or they force me to hold stress positions, or stomp on my balls. Blindfolds, waterboards—none of it makes any difference to me anymore, because I'm dead. And this gives me a tremendous serenity, even great happiness. Can't you see that I'm content?

CAPTAIN

You're the first dead man to jabber like a parrot.

Very good, Captain, excellent: you've noticed the contradiction. You're trained for dialectics, eh? I'm dead and I talk like a parrot. Bravo, Captain! Who would have thought you'd reach such a brilliant conclusion? Hurray! May the tape recording please take note of my wish to applaud—not my applause, of course, because I'm tied up. (He pauses) I do owe you an explanation. What I mean is that I'm technically dead, but I'm still functioning as a body, which is to say I still piss and crap on myself, though I can't say as I belch, since you're starving me to death in here and I've got practically nothing to burp up. Technically, I'm a dead man, I'm telling you, because you're not going to get so much as a single little telephone number out of me, not even my shirt size, and so you're going to keep doing it and doing it to me, and this fragile little body of mine can only stand a little bit more, just a very little bit more. Like you said, Captain, I'm no athlete. And since you're going to keep doing it and doing it, well, that's why I'm a dead man, technically dead. You understand what I'm saying, Captain? You wouldn't believe the calm that came over me when I realized I was dead. Everything changed. For instance, I used to hate you, and I said so, but now that I'm a dead man, I just feel sorry for you. I feel like for the first time I've got the advantage—a pretty big advantage. You could almost say it's an immeasurable advantage.

Don't be so sure. How do you know how much you can take? You don't know where that line is until you get to it. You've held up so far, but I told you before, we've got a long way to go yet. Every day we discover something new.

PEDRO

I admit that back when I was alive, that's what I used to worry about: how long would I be able to hold out? Because when you're alive, what you want is to keep on living, and that's always a dangerous temptation. But once you know you're dead, the temptation's gone.

CAPTAIN

And the pain?

PEDRO

Right, the pain. How important pain is when one's alive! But how little it matters when one is dead!

Screw that, you're not dead. (He pauses) But maybe you're nuts.

PEDRO

I'll compromise with you, Captain: nuts, but dead.

CAPTAIN

A live wire.

PEDRO

Another sage observation, Captain. A live wire, but unplugged.

CAPTAIN

(Impatient) Pedro!

PEDRO

Pedro Nothing Left.

You can take that complete name of yours and shove it up your ass.

PEDRO

I must tell you, you have ordered the sodomy of a cadaver. And that, anywhere in the whole world, under any regime whatsoever, constitutes a lack of respect.

CAPTAIN

(Trying to bring the conversation back to something more normal) You've got to talk, Pedro. No kidding, I've come to like you, and I don't want them to put you through the wringer.

PEDRO

They've already put me through the wringer, Captain. Your sudden burst of kindness comes too late, and how sorry I am! I've got no liver left, and probably no balls, either, I suppose; I haven't checked.

I don't want them to do you in.

PEDRO

Them! What's this third person plural?

CAPTAIN

I don't want us to do you in.

PEDRO

That's better. You guys don't like ruins? Say, Pompeii, Herculaneum, Machu Picchu, Pedro Nothing Left, etcetera?

CAPTAIN

Keep quiet, you idiot.

PEDRO

It's only the living who keep quiet, Captain. Don't you remember how I kept silent while I was alive? But we dead ones, we can speak. With the stumps of our tongues, and our parched throats, and our four

remaining teeth, and our bloody lips—with this little you've left us, we dead ones can talk. (*He pauses*) About your family, for example.

CAPTAIN

That again? How about if we talk about yours?

PEDRO

Or mine. Why not?

CAPTAIN

About your wife.

PEDRO

You must mean my widow. Actually, Aurora . . .

CAPTAIN

(Sharply) Alias Beatriz.

Pedro becomes silent. His head falls to his chest.

(He smiles) What? You weren't dead? It looks like you've still got reflexes.

Pedro remains motionless, with his head still slumped forward.

CAPTAIN

Aurora, alias Beatriz. Didn't I tell you that every day we put new cards on the table?

Pedro lifts his head a little, but now his gaze seems to be lost in some faraway place. He begins to talk in a very low tone, almost a whisper, and after a while his voice slowly rises.

PEDRO

When I was little I used to dream about the ocean, and now that I'm twelve years old, I'd like to see it. Nicolás says it isn't the ocean. Nicolás . . .

CAPTAIN

(Cutting him off) Alias Esteban . . .

... says it's a river. But with rivers you can always see the other bank, and here you can't. And besides, rivers aren't salty, and this water is salty, so I call it ocean. I call it sea. "Sea . . . " And when I call its name, I bury my feet in the sand, and the sand gets between my toes, and it tickles.

CAPTAIN

(As if catching it from Pedro, he, too, is transfixed. They take turns talking, without dialogue. Actually, there are two crossing monologues) I had to give her a rose; I don't know why, but I just had to. She always came there with her mother and her cousin. She'd come, and I'd look at her, but I had to give her a rose. And one afternoon I stole one from the embassy garden, and the policeman ran after me yelling, You little bastard, and he chased me, but I ran and ran, and I had an asthma attack. But when I got to the park and reached the fountain, the asthma had passed, though my heart was still pounding the same as before, and I went up to her and gave her the rose, and at first she looked at me, surprised, and then she blinked, and she threw the rose into the fountain.

I wanted to be a hobo, and at thirteen I left home and walked the entire morning, feeling happy, euphoric, free. And since I had some of my mom's change in my pocket, around noon I bought two ham and cheese specials and a milkshake. And in the afternoon, since the sun was so hot I fell asleep on a park bench in the plaza, till the sirens of the fire trucks woke me up. But they went on by and I walked and walked, with dogs following me and without dogs following me, and then my knees started to hurt and the street lights went on, and when I was just about to start crying my mom saw me from across the street and called out a "Yoohoo" to me, and that was the end of my career as a hobo.

CAPTAIN

Andrés used to follow me everywhere because he hated my guts, and I felt this hatred so intensely that the only thing I could do was hate him back. And one day I couldn't stand it anymore, and I turned around and looked him in the eye, and then he turned too, and took off running. And then I began following him, and we hated each other intensely, but he never turned around and never looked me in the eye.

She came to the library every afternoon, and she always sat there studying her math. I was studying history, but the truth is, I wasn't studying much of anything, because I spent all my time checking her out from the corner of my eye and trying to see if she was checking me out. But we never checked at the same time, so we spent a whole semester checking to see if the other was checking. Till one afternoon Aurora . . .

CAPTAIN

... alias Beatriz ...

Although the Captain said it mechanically, it is as if a spell is broken.

PEDRO

All right, so you know everything, Captain, but that's not going to stop me from being dead. And I know more than I let on, too. For instance, I know that you people know that she doesn't know squat, and you know I know that.

We can bring her in just the same.

PEDRO

All the more reason to be dead, the sooner the better. The dead can't be blackmailed.

CAPTAIN

(After a long pause) Why is it I like you in spite of the stupidities you come up with?

PEDRO

Could it be because you like stupidities?

CAPTAIN

No, that's not it. What it is, is that you, Sir . . . (he stops himself, surprised; walks around the room a little) Sir? And why, just like that, all of a sudden, do I address you as Sir? (For the first time Pedro smiles) No, don't laugh: I suddenly felt like I ought to call you Sir. That's never happened to me before.

(Still smiling) Don't worry about it. In exchange I'll call you by your first name. Anastasio, isn't it? Tacho.

CAPTAIN

(He nods affirmatively) Okay, that seems fair.

PEDRO

(Almost gleeful) Shall we start?

CAPTAIN

Sure.

PEDRO

You go first.

CAPTAIN

No, Sir, you go first.

PEDRO

Have I already told you that I'm dead, Tacho? Oh,

yes, I told you when I was still calling you Captain. Fine, but before leaving this little topic I'd like you to untangle something that's been a puzzlement to me.

CAPTAIN

Oh, and it's got to do with me?

PEDRO

It's got to do with you, Tachito, for sure. You see, I'm trying to figure out how a man, if he isn't crazy, if he's not a beast, can become a torturer. (*He pauses*) Remember, I'm dead, so I'm not going to tell anybody. It's just for me, that's all.

CAPTAIN

(Speaking slowly) I am not that.

PEDRO

Oh, no?

CAPTAIN

I've already explained that to you.

But I don't buy your explanation, Tacho, you know what you are. (*He pauses*) Let's see, tell me how it came about. Childhood trauma? Deep conviction? Transitory alienation? Summer sessions at the School of the Americas?

CAPTAIN

(Shrugging his shoulders) All right, I'm an anticommunist.

PEDRO

Yes, I would imagine so. But that doesn't add up to an explanation. There are millions of anticommunists in the world who aren't torturers. The Pope, for instance.

CAPTAIN

Not all of them get to that stage. (He laughs, as if what he said was a joke)

PEDRO

Agreed, not all of them get there. But you, Tacho, how is it you got to that stage?

It's a long, drawn out story. No childhood trauma: not everything bad that happens in life is because of a trauma in childhood. It's more like one little change after another little change. No deep conviction, either; just sort of one small temptation after another—economic or ideological, it hardly matters. But always little by little. It's true I got the final push at the School of the Americas. With short and bearable little tortures to my own body, they showed me where the most sensitive spots are. But before that they taught me how to torture cats and dogs. Before, before: there's always a before. It's a gradual thing. Don't think, Sir, that it was fast, like some magic trick that turns a good boy into a callous monster. I'm no callous monster, at least not yet, but at the same time I can't remember anymore when I was that good boy. (He pauses) But why am I telling you all these things? Why am I confiding in you like this?

PEDRO

As they say, Better late than never.

CAPTAIN

The first tortures are horrible. Nearly always, I threw

up. But there comes a time toward morning when you quit vomiting, and then you're lost. Because four or five nights later you start to enjoy it. You're not going to believe me, Sir . . .

PEDRO

Don't worry, Tacho, I believe every word of it.

CAPTAIN

No, you're not going to believe it, but one night when we were prodding a girl—she wasn't even very pretty—prodding her . . . you follow me?

PEDRO

Yes, I follow you.

CAPTAIN

And she was screaming, crazed with pain, and she writhed and she writhed . . . (he stops)

PEDRO

And?

You're not going to believe me, but then I realized I had an erection. An erection, no less, under those circumstances. Doesn't that seem horrible to you?

PEDRO

Yes, it does.

CAPTAIN

And what's worse is that the next day when I went to bed with my wife I couldn't . . . and I started to get nervous . . . and I couldn't get . . .

PEDRO

But in the end you managed, right?

CAPTAIN

Yes, how did you know?

It's always that way.

CAPTAIN

But I could only get it up by concentrating like crazy on the girl of the night before, who wasn't even very pretty. Isn't that awful? To make it with my wife I had to picture that girl writhing from the cattle prod we'd shoved into her. What do you call that? There must be a scientific name for it.

PEDRO

The name is the least of it.

CAPTAIN

It's on account of this that I can't back up, and I can't back down: I've got to make you talk. I've come too far down this road, Sir. Now do you understand? Do you understand why you're going to have to talk?

PEDRO

I understand that you want me to understand.

That's why I had to begin calling you "Sir." Because if I just kept saying "You" to you, I wasn't going to get through to you.

PEDRO

Do you want me to tell you something, Tacho? There's no way you're going to be able to get through to me, Captain. Not if you're calling me Sir, and not if you're calling me You, or boy, or buddy, or your royal highness. Get it? That's the advantage of No. It's No, and that's it: No. You hear me, Captain? No! Did you hear, Tacho? Tachito? No! Have you heard, Captain? No!

PART FOUR

The same set. Pedro, or at least Pedro's body, is on the floor, hooded and motionless. In time some very weak little groans can be heard. The Captain enters, without coat and tie, sweaty, hair uncombed.

CAPTAIN

Oh, they brought you down early. (He touches the body with his foot) Pedro. (The body shows no signs of life) C'mon, Pedro, we've got work to do. (He goes to the sink, wets a towel, wrings it out a little, approaches the stretched out body, leans over it, removes the hood, and is plainly startled by the calamitous condition of Pedro's face. Even so, he pulls himself together, and with the damp towel begins to clean Pedro's facial wounds. Slowly, Pedro begins to move) Pedro.

PEDRO

Huh? (He opens an eye, but seems not to recognize the Captain)

CAPTAIN

What's up? Are you feeling better?

Huh?

CAPTAIN

Pedro, do you recognize me?

PEDRO

(Babbling) Unfortune . . . ately . . . yes.

The Captain helps Pedro into the chair but the prisoner cannot hold himself up. This time they've really done him in. The Captain takes off his belt and uses it to strap Pedro to the back of the chair so that he won't fall over. Gradually Pedro comes to, but he is obviously done for. In any case, there will continue to be a contradiction between the relative vitality that can still be seen in his face, and his physical ruin.

PEDRO

Is it the Captain?

Yes, sir, it is. Jeez, look what they did to you this time! They really fucked you up bad, Pedro. Fubar.

PEDRO

Not so bad . . . since . . . I was already dead.

CAPTAIN

Don't you think it's time you let up? You've already played the hero. Who'd be such a sonofabitch as to blame you if you talked at this point?

PEDRO

(He doesn't answer. After a silence) Captain, captain.

CAPTAIN

What is it?

PEDRO

You ever talk to yourself?

Well, maybe. Sometimes.

PEDRO

I do. I talk to myself.

incommunicado.

CAPTAIN

Why's that?

PEDRO

I talk to myself because for three months I've been

CAPTAIN

CAPTAIN

What do you mean? You talk to me.

PEDRO

That's not talk.

CAPTAIN

So what is it, then?

It's shit,	that's what it is. (He pauses) I talk to myself
because	I'm afraid that I'll forget how to talk.

CAPTAIN

But you talk to me.

PEDRO

I don't mean talking like to the enemy. I mean when you talk to a comrade, a brother.

CAPTAIN

Oh.

PEDRO

Captain, captain.

CAPTAIN

-Now what?

You ever feel like you're floating on air?

CAPTAIN

To tell you the truth, no.

PEDRO

Of course. You're not dead.

CAPTAIN

Neither are you, though you're working on the merit badges to get there.

PEDRO

Well, sometimes I float. And floating is beautiful. And then I float off to the seashore.

CAPTAIN

You don't go to jack shit. Not to the seashore, not to anywhere. You're right here, down to earth.

That's true, that's really right. Down to earth, buried in the earth, because I'm dead. But when I float I go to the seashore. Not every day, of course. Sometimes I'm not in the mood for it. Yesterday I felt like going, so I went. Years ago, when I used to go to the seashore—walking, not floating—I always used to see lovers out there, but they're gone now. They're off fighting against you guys now. They're prisoners, or in hiding, or in exile. (Long pause) What's your wife's name, Captain?

CAPTAIN

(Between clenched teeth) What's it to you?

PEDRO

You see? I gave you an opportunity to tell me nicely. But I know that her name is Inés.

CAPTAIN

(Surprised) And where'd you find that out?

PEDRO

I told you before: I know more about you than you

know about me. Inés. But don't worry, I also know she doesn't have an alias. Except that you call her Cups. But that's not an underground name. And lucky for her, right? Lately it's not so good to have an underground name.

CAPTAIN

Where are you going with this?

PEDRO

To my death, Captain, to my death.

CAPTAIN

What do you gain from not talking? That they beat the shit out of you?

PEDRO

Or that they stop beating the shit out of me.

CAPTAIN

Don't kid yourself, they're not going to stop.

If I die, they'll stop. And I'm dying.

CAPTAIN

But it takes a long time to die this way.

PEDRO

Not so long, not if one helps, if one collaborates.

CAPTAIN

(Quickly taken in) You're ready to collaborate?

PEDRO

(Speaking very slowly) I am ready to help myself die. (He pauses) I'm also ready to fix it so Inés will love you.

CAPTAIN

That you don't have to worry about: she loves me.

PEDRO

Yes, so far she does. But that's because she doesn't

quite know what it is you do for a living.

CAPTAIN

She might have an idea.

PEDRO

No. She doesn't have any idea. If she did, she would already have left you. She's not a bad person.

CAPTAIN

(Robot-like) Not a bad person.

PEDRO

And I also want to help you so that your children, the little boy and girl, don't hate you.

CAPTAIN

My kids don't hate me.

PEDRO

Sure, not yet, but they will eventually. Or maybe they don't go to school?

Only the boy.

PEDRO

But later on the little girl will go, too. And their little friends will be talking to each other about who you are. And the first time there's a fight and the name-calling starts up, your kids will find out. It stands to reason. And that's when they'll start hating you. And they'll never forgive you. You'll never get them back. You'll never know if . . . (He cannot continue talking. He passes out)

At first the Captain doesn't go near him. Lost in thought, he looks at Pedro without seeing him. Then he goes over to the sink, fills a glass up with water, turns toward Pedro, and throws the water in his face. Pedro slowly comes to.

CAPTAIN

Make no mistake, Sir, you're not dead yet. We're going to continue right here, face to face.

PEDRO

(Pulling himself together) Oh yes, speaking of Inés and the little ones.

That's enough!

PEDRO

(After a silence) Captain, how come you don't kill me?

CAPTAIN

You're out of your mind! And you're trying to make me crazy!

PEDRO

Why don't you kill me, Captain? It would be self-defense, I promise you that. Besides, I tried to escape. Remember the escape law? Bear up, Captain, you've got the chance to do your good deed for the day.

CAPTAIN

Aren't you talkative today!

PEDRO

I'm catching up a little for all that earlier silence. And what's more, you're the ideal person for a conversation.

CAPTAIN

Me?

PEDRO

You. Because you've got a guilty conscience, Tacho. It's very stimulating to know that the enemy has a guilty conscience. Because all that stuff you said about your not having been born a savage, was baloney, wishful thinking. You played the "bad cop," you did plenty of the dirty work, and not so long ago, either. We know about you, Captain. Maybe you have to make the hoods a little thicker. There's always someone who sees somebody. And I, for instance, don't just know the name of your wife; I know your name, too. And your alias.

CAPTAIN

You're mad! I haven't got an alias!

PEDRO

Sure you do. It's just that your alias isn't a name, it's a rank. Your alias is the rank of captain, when in fact you're a colonel. You're a colonel, Captain. So which way shall it be? Shall we have Rómulo and the captain, or the colonel and Pedro? What do you think, Captain? Eh, Colonel?

CAPTAIN

(Wincing from the blow) You know something? You're meaner than I am.

PEDRO

Why? Because I give you a dose of your own medicine? That's not so bad. Besides, you've still got the power: the cattle prod, the bucket with the shit, the clubs. I've got nothing. Except my negativity, my No.

CAPTAIN

That seems to you like a small thing?

PEDRO

No, it doesn't seem that little. But with my nega . . .

... fanatic ...

PEDRO

That's it, with my fanatical negativity, I up and disappear. I leave you with the door to the house wide open, or I should say, the door to the slaughterhouse.

The Captain looks defeated. Pedro is all worn out too. Finally the Captain looks up. He speaks as though in a trance.

CAPTAIN

No, Pedro. You're not mean, I'm looking for excuses. And because you aren't mean, you'll understand. You say, Sir, that you want me to be able to keep the love of my wife and children . . .

Without paying attention to what the Captain is saying, Pedro starts talking, and does so without any regard for his surroundings.

PEDRO

You've really never talked to yourself, Captain? I'm

here now, with you, but I'm going to talk to myself anyway. You'll see how somebody talks in situations like this. Pay attention, Captain. This is a demonstration of how one talks to oneself. (*He pauses*) Look, Aurora . . .

CAPTAIN

. . . alias Beatriz . . .

PEDRO

(As if not hearing the Captain's remark) Look, Aurora, I've had it. And I know that you're fucked, too, wherever you are. But I'm dead, and you, on the other hand, are still alive. I'm able to bear it all, all of it, all of it except for one thing: not having your hand to hold. That's the one thing I miss the most—your soft hand, your long, fine, sensitive fingers. I guess that's my only remaining attachment to life. If they'd give me only one merciful favor before I'm gone from it all, that's what I would ask for: to hold your hand for three, five, eight minutes. We were good together, Aurora...

CAPTAIN

(With a constricted throat) . . . alias Beatriz . . .

PEDRO

... you and I. You and I know what it means to trust someone else. That's why I would have wanted to hold your hand: because it would be the only way to tell you that I trust you, it would be the only way to feel your trust in me. And also to linger for a while with our trusting feelings of the past. Do you remember that March night four years ago, on the little beach near your folks' place? Do you remember how we lay for about two hours on the sand without speaking, staring up at the Milky Way as one might look at a ceiling? I remember how all of a sudden I started to move my hand over the sand toward you, without looking at you, and just then I found that your hand was moving toward me. And our hands met each other half way. Think of it, that this is the recollection I remember best. Also there's your body, your hair, and your mouth, too-how could I not remember all that? But the image that I remember best is that night on the beach. Aurora . . .

CAPTAIN

(Sobbing) . . . alias Beatriz . . .

. . . when you tell Andrés, tell him a little at a time. Don't hit him brutally with the news. That sort of thing puts a permanent scar on a childhood. Explain it to him little by little, starting at the beginning, and wait until you're sure he's understood one part before you go on to begin the next one, just like you do when you tell him stories. Gradually, so it doesn't hurt, get him to understand that this didn't come about because of some heated argument or a fit of passion or some irrational hunch, but it grew out of a mature decision, a process. Explain it to him well, using those precise and tender words that you're so good at. Tell him that he doesn't have to agree with all of it, but that he has a duty to understand it. I know that leaving him without a father at a time like this is like an act of aggression that I'm committing against him, or at least he may come to feel it that way, if not today then some day later on, or maybe some night when he's lying awake, unable to sleep. I'm counting on your superb power of persuasion to convince him that with my death I'm not assaulting him, but rather, in my way, trying to save him. I could have saved my life by informing on others, and I didn't do that. But if I had done it, then that surely would have destroyed him. Today, he'd probably be happy if his daddy would have come home, but nine or ten years from now it would have him beating his

head against the walls. Tell him, when he's able to understand it, that I love him enormously, and that my only message is that he should never betray anybody. Will you tell him that? But, for that one, rehearse it several times beforehand, so you don't cry when you say it. What you're saying loses its force if you're crying, don't you agree? Once upon a time, you and I used to talk about these things, when it looked like victory was a sure thing and just around the corner. Now, it still seems a sure thing, but it's become more distant. I'm not going to see it, and that's a pity. But you and Andrés will see it, and that's a lucky thing. Now, give me your hand. Ciao, Aurora . . .

CAPTAIN

(Crying, hysterically) Alias Beatriz!

A long silence ensues.

Pedro, after all that effort, is overwhelmed. Perhaps he has again lost consciousness. His body is leaning to one side; the only reason he doesn't fall is because the belt keeps him fastened to the chair. The Captain, for his part, is also undone, but his deterioration of course means something different, and this should be obvious. He is holding his head with his hands, and for a time can be heard moaning. Then, slowly he pulls himself together, and although Pedro is apparently unconscious, he begins to speak to him.

Pedro, you are dead, and I am too. By different causes, to be sure. Mine is a death by entrapment, by ambush. I got caught in the ambush and there's no way out. I'm trapped. If I told you that I can't get out of this, you would say that's only natural, because it would mean giving up the comforts, the two cars, and so on. But that's not it. I could let go of all that without any regrets. If I don't quit, it's because I'm afraid they'd do to me the same thing they're doingthat we're doing—to you. And I'm sure you'd say to me, "Hey, you'll see, you'll be able to take it." Well you, Sir, you can bear up, because you have something to believe in, something to hold on to. I don't. But although I can't see any way out, there's something that can work sort of half-way for me. I already know that Inés and my children may come to hate me if the details of what I've done and what I'm doing ever come to light. But if I do all this and still get nothing in return—like the way it's been with you up till now-there's no possible way I can justify it. If you die without giving up a single piece of information, then I'm a total failure, a total disgrace. But if you do say something, that would give me some justification. It would mean my cruelty hasn't been for nothing, it'll have accomplished its purpose. That's all I ask of you. I'm pleading with you. Never mind four first names and last

names, just give me one name. You choose it: Gabriel or Rosario or Magdalena or Fermín. One little name. Choose the one who means the least to you, the one you don't like as much, even if it's the one who is the least important. I don't know if you understand me: I'm not asking you for information here to save the regime, just for a little piece of information to save me, or rather, to save some small part of myself. I'm only asking you for a measly little justification, so that Inés and my kids won't see me as a hopeless sadist, so they'll be able to see me as a respectable investigator, a worthwhile professional. If not, it's all over for me. (The Captain takes a few steps toward Pedro and falls to his knees before him) Pedro, we've only got a little bit of time left, very little time. For you, and for me. But you're leaving, and I'm staying behind. Pedro, this is a plea from a shattered man. You're not inhuman, you're a sensitive man. You're capable of loving other people, of suffering for them, of dying for them. Pedro, I beg you: say a first name and last name, just one first and last name. That's all I'm asking. The victory will be yours as well as mine.

Pedro moves a little. He tries to right himself, but cannot. He tries again and finally sits up straight. The Captain resorts to a desperate ploy.

I ask you, Rómulo. I beg to Rómulo. I fall to my knees before Rómulo! Rómulo. Will you give me a name? A first and last name: will you give me only that?

PEDRO

(With great effort) No . . . Captain.

CAPTAIN

Then . . . I ask Pedro, I beg Pedro. I fall to my knees before Pedro! I appeal not to the underground name, but to the man. On my knees I implore the true Pedro.

PEDRO

(He opens his eyes wide, almost dead) No . . . Colonel!

Lights shine on the face of Pedro. The Captain, on his knees, remains in the shadows.

FINIS-THE END