The slave / Hans Kirk ; translated and with an introduction by Marc Linder.

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The Slave

Hans Kirk
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The Slave

O, holy mother of God,
let our enemies die,
and give us a successful voyage
across the salty sea.

Old Spanish seaman's song.

Translated and with an Introduction by

Marc Linder

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Introduction

The conclusion is inescapable that the gold and silver which the men on the treasure ships brought to Spain and which, if they were imbued with the prevailing mercantilist philosophy, they imagined were going to enrich the motherland after the fashion of King Midas, merely served to impoverish the working-classes and provide windfalls for the trading-classes. . . . The gold and silver of the Indies . . . precipitated a price revolution in all Christendom, and in most countries the lag of wages behind prices bestowed even greater windfalls upon the rising bourgeoisie than in Andalusia. This augmentation of profits was probably the greatest single factor in the rise of modern capitalism.1

Hans Kirk, who lived from 1898 to 1962, was one of Denmark’s leading novelists during the quarter-century beginning with the publication in 1928 of The Fishermen, which has become the best-selling Danish novel of all time.2 Always a politically engaged author, Kirk mastered several fictional genres, including short stories and novellas; in addition he turned out thousands of journalistic pieces.

Kirk wrote the manuscript to The Slave in 1941-42 while incarcerated in a prison in Copenhagen and at Horserød, a World War I-era detention camp north of the capital. Immediately after the German occupation of Denmark on April 9, 1940, the Danish police placed at the Gestapo’s disposal a special registry of Communists it had collected listing Kirk as chairman of the Danish Communist Party’s literature group. He was among the first Communists arrested by the Danish police on June 22, 1941—the day Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union—in response to demands by the Gestapo.3

2Hans Kirk, The Fishermen (Marc Linder trans.; 2d ed; Iowa City: Făn-pìhuà, 2000 [1999]).
3Børge Houmann, “Om baggrunden for disse breve og deres udgivelse,” in Hans Kirk, Breve fra Horserød 7-16 at 8 (Børge Houmann ed.; n.p.: Sirius,
The Germans, Kirk joked later, had been “so friendly as to burn” the manuscript of this “picaresque and exciting history of a treasure ship”4 after his escape from Horserød on August 29, 1943. The impact of incarceration on Kirk is manifest in the use that his allegory about power makes of a seventeenth-century Spanish colonial backdrop to illuminate questions of accommodation of and resistance to Nazi subjugation.5

According to Kirk’s own account, he and his fellow prisoners faced a “desperate situation” in late 1941 and early 1942: “We had to ask ourselves the question whether it was necessary to capitulate to Nazism, which Social Democracy at that time was prepared to do. The book was meant as a kind of answer to this question.” Three years after the war Kirk decided to write the book all over again—despite the “tremendous difficulty” that he and most writers experienced resuming work on a book that they had already believed finished—because he felt that that question was still topical.6

While Nazi conquest of Europe formed the motive for writing The Slave, Kirk happened on the material for the plot serendipitously. In an interview with the Communist Party newspaper two weeks before the novel appeared in 1948, Kirk observed that “it was by pure coincidence that I found an article about the sub-

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4Johannes Weltzer, “Hans Kirk—en Digter midt i Hverdagen,” Information, July 5, 1945, at 5, at 6, col. 2. According to one of Kirk’s friends, comrades had buried his manuscript under the barracks, but it had been removed by the time Kirk came to get it after liberation. Kirk, Breve fra Horserød at 39.

5In this sense, one reviewer’s criticism that “many of the novel’s ideological conversations torpedo the framework. 17th-century Spain disappears, once again we’re in Vestre Fængsel,” missed the point. Niels Kaas Johansen, “Den farlige tendens,” Information, Nov. 10, 1948, at 4, col. 1, 4.

6Eric [Danielsen], “Mennesket må selv gribe ind i sin tilværelse,” Land og Folk, Sept. 26, 1948, at 9, col. 1. A social-democratic reviewer disagreed vehemently, arguing that while in a pinch one could understand that a novel written during the Nazi occupation could teach a “gospel of hate,” publishing it three years after the war without revisions was “trist.” F[rederik]. N[ielsen]., “Herba diaboli,” Social-Demokraten, Nov. 20, 1948, at 7, col. 4.
ject in an American journal, and afterwards I investigated it more closely.”  He had time to do research in prison, and a librarian helped him obtain books from the Royal Library in Copenhagen including four books in German and English about the Antilles published in the middle of the seventeenth century. (Indeed, Kirk complained to the Justice Minister that the prison administration, which was responsible for returning the books to the Royal Library, had refused to give him a receipt confirming that he had handed them over; he observed that, given his economic circumstances, he would not be able to satisfy any financial demands made by the library in case these rare and expensive books were lost.)

The novel, according to Kirk, was “based on an authentic event” in 1679 concerning a three-masted Spanish ship, “one of the world’s richest gold ships . . . on the way from the Spanish possessions in South America to Barcelona.”

Nevertheless, *The Slave* was not intended as an historically accurate portrayal of the seventeenth-century event itself. In—

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7Eric, “Mennesket må selv gribe ind i sin tilværelse” at 9, col. 1.
8Kirk, *Breve fra Horserød* at 36-38 (letter of November 2, 1941).
9Eric, “Mennesket må selv gribe ind i sin tilværelse” at 9, col. 1. For a report—a Danish translation of excerpts from the article amounting to an outline of the book’s plot—that Kirk sent to the librarian in 1941, see Bo Elbrønd-Bek, “Breve fra Hans Kirk vedrørende ‘Slaven,’” *Danske studier* 111-24 at 116-17 (1983). Extensive searches of periodicals indexes failed to identify the article. Nor does the leading monograph on shipwrecks in the Western Hemisphere mention a Spanish gold ship from 1679. Robert F. Marx, *Shipwrecks of the Western Hemisphere, 1492-1825* (New York: World, 1971). Morten Thing, Kirk’s biographer, confirmed that no one has verified the existence of this article. Email from Morten Thing to Marc Linder (May 26, 2000).
10Bo Elbrønd-Bek, “At sejle er nødvendigt: Ikke at leve—et essay om Hans Kirks roman *Slaven*,” in *Bag ved bøgernes hjørn*: *En hilsen til Mogens Iversen* 191-213 at 193 (Copenhagen: Danmarks Biblioteksskole, 1978). One example of deviation from the historically representative is the portrayal of the ship as sailing alone, whereas in fact Spanish ships carrying large quantities of bullion (which by the late seventeenth century was overwhelmingly silver rather than gold) sailed in large, state-bureaucratically organized, convoyed treasure fleets for protection against pirates. Clarence Haring, *Trade and Navigation Between Spain and the Indies in the Time of the Hapsburgs* (1918). The abominable hygienic conditions, even for wealthy passengers, were much
indeed, Kirk’s presentist orientation was reinforced by the practicalities of reconstructing the lost manuscript at a time when he was fully involved in post-World War II Communist Party politics and presumably lacked the time to duplicate all the research he had done while in prison. In an interview with him, *Land og Folk*, Kirk’s own Communist Party newspaper, correctly noted that “no one seriously believes that Kirk buried himself in historical material if it wasn’t at the same time to say something about the present, on which in contrast to so many other authors he has taken a clear and unambiguous position.”

Hans Scherfig, another outstanding left-wing Danish novelist, called *The Slave* “the weightiest literary work of the occupation period.” And a reviewer in the Communist Party newspaper went so far as to assert: “If the Germans had not been so thorough in burning the manuscript . . . *The Slave* could have appeared illegally in 1943 and become the Danish resistance’s most powerful document and the resistance struggle’s strongest literary spur.”

Kirk, a talented story teller, embedded his political-moral meditation on power in a plot thick with what an early reviewer called the “features of a bloody and violent sensational film.” The full spectrum of class hierarchy is represented on this ship of fools: high-ranking Spanish colonial administrative, military, and judicial officials, a catholic inquisitor, aristocratic estate and slave owners, an immensely rich female capitalist, and an English puritan merchant-capitalist populate the upper-class deck,
while the lower-class deck houses sailors, cannoneers, and Indian and black slaves. Kirk, as novelist and poet Tom Kristensen observed, succeeds in “deftly dissecting” these ideological social types and “numbering their bones with amusing Marxist numerals. . . .”15

Kirk considered The Slave his best book: “I have in any event written one readable book—The Slave—the rest you can sweep off the table.”16 Within four years of its appearance, The Slave had been translated into six languages—Norwegian, Swedish, German, Dutch, Polish, and Icelandic—and came out a few years later in Hungarian and Slovak as well. After more than half a century, the book remains in print in Denmark’s leading paperback classical literature imprint.17

Marc Linder

Acknowledgments

English-language readers are very fortunate indeed that Elias Bredsdorff, dean of Danish literary critics and for 30 years professor of Danish at Cambridge University, generously checked the entire translation against the original. That he found so few errors was in part the result of the answers that Gitte Gaarvig Sørensen (Special-pædagogisk forlag), Bente Villadsen and Palle Jørgensen (The University of Iowa), Søren Nørby (Royal Danish Naval Museum), and Søren Beltoft (Dansk Sprognaevn) had previously given to questions about unusual Danish words and grammatical constructions. Kirk's biographer Morten Thing (Roskilde Universitetscentre) and literary critic Bo Elbrønd-Bek (Copenhagen University) provided background information. Helli Skaerbak (Roskilde Universitetscentre Library) furnished copies of hard-to-find newspaper articles. Marjorie Rahe passed judgment on the translation's readability, while Larry Zacharias, Judy Polumbaum, and Jan Weissmiller read drafts and suggested hundreds of changes.
Cast of Characters
(in order of appearance)

Juan Gomez—soldier retiring to Spain
Pablillo— overseer
Count Guilemo Castillon—old estate owner
Don Pedro de Carajaval—viceroy
Don Jesus—inquisitor
Doña Inez Escobedo—wealthy capitalist
José Nuñez—mate
Pablo Avarano—intellectual and colonial scribe
Mariello Corridan—noseless soldier retiring to Spain
Indian slave girl owned by don Luis de Zuniga
Pancuiaco—Indian slave owned by doña Inez
Don Vargas—Jesuit priest
Don Francisco de Elinaz—oidor (judge)
Don Luis de Zuniga—officer and nobleman
Samuel Rayburn—English merchant
Colonel Juan Gonzales—army officer
Chaparrito—boatswain
Alberto—old sailor
Christobal—mulatto sailor
Portuguese sailor
Fray Ramon—Dominican teacher at Mexican university
Captain van Laahr
Don Guilemo’s Negro slave
Old sailor
The soldier Juan Gomez’s head was heavy from drinking and the heat when he got up from his empty glass in the tavern to go on board. His gaunt face with its suntanned skin and drooping, gray mustache remained impassive as he flung the money on the counter for the last time.

It was in the middle of the hot afternoon, and the sun sparkled from the sky. A broiling brimstone-colored haze lay over the land. The sunlight shone like a flash of fire from the white-caulked walls, and the apple-green and blue shutters were shut in front of the windows. The palms in front of the inquisition building on the square cast a shadow. It was like a cool sea in the noon heat.

In the broad warehouses in Veracruz’s harbor square all the doors and hatches were wide open. Negroes hauled cases and boxes down to the lighters, which ferried the freight out to the San Salvador. Once in a while an overseer jumped into the line and with his leather whip thrashed the black bodies, which were shiny with sweat.

The bells of The Sacred Heart Church began to chime—worship services were being held for the San Salvador’s successful voyage. A procession moved slowly across the harbor square and the work stopped. While the priests in white and violet attire and the altar boys with swinging censers passed by, the Negroes bent in the dust, and the overseers knelt with their hands folded over their whips. The sweet odor of the incense mingled with the rotten stench of seaweed from the beach. A heavily ornamented gilt painting of the Madonna was respectfully lifted down into a pram and with its procession of priests and choir-boys rowed out to the ship, which pitched gently at anchor.

Juan Gomez ran straight into the arms of his old comrade, the overseer Pablillo. He was heavy and red-blazed with a heaving belly as round as a ball and an iron-bound wooden leg, which resounded on the sun-baked earth. He slapped Juan heartily with his whip.

— Are you there, you son of a bull, he shouted. Has the day
— The great day of your stupidity?
— The day has come, Juan said. And the hour too.
— Nobody’s gone on board yet, Pablillo said. She doesn’t weigh anchor until the tide turns, and it’s all too early. Come, you son of a bull, I have a keg sitting in the shade.

He raised the whip, bolted in long hops over to the line of slaves, and laid a blow on a slave’s back.
— Speed it up, you heathen dogs, or I’ll whip the living daylights out of you. Move it or by the Madonna’s nipples I’ll flay your skin off.

The line turned faster than a snake trying to escape. One heard the slaves’ heavy moaning and the Negro Pablillo had hit shrieking with pain.

They’re lazy to the very bottom of their black souls, Pablillo said. If you look away for a second, the work stops. But let’s go, little brother, I’ve stashed a keg to bid you farewell.

Pablillo had hidden the wine keg behind the warehouse. They sat down on the ground under a palm tree—here in the shade it felt as if in a well of coolness. Pablillo took the first swig from the leather keg and handed it over to his friend. Juan put his head back and took a deep swig.
— You’re stupid, Pablillo said, looking at him earnestly. Why are you going home? What’s there for you to do there? You think they’re going to receive you like a nobleman? No, in a few months you’ll smarten up and attest to the truth of my words.
— Maybe I’ll buy a vineyard, Juan replied.
— To toil and drudge like a peasant and cultivate wine you can’t even afford to drink yourself. You’ll take a young wife into bed and in ten years she’ll be a shrewish sow who’ll cheat on you with every tramp who comes along. Isn’t the land here good enough for us? Back home they toil harder than mules, and get no thanks for it. Here we’re the ones who crack the whip, and others have to do the dirty work.
— I think I’ll buy myself a vineyard, Juan Gomez said and looked coolly at his gnarled hands with their broad, square nails. One can sit down on the bench in the inn next to the alcalde. I
can get a good piece of property, and there’ll still be money left over.

— And still you’re nothing but a beggar. You’ve lived our life and aren’t a peasant any more. I’ll be damned if I ever travel home.

Pablillo took a deep swig from the keg and lay down comfortably while he talked on.

— What were we when we came here thirty years ago, half-dead from seasickness and scurvy? A flock of damn greenhorns who had just let go of the nipple. We were dumb as snot, and they could do anything they wanted with us. They hauled us through wilderness and deserts, over mountains and damned plains, and we dropped dead like flies. They made us believe that if we just starved and thirsted long enough, in the end we’d get more gold than we could haul. Of course, their officers got their repartimientos, large estates with Indian slaves, and we got a bare ass. The big people have the big mouths, and we have only a little mouth, and most of us got it full of dirt.

— You’re right, Juan said. For most of us it wasn’t a good country. And that’s why I’m going home.

— You’re as dumb as the day you got here, little brother, Pablillo said. What are we supposed to do here on earth if we don’t learn from our mistakes? There are two kinds of people, those over there—he got half up and pointed to the slaves with the whip—and those who own them. They’re made to be slaves, to drudge away, till one fine day the devil comes to fetch them. They’re made to starve and be beaten, they have an immortal soul, you say, but I say no, where’s it supposed to be? They’re flesh and nothing but flesh, and when they die, they fly right to hell, where the devil perhaps can use them for something or other. There are two kinds of people, I’ll tell you once again, those who own everything and those who are in debt right to the marrow of their bones, and you yourself have to choose where you want to belong. Drink the wine, you son of a bull.

— When I buy my farm, I’ll own it, and nobody will have any say over me, Juan said calmly. And I have my belt full, gold all around my waist.
— And you'll take a young woman into your bed, you goat, and get a house full of lousy kids. And the harvest fails, or you get sick, and your money was used up long ago. You try to scrape by, but one fine day you have to borrow money, and then the game has begun. Before you know what hit you, you've become a poor wretch who has to toil for others, and you yourself eat moldy bread and drink sour wine, and the alcalde asks you to beat it if you sit down next to him in the inn with lice crawling on you. No, look at me. I'm a man who's served a long time, who has lost a leg, but gotten a good mind instead, and I have my connections on the right side. I expect to become harbor bailiff when old Rodrigo kicks the bucket. It's a good position and doesn't require much work. But if I had both legs and weren't so fat, I'd prefer to be a calpixqui on an estate. Son, why don't you become calpixqui instead of going home and spending your old age rooting around in sheep dung?

Juan shrugged his shoulders without answering, and Pablillo continued:

— What's a poor wine-grower compared to a calpixqui, indeed, what's a famished grandee compared to him? No more than a flea you can snap between your nails. He doesn't own the estate, but the owner is far away, and he who is closest is master. It must be a helluvan idiot of a calpixqui who doesn't know how to administer a repartimiento so he gets his ample share. And in extras he has everything his heart can desire. If he sees a fat hen, it ends up in his pot. If he feels like having a woman, he takes her. It's his right, and if the Indians don't know it, he can quickly teach them. Have you ever thought about what rules the world, you son of a mad bull?

Juan shook his head.

— It's the whip. It's the whip that keeps everything going. What do you think they'd get out of the whole deal if they didn't know how to crack it? What do you think would become of the grandees, bishops, cardinals, yes even the king himself, if people like me didn’t know how to get the most pain out of an ox-hide whip? Think a bit about things, son. The monks say we've conquered the country to teach the Indians the true faith and to save
their souls. But do I slaughter a hen perhaps to save its soul, or do I preach to the ox I turn on the spit? No, I eat the ox with a hearty appetite and without the slightest thought of its immortal soul, and I crack the whip simply because it’s needed. I crack the whip, and it’s the whip that governs. Look at the blacks over there. If I say to one of them: go, you black bastard, and beat your own brother to death because I can’t stand his face, he’ll obey. He knows that otherwise I’ll whip him till his guts gush out of his black belly. God has the kingdom, the power, and the glory in heaven, they preach, but here it’s people like us who have the power if we ourselves want to have it. What’s a hand without a knife? You and I have been knives, and I want to remain being a knife.

— Your wine is strong, Juan Gomez said.
— Strong and good, you won’t get any better in Castille, Pablillo nodded.

Out from the San Salvador one heard the choirboys’ high, silver-clear voices, while the picture of the Madonna was being carried from fore to aft and the deck and the masts sprinkled with holy water. The last load was stowed, and the Negro slaves sat tired by the warehouse walls in a narrow strip of shade. It smelled of heat, sweat, rotten seaweed and dust deep down in the lungs. But in the air was a hint of evening cooling, which in a bit would ripple in over the coast out from the lazily foaming surf.

The passengers began to come, on foot or in sedan chairs, high officials, clerics, estate owners, officers, and merchants. And little by little the wharf was filled to overflowing with people who came to say farewell to those who were to go on the long voyage, and curious people who wanted to see the San Salvador weigh anchor. Right near where Juan Gomez and Pablillo were sitting four Negroes came across the harbor square’s reddish-yellow encrusted earth with a sedan chair in tow. Behind the white curtains a little bald-headed man sat on soft pillows in the tropical heat. His face protruded like an inquisitive monkey’s, yellow and bony with a thin beard, resembling withered grass. His eyes lay deep in his cranium, and his hand, which hung flaccid out over the sedan chair with horny, bluish-black
nails, resembled the claw on a dead bird.

— It’s don Guilemo, Pablillo said, and instinctively whispered. They say he’s a hundred years old if he isn’t even older. Who knows? Satan holds his hand over him. Last week he condemned a mestizo because he drunkenly went by a procession without taking his hat off, and now he’s sitting and waiting to be roasted. But don Guilemo is engaged in sorcery with the native magicians and everybody knows it, but nobody does anything to him. So you see yourself it’s a matter of choosing where you want to belong. Think about it, son, now we have to empty the keg before you go on board.

Pablillo shook himself grudgingly as if compelled to say something he actually didn’t feel like saying.

— This is a good country, he said. My father was the executioner’s helper in Córdoba. He knew his trade, people were never hanged or decapitated, burned or broken on the wheel as well or as punctually as when he took care of it. But he had his own mug in the inn, and people moved out of the way when he went to mass. And strangers seldom came to our house. But although he was the ablest of the executioner’s helpers, he never became executioner when the old man died. They chose another who had connections—see, that’s the way it went. I ran away from home when I was twelve and starved and had a helluva time. It was a damned life, but here I am, white man and hidalgo. I have to bow to some people, but most have to bow to me. I don’t want to return home to sit at the end of the table and drink the wine others have spat in. If somebody exasperates me, I use the whip, and it sprouts bloody streaks. Maybe it’s not on the back I hate, but on somebody else’s back. But the anger is quenched in me, and I can enjoy life again.

— You can also get tired of being a knife, Juan said. And a hand can be used for something else than wielding a knife. I’m not young, and I yearn for peace and quiet. I’ll get married and have children, and when you come home some time, you’ll taste my wine.

— The heart has two halves, Pablillo said. The one yearns, the other wants to stay. And the one wants good, the other evil.
Maybe my father shed tears in his soul when he whipped a thief at the whipping post. Maybe he was taking revenge for all the injuries that had been inflicted on him. Who knows? Holy Madonna, who knows another human being? But others’ weakness makes us strong, and our weakness gives others strength. Which is it better to be, strong or weak?

— I don’t know anything about that, Juan said. My desire isn’t to feel my own strength or to sense how hard I can crack a whip. I came here because I was poor just like you. They paid me my wages to march through the country and keep conquering new land and new cities, to get them more goods. I don’t know whether they had a right to it. I got my wages. I did what they demanded of me. Now the time has come when I want to live my own life.

— A lousy peasant’s life, Pablillo objected.

— Maybe some of my family are still alive. We were many brothers and sisters, and we were very poor.

— And now you want to sire children into the same poverty. I wonder how many children you have here.

— How can I know that?

— The tree casts its fruit and doesn’t know where it sprouts, Pablillo said. This country is a gift of god to people like us, and you want to reject it. I’ll donate a candle for you, little brother, for your sin is great. In fact, maybe I’ll have a mass read for your soul. But by all the saints I’ll come to miss you for all the years we’ve known each other. And what kind of people are they sending over here these days? They come with noble names as long as hunger years and with bottomless pockets they want filled before the next ship sails back.

A lean boy with bluish-black hair came running, snatched Pablillo’s ox-hide whip and darted over to a Negro, who had gone and stood near the warehouse to relieve himself. With his thin muscular arms he cracked the whip, while his boyish voice resounded:

— You swine, you son of a black whore. You think you can stand there where people can see you? And in a little while the procession is going to pass by. You intend to piss right in the
Madonna’s face? I’ll whip you till your skin is hanging in shreds, you swine, you black dog.

The slave rushed off with the boy after him, and Pablillo’s face sparkled with delight.

— That rascal’s got guts, he said. He’s got the knack—see how well he places the blows—they strike just where they hurt most. He knows what a whip’s for.

— The boy gives you satisfaction, Juan said. He resembles you.

— More my father, Pablillo smiled. He had it in his fingers—I don’t. I can whip all right so they fall down on the ground and give up the ghost, these devil’s animals, but it’s not good, little brother, because a black devil is worth money. But the rascal can play with them, the way my father could, like a cat with a mouse. He torments them half to death, but no more than that. Give the rascal a whip, and he can manage a whole slave gang. And I have four of that kind at home in the hut. They’re half-bloods, but it’s my blood that rules.

— Now it’s time to go on board, Juan said. Farewell, Pablillo, and thanks for good and bad days.

They embraced, and Pablillo had tears in his eyes.

— My son, you damn bull, you’re the last of the old ones, he complained. It’s going to get damned dreary here when you’re gone. Nobody to talk to about the past. Now one can sit alone with one’s wine in the inn because the young people have their own lives to live. Sometimes one feels like asking the devil to take the whole thing, wife and children and house and slaves, but cheer up. Some time I’ll visit you in your wretchedness in Spain and donate a cask of wine for you and buy you a beautiful girl, you goat.

— So let’s look forward to seeing each other again, and blessed be your future, Juan said and walked down to the pram, which was waiting to take the last passengers aboard. He stood and looked in toward land, while the pram ferried out to the San Salvador. He had drunk much wine that day, said farewell to his few friends, and now was on his way. In his hand he had a parcel, and around his waist inside his jacket he was wearing a
strong leather belt, which was full of heavy gold pieces. That was for thirty years' sweat and toil in the new country.

He didn’t notice the other passengers on the boat. He stood and stared in toward the sun-scorched land behind the town with its churches and patrician houses, its miserable Indian huts, gambling houses, convents, whorehouses, and merchants’ stalls, and in his sluggish, hazy brain a series of confused images formed. A hard life, he mumbled, a damned hard life, and for what pleasure?

In thirty sun-scorched years he had eaten soldiers’ bread. He had marched through jungles, where you gasped for breath in the hot, damp vapor and chopped your way through the tough garlands of creepers with machete in hand. He had wandered through deserts where the only vegetation was cactus plants with yellow and flaming-red flowers. He had seen the moon shine over valleys where silver-white streams twisted their way through bamboo woods so green your eyes didn’t want to believe it. He had conquered new lands and towns, mines, plantations, and mighty estates. He had drunk ouieo, the intoxicating beer of cassava meal, poured himself full of palm-wine, enjoyed the brown women, and confessed his sins like a Christian.

A joyless life, he thought. A paltry life. I wonder how many people I’ve killed. Once I had a count on that. What’s a life all told worth today?

He brooded a bit about that and said to himself that in any case the price of human life in this new country was not high. And nevertheless life grew, like the wilderness in the hot swamp land, which put down roots and unfolded, it twisted like green liana around withered trunks; everywhere it teemed with life, with poisonous snakes, which hissed in the grass, with graceful gazelles and motley birds. It was a life that grew hectically and poisonsly and breathed death and putrefaction.

Then he caught sight of Pablillo standing in the harbor square and cracking the whip goodbye. He raised both arms and waved back.
The San Salvador was a three-masted galleon of five hundred tons with a crew of ninety-two men, Spanish and Portuguese sailors and Negro slaves and about a dozen Spanish cannoneers. The ship was owned by a shipping company in Barcelona and was regularly engaged in the new world trade. It was a fast-sailing gold transport ship, strong and well built. It had a dozen small passenger cabins, which could hold twenty prominent passengers, but on this voyage forty passengers were squeezed together in them. Moreover, reasons of etiquette had necessitated giving three of them private cabins: the viceroy don Pedro de Carajaval, the inquisitor don Jesus, and doña Inez Escobedo.

Don Pedro was viceroy in one of the western states and had received an official summons to put in an appearance at court. He was a small, gaunt man with small, cold coal-black eyes and a yellowish, immovable face. An invitation to the court was synonymous with an order, and despite his liver disease don Pedro had immediately embarked on the long voyage with his retinue of functionaries and officers. It was part of good form to bring gifts along to the royal house and the most influential courtiers, and don Pedro during his entire tenure in office collected precious things in order to be able to make his appearance with splendor appropriate to his station when he was sent for one day. When the invitation finally came, he imposed on the Indians in his provinces a head tax and had it collected with an iron hand, half for the crown, half for himself, and a little bit of life came into his sad face when he thought about the recognition he would receive at the very highest level for the taxes he brought along.

His boxes with gold and silver bars, with expensive gold ornaments and precious stones, were carried on the backs of mules and slaves over mountains and through the jungle, in the sun, which made the earth burn under the soles of their feet, and in the high mountains’ thin air, which made every burden twice as heavy. If a mule stumbled, the cases were loaded onto the Indians they fetched from the closest village, and many had fallen
on the way and were left behind in the mountains when the whip was unable to get them on their feet. Besides the gifts for the court, he brought along his whole private fortune in heavy gold bars, and it was his hope that the king would give him an office at home which corresponded to his rank and deserts. He had enough gold—he wanted to be one of Spain’s richest men. Don Pedro had spent a generation building the foundation for the existence he now wanted to enjoy.

Don Pedro and his retinue were escorted on board by the governor accompanied by displays of military honors, while don Jesus had stolen on board without anyone’s having taken notice and immediately locked the door to his cabin. Doña Inez was not accompanied by any large retinue either. She had only a chambermaid along and an Indian slave, whom the aging mate José Nuñez showed down to the orlop deck, where the ordinary passengers put on board with the crew.

— Make sure that he gets the best food here on board, doña Inez said. I bought him to use as a gift. I don’t want to have him wind up looking totally wretched on the voyage.

And with the chambermaid in tow she went to arrange things in her cabin.

The San Salvador pitched while dragging its anchors in the evening breeze as the last passengers boarded. The deck was swarming with people, and José Nuñez looked at them pensively, while they found the places they belonged. Some in the fashionable cabins, others on the orlop deck, which lay right over the cargo hold and under the water line, so there was no more air than could escape down through the cabin stairwell.

José Nuñez had seen many people travel out and about as many return home. Ship after ship had made the dangerous voyage across the ocean, heavily laden with silver and gold from Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico. And thousands of young adventurers had sailed toward the west lured by the old tales of silver temples where all four walls were covered with gold plates from the floor to the roof and where over the altar blazed a mighty sun of gold with rays like fire of emeralds and precious stones. Who had not heard with a palpitating heart of Manico
Serra de Leguizano, who got the sun-painting in Cuzco as booty and gambled it away in one night?

If the gold plates had existed, they weren’t there any more, and if the Indians had hidden their gold, they also knew how to guard it. Not just anybody got hold of it, and as a rule the stupid adventurers from Spain returned home empty-handed. José Nuñez cautiously looked around and took a bite of the tobacco plant he had secretly become addicted to chewing. After all, he had known someone, a reprobate Franciscan, Huanuco, who asserted that he had seen the Indians’ secret treasure. He was a gambler and drunkard, but the Indians loved him. Lord knows why. One night he was playing cards at a bordello and was cleaned out down to his shirt. He rushed home and fetched some money that he had lying around and that belonged to the church. He also lost that, and when the last penny had gone into the others’ pockets, he knocked his head against the floor in his cell and uttered a shriek of despair mixed with burning prayers. He noticed a hand touch his shoulder—it was one of his Indian parish children.

— Don’t cry, pious father, the Indian said. We’ll give you more gold than you can use.

And the next night the Indians led the monk with his eyes blindfolded on a long, laborious route to a rocky cave. Here they took the blindfold from his eyes, and by the glimmering of the torch he saw the gold lying in heaps.

— Take as much as you can carry, the Indians said, and Huanuco took his cowl off, filled it like a sack with gold and put it on his neck. Once in a while he had to rest, and each time he loosened a bead in his rosary and let it fall to the ground. Maybe then he’d be able to find his way to the cave again. But the next morning an Indian put all the beads in front of him in his cell.

— You lost them in the night, pious father, he said gently.

Huanuco died of drink, and maybe his story was pure invention, for truth is a rare commodity, José knew. Now on this trip he had heard of a young Indian girl who had fallen in love with a Spaniard and promised him a gold treasure if he’d be true to her. One morning the two of them were found in bed with
their throats slit. The girl’s parents and siblings were jailed, but no one succeeded in squeezing out of them where the gold was hidden. Maybe they didn’t know. Maybe they preferred to die rather than give the king what was his. They were buried in unconsecrated ground.

José stood peacefully and chewed his tobacco, enjoying the last minutes until the anchor was to be hoisted and the sails set. He had nothing to do with the elite passengers—he was just a simple seaman and not some courtier. They walked around there and resembled turkey-cocks, the rich and elite gentlemen, but how much were they worth in a brisk breeze, not to mention a real hurricane? Not so terribly much, according to his experience. But he had seen the heavy boxes, cases, and barrels being loaded, and the good ship San Salvador had never held more gold.

Oh, if one just had a right to a couple of handfuls of it as wages for all those many and dangerous voyages. It seemed to him suddenly he could sense the warm smell of wood-smoke and garlic, which he knew so well at home from his own room, even though he sat in it only at half-yearly intervals. Just a few handfuls, and he could stop working, sit with the fishermen and skippers down by the dock in the evening or go out in his boat and catch a couple of fish, which his wife would grill in oil and prepare with blue olives and pepper.

— But it’s their gold and not mine, he thought. Who gave them the right to it, I don’t know, but it’s not mine. I should have been smarter—then I’d surely also have gotten my share. She’s smart—maybe she’s the richest of them all.

He saw doña Inez go over to the railing and look out over the town, whose church bells were now ringing for evening mass. None of the other passengers dared approach her. They all knew her name and knew that she was an unusual woman. She came from a distinguished family, had been married twice, the last time to a relative of the duke of Alba, and in her mid-thirties had become a widow for the second time. She had good connections at the court and could easily have entered into a new and rich marriage, but doña Inez didn’t have the slightest desire to get
married again. She managed her large fortune herself, which she
had doubled a couple of times since she herself had gotten
control over it.

Doña Inez had been on a business trip to the new empire to
attend to her significant economic interests over here. She didn’t
search for Indian treasures and didn’t have the least desire to
finance adventurers who set out to find gold in El Dorado. Her
attitude was businesslike, cold and sober, without the slightest
sense for romance. She had invested a part of her capital in
mines and operating plantations in the western countries, and her
properties were exploited with systematic efficiency. She had
acquired a concession on large, previously unoccupied stretches
of land and had personally defrayed the expenses for a military
expedition, which pacified the land by burning down the Indians’
villages and forcing them to pay rents on their land.

She had a gold mine, which threw off an excellent profit, and
had set up large sugar plantations, which were already promising
enterprises. She ruled over an army of slaves, functionaries, and
overseers, which could easily stand comparison with the popula-
tion of a principality in Europe. She had large estates at home,
olive groves, vineyards, huge flocks of sheep, and the bulls from
her stalls were in demand at every bullfight in Spain. She owned
a couple of streets with rental houses in Madrid and a silk
weaving manufactory near Valencia, had a share in a lead mine,
and was the main shareholder in the shipping company that
owned the San Salvador and a fleet of other overseas ships, and
to his annoyance the viceroy had to make do with the ship’s
next-best cabin. The best was assigned to doña Inez, and she
viewed it as a matter of course.

Doña Inez stood and looked out over the town, but her
thoughts were far off. Once again she summarily went through
the arrangements she had made and the orders she had given.
Her head worked quickly, and she was used to operating with big
numbers. But everything was in order, like one side in an able
bookkeeper’s ledger, and she made up her mind that she had not
committed any mistakes, and that in any case it was now too late
to correct them.
With a sigh she thought about the long, boring trip, which was now at hand. She hated to be unoccupied, she loved to give orders and to rule over men. The day before she had looked through the passenger list and said to herself that there was no prospect of much fun. It was the usual collection of boring provincial officials, priests and adventurers, of whom she had met so many on her trips to the new lands. She had contempt for these gold-seekers and aristocratic fortune hunters, who didn’t understand at all the wealth they were surrounded by. The ones with brains didn’t look for gold treasure or put the Indians on the rack to get them to scream out where they had hidden the rest of their treasures. They sent out engineers or geologists to find the gold veins, where the gold was gotten; they put the Indians to work and exploited the fertile earth. The conquistadors’ time was past.

Doña Inez turned and gave a cool and appraising look at the passengers, who were standing at a respectful distance from her and staring in toward the town, the crowd of people on the beach, and the many small boats swarming around the ship. Then a whistle shrieked and the ship’s officers shouted their orders. The sails were set and the San Salvador pulled impatiently at its cables. From the capstans one could hear the crew’s husky song as the anchors were being raised:

O, holy mother of God,
let our enemies die,
and give us a successful voyage
across the salty sea.

A cannon salute barked from Veracruz’s forts, and the cannoneers on board answered it. As the San Salvador glided out into the bay, the church bells could be heard like a sorrowful little melody from the land.
Juan Gomez had found an unoccupied bunk on the orlop deck and put his mat and blanket there. The room was divided by a wooden partition, and in each stall were a dozen crudely constructed bunks. To get into the passenger berths on the orlop deck one had to go through the big crew’s cabin, where there were bunks on all sides and canvas hammocks stretched out criss-cross. There were only a couple of narrow passages past the long tables in the middle of the room.

The orlop deck was illuminated by horn lanterns, which cast a weak, reddish glimmer. The heat was stifling and there was a rank odor of sweat and urine, rancid oil, garlic, and dried fish. When one came down the ladder, the stench hit one like a fist in the chest; one had to stop and take a deep breath a couple of times before groping on in the red half-dark. In one of the stalls a bunch of black sailors and negro slaves were packed together like sheep in a pen. Some had flung themselves into the bunks, while others sat in a circle around a broad-nosed Negro, who was playing on a stringed instrument. Over their head dangled a lantern, which emitted turbulent shadows into the room when the ship yawed. The Negroes rocked rhythmically with their upper bodies and sang in deep, wailing guttural sounds, their faces shiny with sweat were like spots of dark—only their teeth and the whites of their eyeballs shone.

In Juan’s enclosure some travelers were already lying and sleeping in their bunks—a couple of brothers of a religious order who were traveling home to their monasteries in the cheapest accommodations. A shabbily dressed, thin man with a week-old beard stubble and an ugly, red rash on his domed forehead was spreading out his blanket in his bunk, and when he was done, he took out an earthenware bottle, took off the cork and smiled broadly to Juan.

— To your health, honored señor, he said and politely bowed his tall body. Would you do me the honor of enjoying a swig of wine together with me since we shall be traveling companions. My name is Pablo Avarano, the wine is not the worst and the
name not the best, so it all cancels out.

Don Pablo handed Juan the bottle and nodded in a friendly way.

Your livelihood is unmistakable, señor, he said. You are a soldier, a faithful soldier, a brave soldier, who has killed countless Indians and robbed them of their possessions for the advantage of the most Christian king and the true faith in which alone salvation is to be found. Am I wrong?

— I have been a soldier, Juan said and drank.

Don Pablo again raised the bottle and took a swig. He was pretty drunk, his bulging eyes were made pale by drinking, and the rash on his forehead glowed.

— The country we’re now leaving, he said, is in its way an excellent country. I’m certain the Indians at one time felt splendidly in it. Now their satisfaction is possibly a tad circumscribed. But on the other hand, what happened later has been an El Dorado for soldiers, and that is a sign for me of providence’s inscrutable wisdom. In his wisdom the good Lord has decided to make a gift to all that lumpen-aristocratic rabble we have in Spain of a good, fat morsel, and since our own country is rather impoverished, he opened the new world for them, and they really succeeded in making it into a thieves’ nest, where plundering has ingeniously been systematized, where one finds rascals and robbers in the highest offices, and where the bishops’ letter of appointment shall preferably be signed by Satan himself.

— Your words are just as strong as your wine, señor, Juan said. It’s a bit dangerous to speak such angry words when you’re not sure whether someone is listening. But why have you yourself visited this place of sin?

— My evil fate, don Pablo said, has never granted me anything but lice in my shirt. That comes from the fact that I have always made one demand of myself and others: unconditional intellectual honesty, señor. When I see a cat, I wish to call it a cat, and no one is going to get me to address it as lion. It’s an unlucky trait, and its consequence was that I was expelled from the university. For a time I managed as a private tutor for petty-aristocratic families, who got me cheap and in exchange re-
frained from making inquiries. But it always turned into a mess. In one place I was so unlucky as to bed the mistress of the master of the house and was chased out of the house with a riding crop. In another place I got involved in a discussion with the parish priest about the character of the trinity and had to depart quickly. One of the big difficulties here in life, señor, is to hold one's tongue when one has a good, clear head.

— A sharp file and a sharp tongue should be used cautiously, according to the proverb.

— And that old proverb is right. If one is silent, one can go far, but I've carried my heart on my tongue. You asked why I emigrated, and the answer is simple: the inquisition began to become a bit interested in me, not much, but sufficiently for me to have found it wise to disappear—because I've never been a brave man; my intellectual honesty compels me to admit that to you, amigo. I got a modest position as a scribe in a provincial governor's office, and there I vegetated for five years and tried to bite my tongue on various occasions, but my tongue was too strong. And in the end I found it would be wisest to return home because these sons of conquistadors aren't to be joked with when they get angry, and there's a rather short road to the scaffold in these blessed lands. The only thing I'm bringing home with me is the corona veneris that adorns my head. I got it right at the last minute in a bordello. And what did you get in exchange for your exertions, señor soldier?

Juan grinned and looked askance at the bottle that don Pablo readily handed him.

— Not much, he answered. But always something better than a greeting from a whorehouse.

— I know how it is, amigo, don Pablo said. You people plunder a village and amuse yourselves in all good-naturedness with a little murder and rape, and you are by my word so lucky to find gold. An image of the sun hidden at a cacique's or something along those lines, and since that's pure paganism, you confiscate it of course. And even if it doesn't turn out to be an image of an idol, it is in and of itself blasphemous for a lousy Indian to own anything. So you take the picture and entrust your
good fortune to your best friend, who also has a few friends to entrust it to, and before twelve hours have gone by, you are called to the colonel, who praises you a great deal because you have taken care of the gold and assures you that our gracious king will certainly compensate you richly for your find. You get a few gold coins as a finder’s fee, and you can take comfort from knowing that the king won’t get so much. Isn’t that right?

— It’s not wrong. But Perez Rico was in luck’s way. He found a gold picture, and he knew how to hold his tongue. He managed to sell the picture without any of the officers’ getting to know anything about it. Then he bought a share in a gold mine and earned money by the bucket. Now he’s a commissioner and married to the daughter of a bishop. He’s a big man.

— But it’s less amusing to be hanged, and Perez Rico was very close to it, wasn’t he? But it vanishes in the bottle, and starting from tomorrow we have to sustain life with dry mutton, cassava cakes, and lukewarm water. No money, no wine. I learned only a single Indian word, which I picked up already in the Caribbean: nacrabatina, I’m thirsty.

— And you know the reply, don’t you, senor: chalalaali, he’s drunk.

— I am drunk, gloriously drunk, don Pablo said. The sacred wine’s blessings are flowing in my veins. She’s very beautiful, the little Indian girl over there; see, her legs are slender like cedars of Lebanon, her breasts are love’s heights, and her teeth are white doves, which coo about love. Amigo, my categorical demand for unconditional intellectual honesty compels me to admit that female beauty makes an impression on me that is completely absurd in consideration of my age, my experiences, and my whole appearance.

The passenger cabins had gradually been filled, and sleeping and snoring people were lying in all the bunks. Once in a while someone complained while seasick, because the ship was rolling in the ocean’s swells, and an old soldier, whose nose had been chopped off, was standing over by the empty water bucket and throwing up in a welter of half-smothered oaths and curses. Big black beetles scurried over the sleepers, whose faces were
swollen by warmth and vermin. In the neighboring room the Negroes had stopped singing and were bent over moaning from seasickness. From the crew’s cabin hoarse roars and laughter could be heard; the watch below was drinking the whiskey the sailors had brought with them on board.

An Indian girl was sitting in a corner with her infant child at her breast and staring at the swinging lantern. Next to her a young Indian had spread out his blanket on the floor. He was sitting with his legs curled up under him and followed every movement in the room with vigilant eyes. His face with its broad cheekbones and sensitive, well-shaped mouth was as if carved in mahogany. His shiny black hair reached down to his shoulders and lay close to his head.

There was a guileless seriousness about the little group which seized Juan Gomez strangely to the core. He began to think about the altar piece in the poor village church in the parish where he was born. It showed Joseph and the holy mother with the Christ child in flight to Egypt. The mother of God sat there with the child at her breast, while Joseph watched over them, and Juan’s boyish heart had trembled at the thought of their loneliness, without house or home, in flight from cruel enemies to a foreign land.

The little brown woman, who pressed her child so tenderly against herself, and the earnest young Indian resembled the holy family and it was as if the light from the lantern put a halo around the Indian girl’s hair. He stared at them while he heard don Pablo’s voice, which by and by was becoming somewhat throaty.

— They are slaves on this ship, whose cargo is gold and cruelty. Astern in the ship a couple of score people are sleeping who own the two natives and the Negroes in there next door and us poor whites, a certain brave soldier Juan Gomez not excepted. They own the ship and all the gold it holds, they own the drunken crew and every living soul from the oldest sailor to the child there at its mother’s breast, yes even the unborn child in the mothers’ womb. They own us and determine our fate, and they can sentence us to frightful horrors and forget it five minutes
later in a lover’s bed or with a glass of good wine. Or they can most mercifully let us live and amuse themselves about our antics. And do you know why they can do it, highly esteemed señor? Because there are brave soldiers like Juan Gomez and the worthy, old warrior over there who would rather let their ears and nose be chopped off than abandon their duty, which is to serve the strong against the weak. Oh, amigo, give me dry bread, a little sour country wine and a hard bed to lie in, and I’ll write an immortal treatise about the philosophy of power . . .

He had placed his sweaty hand on Juan’s shoulder, but Juan shook it off and got up. He went over to the Indian couple and sat down on the floor next to them.

— Whom do you belong to? he asked the Indian. He didn’t get an answer, just a calm look, and he therefore assumed the man didn’t understand Spanish and directed the same question to the woman.

— I’m accompanying my master, she whispered in bad Spanish.

— Is that his child?

— Yes, she nodded, humiliated.

— Why does he let you sleep down here among the sailors? Who’s to defend you when we’ve been at sea for a week?

She didn’t answer, but cast a frightened glance at the Indian, who nodded as if he had understood the conversation.

— You can sleep in my bunk with your child, Juan said, and I myself will find another place. Your friend can lie down in front of the bunk, and tomorrow you must say to your master that you can’t be here if he wants to have you for himself. There’s a cabin where only women sleep, and there must be room for you.

He helped the girl into the bunk and laid the blanket over her. The Indian got up and spread out his blanket in front of the bunk.

— Why are you doing that, señor? don Pablo asked. What business are these two Indians of yours? Do you also want to put the sheep in the field in your bed? And where will you sleep tonight?

— I’ll find a place, Juan said. You can hardly breathe here
anyway, and I’m used to sleeping in the open air.

He walked through the crew’s room up onto the deck, and a little later don Pablo followed him. They sat down far forward in the bow and stared out over the sea, which was moving calmly in long swells.

— There’s still a last swig in the bottle, don Pablo said. Drink, señor, the wine does not know about masters or slaves. It fills our hearts with joy and gets us to forget our indelible shame. Listen how the ship’s frame is creaking. It’s all the old sins it’s carrying, which wail like a ghost in the night.

It was as if he became sober up here in the cool night, where the sails flapped over their heads like mighty birds. He sat there a bit and listened pensively to the waves, which were breaking against the San Salvador’s prow.

— This ship is filled with gold and slaves, he said. Look at the sinewy muscular Spanish fellows, at the little Portuguese men, who always have their knives ready to be able to stab one other while playing dice, at the Negroes, whose muscles swell under their skin, at you veterans, who are returning home with a couple of pieces of gold under your belt, but know how to fight. The others rest securely under their silk blankets aft, while you people sleep on the hard boards. If you wanted it, all the world’s glory would be yours.

— Once I saw a soldier whipped to death because he hit an officer, Juan answered. I’ve seen many hanged. One was buried alive in the middle of the desert because he had incited to mutiny. Only his head protruded, and I can still remember his blue-black tongue and eyes, which were about to fall out of his head. We marched on, señor, and we never talked about him. His name was forgotten.

— And who buried him down in the sand? You yourselves are the whip that gives your back stripes, the executioner who strips the skin.

— I’m not a scholar, Juan said helplessly. One has to forget a lot because it hurts too much to think about.

— Maybe it would be better if we remembered the evil, don Pablo said. God would love us if we did that. It would be better
if we knew how to hate. But we are like dogs, who sometimes receive kicks and sometimes the scraps of food thrown to us in the corner. But let's try to sleep on this ship, which is laden with gold and a curse, with blood and tears, with untold people's suffering and pain. Sleep well, amigo.

He got up with difficulty and staggered on his long legs toward the passage down to the orlop deck.

— There are many strange people, Juan Gomez thought. And what does God have in mind with them?

He pulled his coarse cloak tighter and rolled himself into a ball to sleep.
Not until toward evening the next day did the upper-class passengers gather under the awning on the quarter-deck. The coast of the mainland could still be glimpsed like a fog-bank on the horizon, and once in a while one felt the dry warmth from the plains like a blast from a baker’s oven. Most of them had been seasick the first night at sea, and neither the viceroy nor the inquisitor had made an appearance yet, but were resting in their cabins.

Doña Inez Escobedo was sitting in a bamboo chair surrounded by cavaliers. She had slept splendidly at night, gotten up early in the morning, and eaten with an excellent appetite. She was in a slightly low-cut silk dress which revealed her beautiful round shoulders, and the red awning gave her cheeks a fine tint, as if she were still a very young girl. Her arms were beautiful, her hands with the many expensive rings lean and fine, and when she sat down, it wasn’t to be seen that she was a bit too matronly broad across the hips.

Next to her sat the young, elegant Jesuit priest don Vargas, who for some years had resided in the western lands and felt it as a banishment and now was finally returning home to civilization. On the other side she had the oidor don Francisco de Eliñaz, who had been designated as governor of one of the provinces and was now on his way to the court to arrange his appointment with appropriate means. The other two around the low table were the young officer don Luis de Zuniga, whose genealogical table was just as long as his purse was empty, and an English merchant Samuel Rayburn, who had been on a business trip to the New World.

Doña Inez had had wine fetched from her cabin, an excellent sherry, and the atmosphere was light and free. The San Salvador was sailing with a serviceable wind and there was every prospect of a fairly easy and pleasant voyage.

A big mottled butterfly with its wings extended had settled on the awning.

— Look, doña Inez said, pointing to it. It has probably taken
the awning for a flower bed, and now it has to come along on the entire voyage.

— Rather, it thought you were a flower, señora, don Luis said and tilted his young, beautiful head affectionately.

Doña Inez looked at him the way one looks at a boy who has made a stupid remark.

— Poetry is wasted on me, señor, she said coolly. I've been married twice and can distinguish good prose from bad poetry. Let us rather talk about something amusing. Tell us something, don Vargas.

Don Vargas bowed politely toward her:

— What do you want to hear about, gracious señora?

— Gossip, malicious gossip, she said. About those who are not present. What else are ocean voyages for? Tell us something about the inquisitor, don Vargas.

— It is altogether impossible to say anything disparaging, let alone malicious, about the venerable don Jesus. On the contrary, books could be written about the invaluable services he has rendered religion, and I am absolutely certain that will be done. But in order that one understand what a prominent personality he is, I shall sketch his career very briefly. Don Jesus belongs to one of the preeminent and rich families from which the good Lord prefers to obtain his highest servants, and at quite a young age he became a bishop. It was to be sure in New Spain and in a rather remote nook, near the Almira river, but a bishop is a bishop just as an egg is an egg.

— Why did one place a young man of good family in a ministry in this desolate region? the oidor asked.

— It was in accordance with his own wish. Don Jesus was, you must know, not only of good family, but in possession of a rare piety. He felt it as a calling to sally forth into the mission field and save darkened heathen souls. In his soul lived a youthful and visionary dream of sacrificing his life for the faith and gaining the martyr's crown, and the only thing that prevented him from doing that was the lamentable fact that the Indians in his district were so pious and peaceful that it was completely impossible for him to find his martyrdom. The church taxes
were paid to the last penny, and the Indians did not nurture the least wish to stone their bishop or burn him. On the contrary, they showed him the greatest deference and filled the church to the last pew every time he preached.

— As a rule one ought not to rely on this apparent submission, the oidor said lecturing.

— Undoubtedly your excellency is completely correct about that. And don Jesus gradually came to recognize that the population might well be good-natured and obedient, but that this Christianity was not deep-seated. The Indians tended to their corn fields, drank their cassava beer, and dutifully attended church for mass, confession, and communion. But the deeper understanding of the sacred faith was lacking, and this lukewarmness inspired don Jesus. He resolved to rouse this primitive Indian population, which regarded the true faith in which alone salvation is to be found as a kind of magic and believed that one could sleep oneself into salvation. He decided to hold a series of revival sermons, where he took things at their root, so to speak, and you would have been pleased with his Christian ardor and fervor, señora. He told the Indians about hell, and it was really hell. One could hear the fire crackle, smell the stench of sulphur, and hear the unfortunate people’s desperate screams. And quite particularly he gave a detailed and picturesque depiction of the devil’s person and horrible power. In sermon after sermon he portrayed the prince of darkness in all his ugliness, talked about his deeds and evil schemes, and when he cast a look at his terrified parishioners, he was not at all dissatisfied with the result of his efforts. But life sees to it that the trees don’t grow up into the sky. Among his priests was a mestizo, quite a talented fellow, who knew how to use his eyes, and one day he sought an audience with his bishop.

— Your most reverend father . . . he said hesitatingly.

— Just speak freely, my son, don Jesus encouraged him.

— I believe there’s something wrong with these Indians. He said it with a certain contempt since half-bloods seldom nurture much respect for full-blooded Indians.

— There’s something wrong with all people, whether we are
white or brown, don Jesus said gently. That comes from original sin, my son.

— To be sure, most reverend, but I have come to learn that the Indians are holding divine services at night and making sacrifices out in the mountains.

— Sacrifices! don Jesus burst out, justifiably becoming enormously appalled. To their old gods? I thought they were all converted.

— They are, they long ago forgot all that heathen abomination, and in the last fifty years they have lived like pious Christians, the priest said with real regret in his voice. But I’m afraid that your most reverend’s Christian and fiery sermons have given the naive natives an all too violent impression of Satan’s power. Those who have been led astray have gotten the sinful idea that it’s Satan and not God who has the greatest power, and now they have set about appeasing him with sacrifices.

— Are you trying to tell me they’re worshipping Satan!

— It does not beseem a humble servant to teach a man of the highest wisdom, the mestizo said modestly. But as far as I’m concerned, it looks as though it’s devil worship that’s taking place at night in the gorge at Antomacao.

Don Jesus at first refused to believe in the dreadful possibility, but at last he resolved to undertake a personal investigation. One evening the mestizo informed him that the Indians had left their huts, and that they presumably had stolen away to perform their rites. Together with a couple of his priests don Jesus walked out to the gorge, and there he saw it with his own eyes. His whole parish was gathered around an image which without the slightest doubt represented the prince of darkness, and they sang hymns to it and performed sacrifices of goats and fowl. It was a clear case of satanism.

— There was of course something logical in the Indians’ reasoning, doña Inez said.

— It is sufficiently well-known that Satan has a predilection for acting by means of logic, don Vargas nodded. Don Jesus of course immediately intervened, and a big affair was made of it with excommunication and a whole series of autos-da-fe. As
proof of his zeal it may be mentioned that he had his own lover—a beautiful mestizo—charged when he discovered that she had been among the satanists. She was convicted and burned.

— Did the pious bishop have a lover? Samuel Rayburn asked.

— Don Jesus was a human being, and he had a lover. We have our customs, as you have yours, señor.

— But his vow of chastity?

— Don Jesus surely settled that with his father confessor, and it is not ours to interfere, don Vargas said.

Rayburn was a short-legged, undersized man with a blond beard, gray eyes, and a sunburned, obstinate bull’s neck. There was something substantial and immovable across his square figure, and the Jesuit looked at him with an arrogant smile, while he sat there with pearls of sweat on his broad forehead, where the veins swelled angrily. Don Vargas was a European, but with a Spanish taste for bullfighting.

— Our custom can of course seem strange, he said teasingly. I’m certain the English regard it as a waste of mercantile values to burn fully able-bodied Indians exclusively out of solicitude for their immortal souls. In Britain, I’ve heard it said, they are content to burn worn-out old women.

— Yes, witches, Rayburn said. Women who are convicted of witchcraft.

— It seems to me I have heard something whispered about the fact that people of our faith are also not completely safe in your fatherland, señor.

— Every Catholic can with permission travel freely and unimpeded in the realms of the British king.

— As you do in his Catholic majesty’s lands, although we are not fond of heretics.

— One thing surprised me not so little, the oidor intervened in the conversation. It is said that your well-known usurper Cromwell sold his prisoners of war to the lords in the Barbados. The price was 600 pounds of sugar for a man.

— That was a humane arrangement, Rayburn said. Otherwise these prisoners would have been executed, and it brought
money into the treasury and necessary labor to the plantations.
— But there were caballeros among these prisoners.
— Most were of foreign origin.
— Nevertheless, noblemen were sold as slaves for 600 pounds of sugar. You must permit me to say, señor, that it appears to us to be a barbaric method. We regard it as contrary to the command of religion to hold white men as slaves, and what should one think of a statesman, even if he is a rebel and a usurper, who sells noblemen like cattle? That kind of thing cannot take place in a civilized country. And without in any way wanting to offend you, señor, I am forced to say that there is undoubtedly a connection between these barbaric methods and your country’s apostasy from the sacred principles of religion.

A cockroach came scurrying across the deck toward Rayburn, and he rubbed it out with his foot.
— Poisonous vermin, he mumbled in his mother tongue.

The oidor jutted out his ram face to go on in the discussion, but doña Inez interrupted him:
— It’s don Jesus we’re talking about and not the morals of the English. Tell us more, don Vargas.
— There isn’t much more to tell. This episode became crucial for don Jesus’s life. He had obtained a horrible impression of the power of evil, and since it was impossible for him to serve the faith by becoming a martyr himself, he decided to make sure others were tortured with glowing irons and burned at the stake for the honor of the church and the faith. I have a bad head for numbers, and I don’t know precisely how many Indian sorcerers, heretics, and apostates don Jesus has put an end to in his high office as inquisitor, but he not need be ashamed of the result. While all pious and good Christians honor and bless his name, he is hated by all those who have reason to fear him, and I sincerely believe that if a malefactor is given the choice between don Jesus’s court and the claws of Satan in person, he will prefer to go directly to hell, and I’m certain he’d be smart to do so. Don Jesus’s piety and zeal are limitless.

— Fortunately we are all faithful Catholics on board, doña Inez said, and you, don Samuelo, are of course protected.
— Yes, what do we know, don Vargas said. Don Jesus’s ability to smell false doctrines and association with dark powers is no less marvelous than a bloodhound’s ability to find a trace. No one is gentler at heart and milder in his being than don Jesus, and his way of life is more a saint’s than a frail person’s, but he is hard as the steel in a Saracen’s blade when his exalted duties are at stake. I have heard it said that the Indians call him by a name that means something like “he who scorches the life from fowl and rips the guts from the belly of humans,” and in truth, no inquisitor has ever demonstrated such noble energy as he. In fact the torment does not exist that don Jesus is not ready to let a body of sin suffer if he can thereby save an immortal soul.

— I look forward to making the acquaintance of such an excellent man, doña Inez said. When he has overcome his seasickness, he’ll surely make an appearance among us less perfect ones.

She waved to a ship servant and had him pour wine into their glasses. It was about to get dark. The sunset had colored the sea scarlet, and one saw the phosphorescence of the sea gleam in the ship’s wake. The red evening clouds were slowly effaced, and in the velvet-blue evening sky the constellations emerged like lights being lit. Down in the between deck, old don Guilemo trudged back and forth, supported by his two gigantic Negroes. They almost carried his tiny body, and his long bird’s neck jutted out as if he were covetously lapping up the cool evening air. His eyes in their deep cavities shone like glass in the light from the deck lanterns.

Rayburn got up and said good night with a deep bow to doña Inez and a considerably briefer one to the company’s gentlemen. He shared the cabin with don Luis and the old colonel Juan Gonzales and felt an urge to be alone for a while before going to bed. He bolted the door, unbuttoned his vest, and took out two books in worn leather bindings. One of them he used to make notes about his business affairs, the other was a prayer book. He sat down on the edge of the cot, and in the meager light from the little horn lantern studied the numbers in his account book. He knew them by heart beforehand, but it gave him a certain securi-
ty to sit and look at them and calculate the earnings once again. He had made good business deals; the long voyage had been worthwhile. And he still had a chance. He had made inquiries about doña Inez Escobedo, and this lady owned mines and large plantations. When a favorable opportunity presented itself, he would have to talk to her.

But, oh, this corruption, this levity, which is coupled with black superstition! Rayburn angrily shakes his heavy head; he hates these lands where everything is hot and luxuriant and stinks of decay. He has contempt for the Spaniards, the foolish noblemen and the hypocritical priests and monks, who twist God’s pure and blessed word. But he has to be cautious, for it is far from safe for a foreign merchant to sojourn in these papist countries. The point is to hold one’s peace, to be silent as the grave and talk only to God in one’s private closet. Even here in the cabin, where he is now alone, it was as if something wild and guilty is lying in wait.

He takes the devotional book and reads a prayer for sea voyagers. Here in the cabin incense is burned and holy water sprinkled before the departure, he knows, because these fools believe of course that that kind of thing protects them against death and destruction, unenlightened as they are. But he talks by means of his prayer’s printed words with his creator and asks that the almighty spare merchant Samuel Rayburn from destruction and shipwreck and other danger that can threaten those who are on the sea.

And while he is reading the good, strong sentences, whose sound is so well-known, the image of his house in the City emerges before him. It’s Sunday, the floor is strewn with green sprigs, and outside it’s drizzling, but the rain is marvelously cool. There’s a weak fire glowing in the fireplace, one hears it crackle cosily, and his wife is sitting at the table, decorously clothed with her reddish-blond hair swept from her high, white forehead and gathered modestly under her cap. Along the wall stand his children, guilt-ridden, for after the morning prayer the week’s account is to be settled. The good merchant Rayburn also has an account book in relation to God, where credit and
debit are painstakingly settled, and the account is regularly balanced. He himself is sitting at the end of the table in the high armchair with the Bible before him and reading God’s word, and afterwards he interprets the scripture, for in his house every master ought to be a priest. At the other end of the table stand the servants, the neat girls clad in their Sunday best, the scribes, who live in his house, the man-servant and the coachman in fine cloth vests embroidered with green and red flowers. They too are anxious because perhaps they also have an entry they will answer for in the week’s account.

So good and solid is Samuel Rayburn’s domestic world, built on labor, honor, and strict fear of God. Here there is no levity, no loose words, but only a wall and immovable morality, which rests on the scripture’s rock foundation.

— A bishop with a lover, he thought shaking his head, oh, Babylon, Babylon!
I am not fond of these Englishmen, the oidor said, they are people without culture or upbringing. They have acquired a set of square moral rules, which they take with them everywhere and in reality regard as the true ark of the covenant. Notice that the merchant was scandalized by the bishop’s having a lover. We are a people with long experience and know that we are best served by bishops who have lovers.

— But they’re clever businessmen, doña Inez said.
— Far too clever, the oidor said.
— Let’s find a more amusing subject, doña Inez said. It’s a pity to turn in early in the cool evening, and I hope my wine is good. Who’s the old man by the way, don Vargas?

She made a slight gesture in the direction of don Guilemo, who at that moment was being led into his cabin by two of his Negroes and added:

— Terrible to become so old.
— But worse to die, señora. For most people eternal salvation seems to lack any attraction.
— Do you know him?
— Everyone knows him. Our lands are great in extent, but we ourselves are few. Everyone knows everyone. Moreover, I have the pleasure of sharing the cabin with him on this voyage, which will scarcely be his last. Count Guilemo Castillon is an estate owner from a noble family, who has had good connections and has been a shrewd businessman. An uncle played an important role at the court and procured him various monopolies, which he has exploited with a hard hand. He traveled across the ocean to acquire a new youth, and now he is on the homeward journey just as old as when he sailed out.
— A new youth?
— Surely you’ve heard about the fountain of youth Ponce de Leon searched for half a century ago? He tried to find it in Florida’s mountains. Since then the legend has been just as vigorous as the fable of El Dorado. Naturally it’s foolish, but what should we humans dream about if not inexhaustible wealth and eternal
youth? A lapsed Franciscan had gotten his fingers into don Guilemo and made him believe he knew where the fountain of youth was located. Presumably he got a suitable price for his information—what isn’t a new youth worth? The old man is tough and doesn’t want to let go of life. The story is told that he drank the blood of a newly slaughtered child. A Moorish magician used it as part and parcel of a rejuvenation treatment, which however remained without any visible result. Well, it’s only nonsense, but his hunt for the fountain of youth is a fact the whole world knows in detail. The Franciscan arranged the expedition for him, and they really succeeded in dragging him on the endless trip to Florida’s mountains and woods. For weeks his sedan chair rocked over savannahs and mountains, through jungles and swamps. It was a trip that could have taken the life of a man in his best years. But don Guilemo survived the whole thing.

— And the fountain of youth, did he find it? doña Inez asked.

— Do you think he looks as though he did, gracious señora? don Vargas smiled. But he reached the Barfaykaou valley in Florida. It’s a nine-mile long valley, which the Indians consider sacred, and where there are no settlements. It’s situated in the Apalatey mountains, and a single narrow pass leads into it. One has to know these valleys to form a notion of their marvelous beauty. The valley here is covered with oak trees, and small crystal-clear brooks ripple down from the mountain precipices. They collect into a slowly gliding stream, along whose banks live otter and beaver. Here wild chamois, akuyas, gambol whose hair is so long that it can be spun. Only seldom does one meet a group of Indians hunting for akuyas; otherwise there are only gurgling water streams, trees, and chirping birds. In Barfaykaou valley there is a fountain the Indians hold to be sacred. The water goddess, the mother of the serpent, Nakawe, mother of the Gods and all the world, lives in it, and if one bathes in its water, one’s life is prolonged. We know these fables, of course. No matter how much we baptize the Indians, they keep believing in them.

— After a long and exhausting journey, don Guilemo, more
dead than alive, his doctor, the Franciscan, and their retinue of Indians and Negroes came to the valley and succeeded in finding the sacred cave in the happy valley. Don Guilemo stood at the destination, which he had traveled across the ocean and through half a continent to find. He sits a bit in the sedan chair and looks out over the beautiful valley before he lets himself be lifted into the cave. The birds are chirping under the green foliage, a fish is splashing in the rivulet; it's like God's own paradise before Adam and Eve were created. He greedily inhales the fresh, spiced air; it's the fresh, immaculate land of youth itself, and the old sinner gets heart palpitations, a new life, quite a long life, and perhaps he thinks about what he can use it for. For new, sweet sins, for all evil, since people do not change. Oh no, señora, we are as we were once created, and a profound wisdom lies in the doctrine of original sin.

— Now just imagine this burlesque scene. One undresses the old man and places him under the fountain, which gushes out of the rock. There he sits, descendant of grandees of Spain, who fought with the Moors and conquered new worlds, peer of kings, in all his pitiful nakedness, bald, with withered limbs, while the Indians in silence and presumably with a bit of contempt look at the old man. He splashes water over himself, he wants to live anew, be young, begin life from the beginning, cast himself out into life, take women, love, and kill. But nothing happens. There is a deathly stillness in the half-dark cave, the Indians are standing like stone pillars; only the water is murmuring. Don Guilemo is sitting crouched under the slender ice-cold jet of water which comes from the earth's cold deep; his lips covering a toothless mouth are blue, his gaunt limbs are shaking from the cold. It can make one laugh or cry. He's an old child who wants to suck nature's breast. But the breast is empty, the nourishing milk doesn't reach his lips. Nothing happens, only the splashing of the fountain and the muffled song of birds outside the cave. And the tension becomes too powerful for him. He moves his lips, as if wanting to shout and conjure nature’s spirits; he grabs himself by his gaunt breast, overgrown with tattered gray hair like a monkey's; he doubles himself up and falls over in a spasm.
Foam forms around his mouth, his limbs hammer convulsively against the cave’s stone floor. The Indians are standing calmly, with faces as if carved in wood, staring at the old man, who is trying to flee from death.

— The bath in the fountain of youth had almost become don Guilemo’s death. But two weeks later he more or less recovered his strength and began the trip back through the valley, where only the birds’ chirping in the foliage and the fishes’ splashing in the brooks interrupted eternity’s repose. The small akuyas watched the procession with eyes that reflected the sky and the swaying trees. And now he is here unsubdued in his lust for life, en route to Europe on his ghastly quest for another fragment of this pitiful life.

— Death is frightful, doña Inez said with a little shudder. But it must be worse to fear death every day one lives. It’s like dying every single hour.

— It is so much the more fortunate that we have another life to hope for, don Vargas said.

— But this life is beautiful, doña Inez said, and breathed deeply. It is very beautiful, don Vargas, and it is a great shame that we shall lose it. I understand don Guilemo well. We all want to live and rule and feel that we exist.

— One doesn’t often experience such an evening, the oidor said. We are on a voyage which for most of us is significant, we have been torn away from our accustomed existence, and everything has become as new. One feels a marvelous happiness on this ship on this beautiful evening, with the mighty constellations of the universe over us and the ocean’s tranquil swells around us. Perhaps the fear we carry with us innermost is the dread that we can never be expunged, and the happiness we now feel is joy over the fact that our life heretofore is gone, borne off by the ocean, perhaps to be washed up on a distant coast as an unknowable corpse. And let it just be buried there without anyone’s getting to know who it was.

— Strange words to hear from a respected juridical officer, doña Inez said.

— Strange words for myself too, the oidor said. At times the
question, however, has skimmed my consciousness, who basically is this oidor Francisco, what drives him, what kernel of energy is there most deeply within him? I know what he is when he sits in the courtroom: a link in a great human enterprise, a judge who passes sentence which a principle enjoins him to utter, and it does not require much intelligence to find out that that principle is the principle of power itself. We are inclined to the opinion that it is we who have the power, but on reflection it is self-explanatory that it is power that has us. Power gives us our opinions and our faith; it molds us in the form which serves it best. At times it has use for warriors, and we become soldiers, at times for statesmen, jurists, priests, or merchants, and it gives us our form according to its needs. And this oidor, whom our ironic friend don Vargas will doubtless compare with a braying juridical ram, is merely one of the functions of power, which it has created in its form and filled with its content.

— Far be it from me to use such a disrespectful expression, don Vargas said gently.

— The question is whether the oidor is anything other than a function, don Francisco continued. What is there in his innermost self, if there is anything at all other than an impulse toward death, a longing to escape power’s claws? What remains when the wave of foam bursts, other than a bit of water? But all the same some drops of water. And deepest in us there must after all be something or other that is untouched by power, immaculate, and that we have not been able to destroy because it has hidden itself so deeply that we ourselves have not been able to find it.

— One can perhaps call it soul, don Vargas said.

— With all due respect for theology I would prefer to avoid using this designation. The oidor of course has an official soul, which gets its nourishment from the faith’s means of grace, but power has also created this soul and taken possession of it.

— And what is power? doña Inez asked. Perhaps the question is stupid?

— Not so stupid that we are not compelled to ask it, the oidor said. What is power, which fills us with its spirit and seizes us? What’s your opinion, don Luis, sitting there so silent-
ly and pensively?

Embarrassed, the young officer smiled. He had drunk a lot of doña Inez’s wine and found the conversation boring. The oidor really did resemble an old ram, but doña Inez was beautiful even if she was no longer young. And everyone knew that she was very rich.

— I’m not used to talking about such subtle things, he replied. I’ve never thought further about it. I’m an officer and my people must obey me because I have power over them. I have to obey my superiors, and as a soldier and nobleman I know that all power is united in the king, who was delegated it by God.

— That’s a clear and soldierly answer, but it avoids the real difficulty, the oidor said. Because it’s clear that the king too is only a function of power. And as far as God is concerned, don Vargas’s report on don Jesus’s Indians was very thought provoking. They abandoned themselves to satanism because they had found out that it was in reality Satan who was the greatest power in existence. We’re good and enlightened Christians and don’t nurture any doubt about God’s omnipotence, but I’m seriously afraid that if it were demonstrated with good reasons that Satan was the most powerful one, we too would do humble homage to him. It is precisely God we honor and fear because he is omnipotent, and it’s worth thinking about the fact that we began by crucifying our savior and didn’t fall at his feet until we had a clear understanding that he was an emanation of the omnipotence. I’m not at all certain that don Jesus couldn’t have found his martyrdom if he had combated power.

— God’s power? don Vargas asked.

— Now don’t lead me on the path to the stake, I’m only a vain official who dreams of still more power before I close my eyes, the oidor smiled. But the indeterminable that at times speaks to me says to me that power is not of a good nature. If power didn’t exist and force us to become what we are, we would perhaps discover fundamental values that now pass us totally by. I don’t know, because power haunts me too, but once in a while I have an inkling of it. And I believe power is evil, for it bestows only emptiness on us and makes us into fools. That’s
the way I’m talking now in the evening, when I feel free and easy, and perhaps also under the influence of your excellent sherry, señora, and tomorrow I’ll kneel again before the almighty. Don Jesus will scarcely have reason to be dissatisfied with me.

Doña Inez sat with half-closed eyes and a little smile around her mouth. The oidor and don Vargas amused her, and she liked the little fop of an officer, whose gaze did not budge from her. Before the voyage was over, all three of them would probably have declared their burning love to her, and perhaps the elegant and cynical Jesuit was not at all a bad lover.

— The viceroy still hasn’t done us the honor of putting in an appearance, she said.

— His excellency’s health is not good, the oidor said. He’s suffering from liver disease, and the strenuous journey through the country didn’t make it better. I paid him a visit this morning.

— Tell me about him.

— He’s an outstanding official, an excellent human being, the oidor said, and . . .

— Thanks, spare us a speech of homage to the powerful one, who of course after all isn’t hearing it, don Francisco, doña Inez interrupted. Let’s hear what you can tell us about him, don Vargas.

— He is, as don Francisco rightly remarks, an outstanding official and excellent human being, don Vargas said. And he’s descended, moreover, from one of Spain’s oldest and most honorable families. His progenitor don Pedro de Carajaval fell in love with a lady, doña Leonora de Lara, whose family descends from the old kings of Biscay, and his feelings were requited. Their betrothal was supposed to be celebrated precisely at the time the king’s favorite, the powerful count of Benavides, fell in love with doña Leonora at a bullfight, which was organized to celebrate a victory over enemies of the faith. The two brothers were still in the field, and the count availed himself of their absence to ask for the beautiful Leonora’s hand, and her family dared not reject his proposal.

— No bull that chases its pursuers can be more raging than Pedro de Carajaval became when he heard this news. Accom-
panied by his brother he proceeded to Valencia, where the young count had taken up his abode with his young bride. That very evening they met the count, who was accompanied by one of his relatives. The brothers attacked them, and soon Benavides fell, never to get up again. The two brothers fled to a church and hurried to send a father confessor to the dying man since they didn’t wish to kill the soul along with the body. The gate where the fight took place is still called Puerta de los duelos.

The brothers hoped that in this asylum they could wait for the opportune moment to justify themselves before the king. But he nourished such a love for Benavides that without veneration for the sanctuary he had them seized and even refused to hear their defense. In spite of the chivalrous character of the combat he treated them as assassins and gave the order to hurl them off the palace tower. So the two brothers, who had lost their confidence in human justice and now relied only on God, summoned the king to meet them in thirty days before the Lord’s judgment seat, and afterwards they hurled themselves down into the fortress moat.

Don Vargas paused for a bit and added:
— On the morning of the thirtieth day the king was found dead in his bed.
— A genuine Spanish story, doña Inez said. One doesn’t understand that every second person at home is of ancient nobility since our forefathers seem not to have undertaken anything except killing one another. But how can the brave Pedro, by the way, be the viceroy’s progenitor? After all he didn’t marry the beautiful one.

— That’s precisely the misfortune, señora. The viceroy is descended from a collateral branch, which the ravens caw a great deal about, and it’s impossible to summon all birds before God’s judgment seat. According to reports, many not very noble cuttings have been grafted on to the noble lineage.

— Sangre amarillo, the oidor nodded. Yellow blood.

— Those are your words and not mine, don Vargas said. I fear that don Pedro on the spur of the moment would have slapped you in irons if he had heard that. I’m only repeating
what is said; personally I don’t doubt that the viceroy’s blood is just as blue as his high position demands, and if his skin is rather yellow, that’s probably caused by the liver sickness that don Francisco just mentioned to us and that plagues the distinguished man. However that may be, the ravens peck at his heart. The wicked rumors make him appear in public with an arrogance as if he were ten grandees, and I don’t believe that any over-mistress of ceremonies puts greater store by etiquette than he does. He has totally refused to approve the appointment of bourgeois officials to higher offices in his province, and that has gotten him into a good deal of trouble with Madrid. But if one dares judge according to the extent of the baggage he carries around, he’ll doubtless get a gracious reception at the court, and everything will thus turn out for the best.

— Oh, this court which everything hinges on, doña Inez said.

— But not everything, the oidor said. It’s a long way to Spain, and many orders never reach us. No one knows what becomes of them, they disappear on the way, no one knows their fate. How are we supposed to manage and exploit the huge empires if we’re supposed to conform to every new sudden fancy?

— Dangerous words, don Vargas said.

— Words that everyone knows but no one expresses, the oidor said. We are kings of everything but in name. We dispose over mighty countries, we rule over untold human souls, we are lords over life and death. And this terrible power, which we can’t free ourselves of, just as little as the fly can liberate itself from the spider’s web, destroys us and makes us barren like women who cannot give birth to children. Constantly we must feel the power in us—it scorches like fire. If this ship is stranded on a desolate island, I’ll spend my days writing a treatise on our own wretchedness. But I’ll write it in the sand.

— It’s getting cool, doña Inez said with a little shudder. And it’s time to sleep.

— She’s beautiful, don Luis said after she had gone.

— She’s very beautiful, the oidor said. And she’s very rich and more powerful than any of us. May God have mercy on him who falls into her hands.
A favorable wind was blowing, and the San Salvador had set all sails. The ocean foamed around the gilt angel on the ship's prow, but right now the noon sun was shining, and there was a smell of tar and sun-scorched wood. Not a sail was to be seen on the horizon; only seabirds shrieked hoarsely over the top of the mast.

José Nuñez had just relieved the captain on the bridge and was trotting back and forth on the deck planks, which sweated small blisters of warmth. At the vertical tiller a Portuguese stood by the helm; his brown face stared vacantly out over the ocean, while his body sluggishly followed the ship’s movements. At this time of day only a few people were on deck, the upper-class passengers were resting in their cabins, and José Nuñez had an agreeable feeling of having the ship to himself.

The old mate didn’t care much about people, and especially not the turkey cocks strutting on deck. Every time he was in port, he talked about retiring, but he knew he’d never do it. As long as he could remember, he’d had a deck under his feet, and even if he dreamt of an old age in his little house by the coast, he knew that some day he’d be let down into the sea from a ship’s deck, sewn into a sailcloth with a cannonball as ballast, if indeed Our Lord himself didn’t take charge of the burial, and he had nothing against the thought. He had seen so many of his friends buried in the cold sea.

Once in a while he strolled over to the compass to check that the vessel was holding course. Out on the horizon lay a few banks of clouds hinting at a breeze, and before long it would probably become necessary to shorten sail. Then the boatswain, Chaparrito, the little bush, came up onto the bridge. He was a bearded and bow-legged manikin whose real name everyone had forgotten, and maybe he himself didn’t remember it. He was wont to say:

— If I’m a bush, it’s a briar and not a rosebush for my enemies.

José Nuñez and Chaparrito had sailed together for many
years and were close friends. When they were in port, they drank together and accompanied each other to the same bordellos, where over many years they had seen the girls age and come and go. They were equally stubborn and equally superstitious and nourished a common love for the San Salvador, whose planks meant more to them than any home, and whose figurehead they loved more than any woman.

— She's lying too low in the sea, Chaparrito said.

— You should instead tell me something I don’t know, José Nuñez growled. Certain people don’t know the difference between a pack-ass and a ship. Confound it—if it blows up into really heavy seas, we’ll go to the bottom like a stone.

— It’s all the same to me, Chaparrito grinned. I’ve been shipwrecked six times, but the harpies don’t get their claws in me. I have a hair of the Virgin of Guadalupe in a bag on my chest, a nail of the señor de los milagros, and, in addition, God’s eye. Look here. He pulled his jacket to the side and showed a little square sewn firmly onto the coarse shirt. It resembled an ace of spades embroidered with various colored yarns.

— Where did you get the sikuli?

— The Indian wench sewed it on. God’s eye looks at you and keeps you alive. She’d like to have me come back.

— Uh huh, that’s what you think, you old goat. But if the ship’s priest discovers it, he’ll scream to high heaven about Indian witchcraft. Why do they load us down so heavily—can’t they get enough gold, these insatiable people?

— Some want gold for their palates, others want whiskey. They have quite a lot on board this time.

— Let them drink till it runs out of their pants—just as long as they take care on their watch.

— But there’s a tramp drinking with them. He chatters too much, and no good comes from chattering picaros. Go down and take a look at him—you can pretend you’re looking for me.

— Make sure the guy over there holds the course in the meantime, the mate nodded.

Calmly, José Nuñez went down into the forecastle. If Chaparrito thought there was good reason to take a look at the
tramp, then there was good reason. It had happened before that
the freebooters, that miserable pack of thieves, had sent a man
aboard the gold ships to demoralize the crew so it wouldn’t resist
if the ship was attacked and plundered.

A group of sailors, who were off duty and drinking taatsch,
agave whiskey, from dented mugs, were sitting about one of the
long tables. In the middle of the circle were Pablo Avarano,
Juan Gomez, and the veteran who had lost his nose.

— Has anybody seen Chaparrito? the mate asked. Are you
filling yourselves again with that poisonous trash? You’d think
you guys had drunk and whored enough in port, but you never
get enough. Just wait till you’re sitting in purgatory: then you’ll
have to go thirsty; if you’ve drunk too much here, you’ll atone
for it there.

He cast a quick look at Juan Gomez and the old man: there
was no mistaking that they were discharged soldiers on the way
home, and they couldn’t be the ones Chaparrito meant. So it was
the third one, who looked suspicious.

— Who are you? he asked.
— My mother was very beautiful, señor, even if you
wouldn’t think it looking at me, don Pablo answered. When she
was young she was famous for her beauty in our whole district,
and the patron did her the honor of sending for her and blessing
her with a child, even though she was already married. One
wouldn’t believe it possible, but the bastard looked down on us
other brothers and sisters. He regarded himself as half-noble,
and he did become a distinguished man, too, and now he’s a
procurator. As far as I’m concerned, I don’t make any big de-
mands, but it’s my view that when someone talks to me, it ought
to take place politely.

— I beg your pardon, señor, José Nuñez said and turned to
go. He had heard enough to know that Chaparrito was wrong
after all. On deck José Nuñez would certainly get the crew to
obey, but in the forecastle he had no say whatsoever. Here was
the sailors’ sanctuary, and he who didn’t respect it very easily
risked ending his life rather abruptly with a knife between the
ribs. As soon as the crew began to drink, nobody knew what
might happen.

The taatsch scratched their throats, and some of the crew were already pretty drunk. It was half-dark in the room, even now in broad daylight. On the middle of the table stood a large barrel with salted mutton and trays with cassava bread which was already so dry it had to be softened up in water before one could get it down.

— There’s no point to a party without whiskey, don Pablo said. The people up there have the good wine, and for them there’s a party around the clock. They own all the gold the ship holds, and why isn’t it yours?

— Because the gold doesn’t want to be with us, the old sailor Alberto answered. The skin on our fingers is too thick. It only wants to be with people with white hands. Gold is like a woman who wants to be caressed by a pretty hand and not by a coarse fist.

— But the pirates don’t have fine hands, somebody said.

— They’ve made a pact with the Devil, Alberto said. He reveals the gold ships’ course to them, but in exchange they have to shed blood. And in the end he takes them when the time has come. The Devil comes as a raven or a black dog and fetches the soul because the gold is the Devil’s snare, and you have to pay for the pleasures it brings you in hell’s torment.

They instinctively muted their voices while they were talking about evil. Here in the ocean his power was great and dreadful, and they had all seen sea-spirits and ghosts and at times the Devil himself. On one voyage Alberto had seen him as a screeching bird which kept circling around the ship as if it had some business on board. It was big and ugly, and no one had ever seen its match. Finally it sat down on the head of the main-mast and sat there and waited for a soul whose time had come and who now had to travel the dark road.

— We tried to scare it away, he recounted. And the mate shot at it with a bullet that was dipped in holy water. It flew away and flapped around the ship a few times and sat down again. The mate loaded and shot the next round, but this time the bullet wasn’t blessed and it hit a sailor right in the heart. At the
same moment the bird uttered an ugly shriek and plunged down into the air as if it wanted to catch something. Then it flew away, but it carried the man’s soul in its beak, and it knew the way to hell.

That’s the way they talk about odd experiences, about devils and sea-spirits and adventures on far-away coasts. Alberto, who was gnarled with wild-growing hair and beard, had seen women who had six breasts like animals, indeed he had slept with one of them, and she knew how to love him like a perfect devil-woman. And on desolate skerries and islands live the harpies, who have claws instead of hands, and if a ship with seamen is stranded, the harpies take them as prisoners and keep them as husbands, and they never return.

— Then the Indian girl in there is better, the mulatto Christobal says.

— You can get enough of that kind when you’re in port, one of the others says. But it would be smartest if you kept away from her. You know, she belongs to one of the grandees up there.

— Then why does he let her sleep down here?

— You may come to regret it.

— If he lets her lie down here, then he’ll surely have to put up with our taking a bit of a peek at her. And I don’t expect she’s going to die from it. If he’s not going to take care of her, she doesn’t have to lie and miss menfolk. We don’t have to wear her out.

— Have you lost your mind, man, Pablo Avarano calls out and gets up from the bench. Juan Gomez also gets up circumspectly and loosens his long knife in its sheath. It now looks as though there’s going to be a row, and Juan has a notion as to what that will mean among a group of half-drunk sailors in a forecastle.

The mulatto is on the way into the room where the Indian girl has her bunk, and the others follow after. Christobal doesn’t look especially pleasant: he had one eye lacerated in a fight and his front teeth knocked out.

— Leave her alone, a hotheaded little Portuguese screams.
If one of us begins, we’ll whore her to death, and then all hell will break loose afterwards. And there isn’t even any flesh on those Indian girls. You can feel their skeleton when you sleep with them. Leave her in peace, you son of a black bitch.

— What are we going to do? don Pablo whispers to Juan Gomez. He can’t be allowed to touch her. We’re humans and not animals.

— Let’s see what happens, Juan says calmly. There’s time enough for the knife to be used.

— I want to have her, the mulatto hisses, proceeding into the girl’s berth. Undisturbed by the noise, she’s lying with her child in her arms, her fine breast rising and sinking calmly in her sleep. Christobal stops in front of the bunk. The Indian is standing in front of it, and it looks as though he has understood what’s going on.

— Move, the mulatto says, and the Indian gives him a piercing look.

In the background the sailors are pushing their way into the doorway. Juan Gomez still has his hand on the handle of his knife.

— Maybe she’s yours? Christobal shouts in a rage. You’re a damn slave yourself. Why don’t you answer?

The Indian doesn’t take his eyes off him, and not a muscle moves in his face. He’s standing motionless and looks at the drunk and crazy man, and slowly the mulatto retreats a few steps. Then he turns around, shoves his way past the other sailors, goes to his bunk, stretches out, and yawns.

— Yeah, you’re a hero, the Portuguese sneers. You let yourself be frightened by an unarmed Indian slave.

— Don’t talk about unarmed, Christobal says. I saw what I saw, and you won’t catch me fighting with that kind.

— What did you see?
— Was it the Devil?

— So you think you can get away with it that way, you cowardly black dog. But that’s what you black bloods are like, you curs.

The Portuguese got a fist in his face and went backwards.
with a roar. He was immediately up on his feet again, and the
two men danced around each other like two fighting cocks. The
mulatto was the stronger, but the Portuguese adroitly avoided his
mighty fists, and at the same time he was heaping blows on the
mulatto, his shrill voice resounded:
— You cur, you cowardly black dog, your mother begot you
with a boar. You can rape womenfolk, but if a man steps in your
way, it’s all over with your courage, you black wretch. Now I’ve
got you.

He struck Christobal under the chin, and the mulatto col-
lapsed like a sack on the floor.
— So you’re lying there, you dirty black swine—going into
a girl’s bed is something else again. It would serve you right if
I took a knife and cut you—you know, you’re not worth anything
to begin with anyway.
— Here’s a knife, one of the sailors called. Fling him on the
table and let’s castrate him.

Willing hands were immediately ready; the screaming mulat-
to was lifted up and flung urgently on the table, and the Portu-
guese pulled his clothing aside and bared his sex.
— Now bring the knife, he shouted. And a bowl for the
blood—then I’ll soon make him into a capon.

That was one of the usual gross jokes that went on in the
crew room when the crew had had something to drink. But a
wildness lurked underneath. It was as if the atmosphere itself,
the heavy, glowing air in the room demanded release. Some-
thing had to happen—murder, mutilation, a manhood had to be
sacrificed. The Portuguese was standing with bloodshot eyes;
his wild, bearded face jutted out over the victim.
— Bring the knife, his shrill voice resounded. Give me a
knife, and I’ll geld him. He won’t play bull any more, the black
ox!

The mulatto’s scream was thin with terror; he screamed like
a pig in the slaughterhouse. Don Pablo grabbed Juan Gomez by
the arm.
— What are we going to do? he asked, at his wit’s end. We
can’t just stand there calmly and watch a man get mutilated.
— If they want to carve one another to pieces, just let them, Juan replied. But it won't get that far. Rabble quarrel and rabble reconcile.

The Portuguese was handed a knife and pretended to be ready to use it. With a murderous howl the mulatto succeeded in sweeping aside the men who were holding him down and getting free. Then he snatched the knife out of the Portuguese’s hand and thrust it in him. The broad blade glanced off his clothing and struck him in the shoulder instead of in the chest.

— He got me, the black swine, the Portuguese howled and slid down on to the floor.

The ones standing closest grabbed the mulatto and wrested the knife from him. The Portuguese wailed as if he were near death.

— He got me in the lung—may all the saints stand by me. Go get a priest.

— So you see what happens and you only got a scratch.

— Go get the priest so I can confess, the Portuguese howled. I have mortal sins on my conscience—are you people going to let me die without absolution? If you do that, I’ll damn you in my last hour. My life is as full of sins as a strainer is full of holes. Be merciful—you hear me.

The men stood silently and looked at him.

— It’s not a dangerous wound, one of them said.

— But if he croaks, he’ll fly right into the puddle.

— He’ll do that anyway.

— There can be wound-fever, and I saw a man die of less. If he wants extreme unction, we can’t deny it to him. Why did you stab him, fool?

— You know, he wanted to geld me, the damned guy. He was about to destroy me, the mulatto said. Let him just burn in hell.

— And what do you think will happen with you yourself the day you’ll have to be held to account. Don’t you know it’s the greatest sin to deny a sinner a priest at death?

Go call José Nuñez, Alberto said.

That’ll mean the mast, one of the others said.
— Then let it be the mast, Alberto said. It’s his own fault. He was justified in defending himself, but not in using a knife. We’re not animals, are we, who have to slaughter one another. He used a knife, and he has to atone for it.

An hour later the mulatto was standing by the fore-spanker. His right hand was nailed to the mast with the same knife he had used. The blood trickled down over his brown arm in a slow stream from the wound. His head was bowed, his face distorted with pain.

— Man is wolf to man, don Pablo said with a little sigh. But for the grandees it seems to be an interesting divertissement during a boring sea voyage.

The passengers viewed the sailor who was nailed fast and discussed how long he could hold himself erect.

— There’s Negro blood in him, he’s tough, Samuel Rayburn said. I’d bet he’s still standing there at sunrise tomorrow.

— He’ll be finished before sunset, colonel Gonzales said.

The colonel won. Later in the afternoon Christobal fell down, and the knife tore his hand. He was bandaged and flung into his bunk. Presumably he’s now been broken of the habit of using a knife on board a ship, the colonel said.
The wretched mulatto was lying and chattering deliriously in his bunk while the drinking bout continued. Once in a while José Nuñez found some pretext for going down to the orlop deck to see how things were going. He shook his head peevishly—if only that damn drinking would go to the devil! They weren’t God’s best children, and if they got whiskey, the wildness could suddenly well up in them. But for the time being they still turned out readily enough for their watches.

Chaparrito, the little bush, had settled down in the middle of the drinking crowd and got his share of the bottle too. He drank deeply and steadily without its being noticeable, and if a couple of them were about to start quarreling with each other, he was immediately on the spot with a few admonishing words. And as the hot day ebbed away, it was as if peace fell over the crew. A bit of an evening coolness filtered down through the hatch—one noticed the ocean’s cool breathing; over one’s head the guards’ heavy steps could be heard.

And now the talk came round to the mighty ocean, which had become their life and their fate, and which some time would become their death. It was great and merciless, and in its depths ruled evil spirits which rose up out of the waves to seize people and drag them down into the deep. At night they rushed howling over the foaming seas, and there were people who could summon them. Chaparrito had once sailed with a Negro who had power over the sea-spirits. He had a drum, and with it he crawled out to the furthest point on the bowsprit and drummed the spirits up out of the ocean. He could turn the wind, and for weeks the vessel fought with head wind until the Negro fell overboard. The spirits had taken the power from him and pulled him down.

— Yes, yes, Alberto said, some sea-spirits were devils from hell, but others were drowned mens’ souls. They hooked on to the ship with their bony hands, and it couldn’t move on even if a sweeping tail wind was blowing. They wanted to get on board, they wanted to be among the living again, or perhaps they just wanted to get on land and be buried in consecrated ground so
their souls could find peace. Alberto had once found a soul from the sea in his bunk.

— He was lying there and sleeping when I came back from the middle watch. The fish had eaten his face right into the bone, and he was lying there and staring at me with bloody eye sockets, saltwater dripping from the bedding.

— Brother, I said to him. Your place isn’t here. In the name of God and all the saints, go back where you came from.

— He didn’t move, but kept looking at me, and never has any human being looked so mournful as his face. At last I had to turn my head away so I wouldn’t start crying, but I couldn’t let him lie there, because otherwise we’d all have ended up in the ocean before sunrise. I took my cross from my chest, and it was a strong cross, cast in lead from a church window, and he had to yield to it. He got up from the bed, sighed so that my heart was scorched, and a streak of water followed him on the deck. But he had to go up onto the ladder and into the ocean again, and when he went into the waves, there was howling and wailing in the rigging.

— Couldn’t you have granted him a little rest in your bunk? don Pablo asked. The ocean is cold.

— Now there’s a bright idea, little brother, Alberto said. If you let the sea-spirits come on board, the ship must sink. The ocean doesn’t want to get rid of its dead. It was better for him to stay out there than for all of us to end there.

The others nodded. That’s the way it was. There, beyond the ship’s planks, in the immense, desolate ocean, spirits ruled, the eternally homeless, who hadn’t gotten a grave to repose in. But here in the forecastle were warmth and fellowship. Most of them were men without family or permanent abode. Evil fate had driven them to sea: they had fled from a murder in an inn or from a jail, or were simply driven by a yearning for a new and free life, which they had never found and now had forgotten. They sailed for months, slept and drank and went on land into a port where they caroused their wages away, and before they themselves knew it, they tumbled back into the sea.

But here was fellowship, their real home. They were no
longer Andalusians or Catalonians, Portuguese or Negroes, but sailors. They could sneer at one another or fight till blood flowed, but they knew they belonged together. They had no one else to rely on but one another, while the whole rest of the living or dead world consisted of enemies who would only exploit them, kill them, or cause their ruin. These coarse and apathetic men, these vagabonds and brawlers owned only one thing: solidarity. That was their only good on the voyage through life, the feeling of belonging together, the law that they stood one for all and all for one.

They came and went in shifting watches, flung themselves dead tired on their bunks after having struggled with the stubborn sails or taken their turn at the heavy rudder. Or they sat down on the bench, took a couple of mouthfuls of the salted mutton and reached out for the nearest bottle with a swig of taatsch left. Some smoked tobacco from small black clay pipes, although it was forbidden. A fire could start, or heaven could get angry about this vice; a smoking man is a hell of a fire. The smoke undulated under the horn lanterns and spiced the heavy, stuffy air, and the tobacco produced peace in the soul and gentle thoughts.

On every single voyage they had to conquer the new world over again and sail the heavily laden vessels across the mighty ocean. They were the new era’s conquistadors, but others owned the gold that they conveyed safely into port. They had to fight their way through hurricanes, be thirsty when there was dead calm and the water became stagnant in the tanks, starve when the mutton and biscuits were used up, and at times fight for their lives with freebooters who lurked along the gold ships’ route. Rarely did any of them become old, and it never happened that somebody amassed so much that he could enjoy the peace of his old age on land. An old seaman had to beg for bread like a beggar. That’s why it was best if the sea conferred on him a merciful death.

The skin on their hands was too coarse, gold didn’t want to be with them, and nevertheless the San Salvador was fully loaded with gold ingots and precious treasures. They were lying
right under their feet, and they couldn’t help talking about the inconceivable wealth that was so close to them. Some told tales about what they would do if they had merely a small part of this immense wealth. They would drink the finest wine and own the most beautiful women.

— Oh, you fools, don Pablo butted into the conversation over the whiskey bottle. Why do you people think about such things you know you’ll never dare do? You’ve grown accustomed to being slaves, and you’ll never be masters. What are you but a flock of shepherds who guard the rich people’s lambs.

— And you, so what are you? Alberto asked.

— Truly not one of the righteous. But I know a little about life. In order to get gold, you have to have the will to take it, and to take it, you have to be able to kill. Have you killed a person?

— Yeah, in a fight, but I was drunk then.

— What did you feel?

— At that moment I felt joy. But afterwards I regretted it and didn’t understand why I had done it. It’s a serious thing to take another person’s life. And he who lives by the sword dies by the sword.

— They’ve given you the doctrine that’s best for you, mate. In five minutes you could clear out the cabins up there of all the fine passengers and throw them all overboard. But you don’t do that because you know they own you. They’ve banged that into your stupid heads: they own us, and they can do with us whatever they feel like. And if someone or other thinks of asking what the situation basically is concerning all the property rights, they’ve taught you to answer: it’s God’s will, and no one shall resist God. But has God himself told you what his will is? No, the priest did that. First and foremost he serves the rich and powerful, and he gets his food without pain by preaching wealth’s commandment, which is not God’s.

— What are you trying to achieve with your words? asked the veteran without a nose. Do you want to egg them on to plunder the ship?

— I’m no fool, brother noseless, don Pablo answered. If I had my way, I’d sink all the gold down to the bottom of the
ocean. I'd put a pickaxe and a spade in every man's hand and say to him: now eat your bread by the sweat of your brow in accordance with God's own word, drink your wine with joy, love your wife and replenish the earth, and every time you meet a thief or a robber who wants to live on other people's toil, make short shrift of him. There weren't any caballeros in paradise unless the serpent was of the aristocracy, and the scripture doesn't report anything about that.

— You interpret the holy word like an emissary from hell.

— Then interpret it yourself since you're so versed in the scriptures. Is it written: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, or is the word: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou serve the masters' superabundance? Does your gospel demand that the poor man must let his children want for bread so the rich man can get cake?

— But no good comes of violence.

— Is that what you thought before you yourself lost your nose? Was it with God's word as the weapon that you went chasing after the Indians' boy and girl, his ox and ass? Or maybe you lost your nose in the whorehouse?

— Watch it, Juan Gomez mumbled. Don't provoke him—even an old bull can become vicious.

The old man's face was red with anger, he breathed heavily and as if snoring and could barely get the words out.

— What are you but a drunkard and a vagabond? he stammered. You should be whipped for daring to take God's word in your polluted mouth. If only your tongue would rot in your mouth.

— Maybe it's better to hear God's word when it's spoken from the depth of degradation than from the altar of self-exaltation, don Pablo said. God's own son preferred to rub shoulders with publicans and sinners and not with the Pharisees.

The old man hobbled ill-temperedly into his bunk, and the others laughed, but Juan Gomez shook his head.

— That wasn't smart, he said. There are many ravens in the world, and the old man looked as if he has the ability to remember his enemies.
— In any case he can’t smell them, don Pablo said. And it’s not enough to hate one’s enemies, one must also know who in reality is one’s enemies. Do you know that, good soldier Juan Gomez, and do you courageous seamen know that? You all hate those who crack the whip over you, but not him who directs the whip’s blows. Whiskey can scratch your throat, but hatred scratches more in the heart, and if only you could hate.

— What’s the advantage of hatred supposed to be? Will we get richer from it? Alberto asked.

— Certainly you won’t get richer, but what wealth do you have now except the prospect of a couple of years’ toil and drudgery and then a death in the waves. If you people talk about the gold we have on board, your eyes are about to fall out of your head with desire to get your fingers in it. But gold isn’t worth anything. Can you perhaps eat it or have a good time with it in bed? Gold means nothing but power over all of us who don’t own it. If it weren’t there, we’d be free.

— Surely you’ve studied at the Devil’s university.

— You guess right, don Pablo said. I know all about the Devil and his work, which you people should also know. I know about blood and tears and about the rich people’s stone-hard hearts, which are an abomination to God. I know those who use God’s name to advance the Devil’s work, and those who speak with pious tongues, while their souls are wells of evil and filth. I know whom I should hate, and I hate them. And if I were pope and infallible, I would introduce the sacrament of hate and distribute it to all the poor and wretched, to whom the rich give stones for bread, and they would learn to hate till their souls were scorched, and the pain would incite them to action.

— You’re drunk—you better go to bed and stop talking foolish words, Juan Gomez said.

— I’m drunk, but my words are not foolish, don Pablo said. They’re good, strong words which come from a place in me that whiskey can’t penetrate. You, my friends, scarcely know what the demand for unconditional intellectual honesty is. But for me it’s more than father and mother, more than my beloved and love, more than paradise lost and eternal peace.
He babbled and his head sank down onto his chest, as if he suddenly had become very tired. Juan Gomez took him by his tall and thin body and lifted him up as lightly as if he were a child, who had to be carried into bed.

— What is wisdom and what is folly? he said almost gently. Now we’ve talked as between brothers, and now he’s best off going to bed.
A couple of days at sea, and it seemed like months since the passengers aft had set foot on dry land. They had become a bit accustomed to the ocean, to the ship's chopping in the sea, and both the viceroy and the inquisitor had emerged from their cabins. They had gotten over their seasickness.

Don Pedro de Carajaval didn't bother much with the other passengers. Only with the inquisitor and doña Inez did he at times converse in his stiff and formal way, and doña Inez found it difficult to suppress a yawn every time he approached. The small, dry, and elegant man emanated such deadly tedium that she really began to pity the court, which would soon enjoy the honor of his visit. Silence descended wherever he appeared, or cheerful, informal discourse was succeeded by strained conversation.

The only one who by preference sought don Pedro's company was colonel Gonzales, and he had his well-considered reasons. He was an old warhorse who had served for forty years and now was on his way back to Madrid to work on behalf of his plans to conquer new lands toward the north. His face was like tanned leather, his mustache bristled fiercely, and when he became animated, his voice could be heard from one end of the ship to the other. His one arm was stiff from a machete blow, and he went about clothed according to the old soldier style which was still in use in his musty garrison. Don Vargas maliciously called him the belated conquistador.

Doña Inez smiled, but actually she rather liked the old soldier. One could imagine him landing on the beach at the head of his people and, with sword in hand, conquering kingdoms bigger and more splendid than Europe's to be repaid with oblivion and poverty by the king, whose might he had created. She shrugged her beautiful shoulders sympathetically. No one knew better than she that the colonel was a relic of the past, and that the future belonged to the enterprising mineowners and planters, who used not sword and carbine, but the whip.

The colonel was wont to pay a visit to the viceroy in his cab-
in the morning and politely to request intelligence on how his excellency had slept and the state of his health. Don Pedro liked that, the visit evidencing respect for his rank and position, and nodded graciously to the colonel. Thereafter Gonzales guided the conversation over to his political ideas. Toward the north lay tremendous and fertile tracts of land to which no one other than the king of Spain had the right, and a military occupation could be undertaken very easily.

— Don’t we actually have enough land? don Pedro asked.

— Can a sovereign get sufficient territory? And new lands offer new possibilities for emigration. The native population is uncivilized, but we can civilize it and use it as a labor force. Or we can introduce negro slaves. It’s our historic mission to spread our Christian culture to these regions. No one knows better than your excellency, whose noble title is among our country’s best, that we Spaniards are a master race, which is created to rule over others.

— Far be it from me to deny this fact, don Pedro conceded. But I am seriously afraid that an occupation will lead to war. After all, we made agreements in the past with France and England.

— War, colonel Gonzales replied and straightened himself up. Are we Spaniards afraid of war? Whom should we fear? The debauched and degenerate Frenchmen or the English shopkeepers’ souls? If war comes, we must accept it; no threat can prevent us from fulfilling our historic mission.

The viceroy nods, but there’s a malicious little smile on his wooden face. The colonel’s plans are politically impossible, and among the dispatches on board is a report that discusses them with indulgent jocularity. Gonzales will never get an audience at the court; all doors will be closed to him. The old officer will wind up running in vain from pillar to post until he’s probably placed in a lunatic asylum. But he has breeding—that can’t be denied. He knows that he owes his superiors respect.

No one took the colonel’s political ideas seriously, but he was the best man at the gaming table. Every evening the dice game began in the mess, where the passengers took their meals.
Colonel Gonzales was attended by invariable luck, and it didn’t occur to anyone to accuse him of cheating. Anyone who would have done that wouldn’t have gotten off lightly because, even though space was tight on the San Salvador, there was space for a duel.

Most of the passengers tried their luck and gracefully lost a few gold pieces to Gonzales. The most eager was don Luis, who as a rule had no luck. He played nervously, with blazing cheeks, and swore furiously when he lost. He had already sold a gold ring to the Englishman he shared the cabin with, and got paid shamelessly little.

When don Luis wasn’t playing, he stayed near doña Inez. He had quickly fallen in love with the beautiful, middle-aged woman, whose wealth was so great that one had trouble imagining it. His obvious infatuation amused her; she nodded to him:

— Sit down, don Luis, and tell me about all your experiences.

And the young officer took a seat next to doña Inez under the awning and reported on the experiences that the new world had conferred on him. He had been on an expedition to find El Dorado, the golden land, and he depicted the terrible dangers he had undergone among savage Indian tribes, who had never seen a white man. He had met Indians who were head hunters and others who smeared themselves with phosphorous so they shone like pillars of fire at night, and if don Luis hadn’t had his good, shiny sword, he wouldn’t have been sitting here safe and sound.

In reality, the expedition was confined to a foolish trip, which he had undertaken with a couple of fellow soldiers up in the mountains because some Indians had twaddled that there was gold. Perhaps they hoped to get money to buy taatsch, perhaps it amused them to get the young, white warriors out on a long and onerous walk.

— And the gold? doña Inez asked teasingly. How much did you find?

— The gold? don Luis repeated, confused. Of course, the gold. No, we didn’t find it, but there’s hardly a doubt that it’s there, and I want to equip a new expedition—later sometime.
Doña Inez nodded with interest; of course he ought to try a new expedition—sometime. No doubt he really had been on the trail of El Dorado. Thousands of young adventurers had been on the trail of the golden land and had returned just as poor. But it is to be hoped that they never find the Indians’ fabled treasure because then gold will drop in price, and doña Inez’s gold mine will lose in value.

She closes her eyes a moment and thinks about the El Dorado she owns. Her mine lies in a place far into the mountains. One reaches it by narrow mountain paths, where one must stop every moment and gasp for breath in the thin air. A couple of hundred miserable huts of clay and straw sit on the mountain slope, and every day four hundred Indian slaves descend into the mine galleries with pick-axes, while the overseers with whips take care that they work industriously, and that they don’t steal the lumps of pure gold that are sometimes found. Nevertheless, it happens that an Indian and a lump of gold have disappeared. If he didn’t take his family along, his wife and his children are tied to posts in front of the calpixqui’s house and whipped. It’s brutal, but necessary, doña Inez knows; one must teach the others what happens if gold is stolen.

The Indians work fourteen hours in the mine in the thin air, where every movement inflicts great pain and one feels as if one is to be suffocated. It is hard to furnish provisions up here, and the slaves live mostly on cornmeal, which is transported along the paths on the backs of mules. There are no vegetables, no fresh corn cobs, no fruit, milk, or meat. The men are gaunt, one can count every rib in their chests, and the women are a pitiful sight, gaunt, with big stomachs and pendulous breasts. And the children. Doña Inez doesn’t care to think about them. They’re only skin and bone and resemble small brooding old men with oversized heads, who know everything about life and its conditions the moment they come out of their mother’s womb.

— They ought not to have children, doña Inez is thinking. Perhaps one ought to forbid them to take wives. And of course they don’t get any joy out of the little ones because the children don’t grow old. They languish like plants that can’t grow so tall
up in the mountains. Besides, no one gets old in the gold mine. New slaves have to be procured constantly. It’s altogether distressing, and the only consolation is that the Indians don’t understand their own sufferings. A mule doesn’t suspect there’s another life than bearing burdens and getting whipped.

Her thoughts go further, to the large plantations and haciendas she owns and has just visited. There, too, are Indian slaves who toil hard under the burning sun till one day they can’t go on and fall down like horses that have been ridden too harshly. They live in barracks or wretched huts, and they have to be whipped to work, her calpixque assert, because they are as lazy as donkeys. One has to use a hard hand; there’s no use showing leniency. They’re a really miserable race, an over-calpixqui assured her. One would think that they lie down to die from pure obstinacy rather than doing the work their masters demand of them.

Of course, there is an El Dorado. The whole country is an El Dorado, with pits, mines, fertile soil, and as many Indian slaves as one has use for. But what does a stupid little officer understand about it? What does he know about her cotton and tobacco plantations, about the large haciendas where she has mighty herds of cattle, about the new territories where she has had grapevines planted to raise grapes, about the Indian villages she rules over, about the encomiendas she owns and where the Indians are for the time being her tenants, but where she is about to shift to a more intensive and profitable operation, which means that the Indians will have to submit to becoming slaves.

The new world is rich and enormous, nature has bestowed on it all its luxury, and doña Inez has subdued it. Oh, how she understands don Guilemo’s horror of death. If she just had another couple of lives, what wouldn’t she be able to accomplish? What do these Indians have to complain about after all—they die, and some time she herself will also die? But she will do something to ease their hard lives: she will build many churches, and no expense will be spared on their splendor. The gold mine, too, will have its church or at least a beautiful chapel. There the Indian mothers can kneel before the altar and pray that they might
meet their little dead children in the eternal light, because presumably there is also a kind of Indian heaven.

— I’ve been married twice, she said half to don Luis and half to herself. And both my husbands were asses. They weren’t good for anything at all, not even in bed. They were very proud of their blue blood and very zealous about getting their rank respected at the court. Our whole country is poisoned by power which is no power, and by men who are not men. Have you ever thought about that, don Luis?

— No, I haven’t, don Luis answered, confused.

— Our grandees are insufferable, incapable, unfit, and stupider than geese, doña Inez said. There’s no reason altogether to be fond of human beings. Sometimes I wonder about why God created them after all. Can it really amuse him to have this rabble sing his praises, to beg for gold, power, and honor? But perhaps Our Lord is himself a grandee who has created man in his image and conferred on him his own almighty stupidity.

— Señora, be careful what you say, the young officer said.

— That’s not necessary, doña Inez smiled. I’m rich enough to be able to say what I think, and what’s more, so rich that I have the means to think.

— If you knew how I admire you, señora, don Luis said romantically.

— No doubt, doña Inez said. But I’d like to know whether you’d choose me if I were a girl in a bordello.

That’s the way their conversations always ended when they were alone, and don Luis stood confused and didn’t know what was serious and what was mockery. He was blinded by her wealth, and her nature satisfied his need for authority. A luster of power and authoritativeness surrounded this woman with the beautiful arms and the round shoulders. She was like the Madonna, who ruled over the people, indeed she was more than the Madonna because she was rich and living and could change captain Luis de Zuniga’s whole life with a wave of her slender white hand.

Don Jesus often appeared on the after-deck and had friendly conversations with the other passengers. He was rotund in his
simple priest’s garb, which bore no sign of his high clerical rank. His face was round and full of tiny wrinkles. Actually, he most resembled a friendly old woman, but his eyes were small and melancholy like a sick little monkey’s, and when he smiled, they didn’t laugh along. He ate alone in his cabin and strictly adhered to his fast. The inquisitor was an ascetic, and when he was alone, his lips moved in prayer, while his small thick hands with the bitten-off nails fingered the beads on his rosary.

Don Vargas shared a cabin with the little, corpulent, and learned Dominican Fray Ramon, who was a teacher at the university in Mexico, and the two men took a walk together on the deck every morning. Don Ramon gesticulated ardently when he spoke about his students.

— There are matters we often forget to mention—our work to civilize the Indians and bestow our culture on them. Do you know, worthy brother, that when Mexico’s university was founded over a hundred years ago, a professorship in Indian languages was established immediately, and there was already at that time an Indian school with over a thousand Indian boys as pupils? A stream of teachers, bookdealers, and books went to the new world. I’ve heard that both the French and the English are exterminating the Indians in their colonies, while we are going the other way: we’re trying to turn them into useful citizens. And we’re constantly making progress. Every year young Indians from the most remote regions come to our university. And they are clever minds, and easily appropriate our learning. We have conquered these lands, and it is our duty as a leading cultural nation to civilize them. We shall give them knowledge, more and more knowledge.

— Pardon, reverend brother, the Jesuit said. But what about the land?

— The land?

— The land, the mines, the gold, which we took from them? They were after all in their way—notice that I say in their way, namely according to their primitive, heathen conceptions—things that belonged to them.

— Here you’re touching on a difficult and painful question,
don Ramon said, and flung out his short arms regretfully. Of course it can’t be denied that the occupation of the land in several respects did not benefit the population. Let’s just say it directly: the conquistadors, whose bravery many of my native pupils by the way have celebrated in song in perfect Latin hexameter, undeniably robbed the Indians of what until then they had considered their lawful property, but I don’t see how one can remedy it. Even if it were possible as a practical matter to give the land back, the current owners of course also have their duly acquired rights.

— Which, moreover, are rather far-reaching since the circumstances have rendered it necessary in various places to make the original owners slaves.

— Alas, don’t remind me of it, don Ramon said sorrowfully. But this injustice can be made good. For there is no other word for it than injustice. May I recall my illustrious brother in the order, the blessed bishop de las Casas, who fought against slavery his whole life. Our order has on the whole constantly fought for the Indians’ human rights, and if these Benedictines hadn’t —but may God forbid that I should say anything.

— I’m afraid the Benedictines are still the strongest.

— Perhaps, don Ramon said firmly. But I believe in human progress. The world goes forward, humanism grows despite everything. We university teachers have sent many petitions to Madrid for the relief of the Indians’ conditions. Already las Casas pointed out that the Indians weren’t even suited to be slaves, and that it would be more expedient to use Negroes.

— But Negroes, too, ought possibly to be considered as a kind of human being.

— We are all the Lord’s creatures. But I’m not certain that the life on the plantations isn’t better for the Negroes than freedom. It’s an inferior race, and even if they live in slavery, nevertheless, they come into contact in this way with the Christian culture. I don’t believe the Negroes suffer under bondage like the Indians.

— And on the plantations and in the mines one can also enlighten them about Christianity.
— Precisely, we mustn’t forget the religious side of the matter. But I would have wished you had visited us at the university so you could study our results. Last semester we had ten Indians studying Greek, and one took a licentiate in Hebrew. .

The inquisitor came toward them, and they stopped respectfully and greeted him.

— A splendid morning, don Jesus said, inhaling the fresh air in deep breaths. I hope I am not disturbing my brothers’ conversation.

— Not at all, your reverend father, fray Ramon assured him.

— We were talking about the fine results that don Ramon has attained with his Indian students, don Vargas said.

— To be sure, the inquisitor said. I am not at all unfamiliar with these things. But I will not deny that I am skeptical. We are dealing with a people which is very primitive and very childlike, and which has lived for thousands of years in the most appalling heathendom. There is a need to learn, but first and foremost to learn to obey.

— But these studies after all do expand knowledge.

— But is it knowledge the Indians first and foremost need? In my opinion it is first and foremost discipline. The almighty has placed this people in our hands in order that we might develop a disposition to serve. This people cannot guide its own destiny, cannot think its own thoughts; we have the responsibility for these little ones of God. And we do not solve the problem by giving them our knowledge and letting them aspire to become our equals. Do not forget, fray Ramon, that it is only a brief time since they sacrificed animals and humans to their idols, and heathendom still resides in the dark corners of their soul. We must treat them justly but firmly, and teach them that by serving their earthly masters, they serve God.

Don Ramon’s good-natured face had darkened, and he breathed heavily, but he dared not contradict the inquisitor. Don Jesus glanced at him, fingered his rosary a bit and said gently:

— I know you are acting in the best faith when you educate your Indians, fray Ramon. You must not in any way take my words as a reproach. I am only an old man who is ignorant
enough in scholarly and classical matters, but life has taught me to think more about the one necessary thing. And what I said about the Indians applies in its way to us too. We must learn to submit to discipline because it is for our own best. The Christian must kiss the lash that whips his back bloody.

He took the other two by the arm and walked slowly with them to the railing and pointed out across the sea:

— How deep is the sea? he asked, and answered himself: — No one knows. We know only one single thing, that he who sinks in its depths never returns. And only a few planks joined together by weak human hands separate us from that deathly deep. Just one little storm, and we stagger about and do not know at what hour we will be shipwrecked. Just one undersea rock and we are irretrievably lost. If a little ocean voyage is so dangerous, what should we think of the voyage through life? Everywhere we turn we meet eternal perdition. The terrible monsters of the deep lurk to swallow us, storms to seize us, hell to catch us. There is only one single thing that has meaning, that we step safe and sound onto land on the coast our voyage is going to and which is that of light and salvation. It matters not at all what we may suffer on the voyage, not in relation to the terrible fate that will be ours if we are stranded underway.

— This world is of an evil nature, and we must not set ourselves against evil, but accept our sufferings. God wants someone to crack the whip and another to receive its blows humbly. The Lord knows what serves our salvation, and he casts out into the dark whoever sets himself against the Lord’s will. We can serve the lord with prayer and hymn, and we can serve him with torment and fire. We can help him to triumph over the obdurate, help to save them from doom. Would we perhaps not put a man in chains if in sudden insanity he wanted to throw himself into the deep from this ship? It is our Christian duty of love to impose torment, indeed death, on others if we thereby can bring salvation to their souls. For salvation means everything, and life and suffering are nothing. It is better that the body die than that the soul be eternally lost, and has not God himself arranged for purgatory’s torment so that we can be purified for the eternal
— Everyone knows your reverend father has saved countless souls, don Vargas said very earnestly.

— I have not saved them, but I have broken their obstinacy and through suffering taught them to turn to God. I have been an instrument in the Lord's hand, and he has punished sin through me.

— And providence could not have found a better scourge, don Vargas said. It will be wonderful for your reverend father sometime to meet all these souls you have cleansed through suffering and saved from the eternal fire by using the earthly fire, which may well scorch, but whose flames nevertheless are like gentle rain compared to hell's sea of fire.

Don Jesus turned his wrinkled face toward him and looked at him a bit.

— Only he can be an instrument of the Lord for good who has overcome desire and malice inwardly, he said. I have loved every single one whom I have punished, and cried at his torment.

He nodded with a friendly smile and trudged back to his cabin in his long cassock.

— What piety, don Vargas said after the inquisitor was out of earshot. I'm afraid human progress will take time, and if the world advances, in any case it's by small steps. But take comfort, fray Ramon, on behalf of your Indians, for those who are the last here will become the first in the next world.

Don Ramon sorrowfully shook his graying head.
Endless days consisting of hours as long as eternity. In the morning the sun rose like a bonfire from the sea, in the evening it set in a blaze. It was best to sleep. Sleep while the San Salvador pounded the seas, or rocked one gently, sleep, until one reached a beach where there were trees and clouds, grazing oxen and leaves that fluttered in the cool wind. One was tired of all these people in such intimate proximity, and who nevertheless hadn’t the slightest to do with one, tired of the ship’s perpetual pitching in the ocean, of the boom from the sail, the rudder’s creaking, the crew’s heavy steps on the deck at night, the shouting of commands, oaths, the dry, salted food, the horizon, constantly swaying, and the smoking horn lanterns, which it swayed in tandem with.

Doña Inez was full of disgust for this voyage, which was never-ending. She was sitting under the awning with her eyes half closed and following the foaming seas, hoping that none of the passengers would talk to her. She was tired of them. She yearned for her usual life, which was full of restless bustle, of people who came and went and carried out her orders.

Suddenly it occurred to her that she could have her Indian slave fetched. She waved to a ship servant and gave him instructions. It took a long time before he returned with the slave, and in the meantime doña Inez had fallen asleep. She awoke with the two men standing next to her.

— What is it? What do you want? she asked grumpily.
— You told me to fetch the Indian, gracious señora.
— That’s right. I want to talk to him, and you can go.

She sat a bit and sleepily looked at the Indian, who was standing next to her. He had turned his head and stared out over the ocean as if doña Inez didn’t concern him in the least.

— Do you speak our language? she asked.
— Yes. I speak it even if burns like fire on my tongue.
— What’s your name?
— Pancuiaco.
— Tell me about your life. I want to know what you’ve
— A slave doesn’t have a life, but what he has experienced belongs to him alone.
— How did you become a slave?
— Your people’s warriors came and surrounded our village. We swung our machetes, the arrows sang in the air, and many men were killed. We survivors drew misfortune’s lot, for your people is without mercy.
— And what would you people have done had you won?
— Killed.
— But the Spanish soldiers didn’t kill, doña Inez said. They let their prisoners live, and isn’t life worth most of all?
— No.
— What is more precious?
— Freedom.

Doña Inez smiled. One could laugh and cry at hearing a slave, a primitive Indian, use this word. What freedom could he presumably have had? A wretched life in poverty and ignorance, more bestial than any serf’s. And still there was a pride in his appearance, a sound in his voice, which made her look at him and listen. He was like a man from another world and another time, and doña Inez suddenly had the strange thought that she had never seen a man before.

He was erect with lean, strong limbs, and he looked freely at her as if at his equal and not like a slave at his master. There wasn’t a grain of fear in his look. She racked her brain about what had been said about him when she bought him, but back then it hadn’t greatly interested her. She had taken a fancy to buying a young slave as a gift for her brother, who was governor in the Canary islands. Of course, it was forbidden to bring Indian slaves to Europe, but the law wasn’t enforced, nor, last but not least, were the Canaries Spain.

She had gotten him from a slave trader who bought up young Indian prisoners of war in order to break the men in as efficient house slaves or the women as servant girls, lovers for the young Spanish officials and officers or as girls in the bordellos. The merchant had shown her a selection of his commodities, but she
wasn't satisfied until she chose Pancuiaco.

— He isn't among the best, he said. I dare not recommend him to the gracious señora.

— Why not? doña Inez had asked.

— He's not tamed yet, and perhaps he can't be tamed at all. Some of them are like horses who can't be weaned of biting and kicking. I'll be glad to show the gracious señora others I can recommend.

— I'll take him, doña Inez said curtly, and gave instructions as to where and when the slave was to be delivered.

Now she wasn't certain she wanted to make her brother a present of the slave, and if she knew him well, he would surely also prize more highly some of the precious things she had brought home with her.

— I mean you no harm, she said gently. You'll have it good with me. Perhaps I'll grant you your freedom.

— Can you give me my machete, which they robbed me of, my hut, which they burned, my violated and murdered wife, and my gold ornaments, which I wore to honor our gods at the festivals? Or my brothers, whom they have made into slaves and who must eat the bread of degradation?

— The evil that has happened can't be undone, doña Inez said. What has happened no living person can change. But I can show you a world you can't imagine that contains magnificent things you have no inkling of.

The slave shook his head and looked out over the ocean.

Your world isn't my world, and your life isn't my life, he said. If you are my master, good, then do with me as you will. But I will never obey you—either you or anyone else. I have only one thing left and I won't let that go.

— And what's that?

— Myself, the slave said, and looked at her.

There was such strength, without anger, in his look that doña Inez had to look away. She felt confused and realized she was having heart palpitations, which annoyed her, because even if he was a beautiful young man, he was still a native, and it had been a great many years since men had given her heart palpitations.
He wasn’t tamed, and how was she to tame this wild horse? She saw fray Ramon coming with a book in his hand to find a quiet corner under the awning, and she waved to him.

— Oh, padre, she gave a forced laugh. Won’t you help me make myself understood to this young Indian. We are literally talking past each other.

Don Ramon came over to her chair and with his friendly, nearsighted eyes looked with curiosity at the slave.

— His name is Pancuiaco, and he’s a prisoner of war who was sold as a slave, doña Inez said. He’s bitter about his fate, though I’ve tried to explain to him that I’ll make sure that he has it good. He says straight out that he won’t obey me. What shall I do with him?

She noticed the slave’s eyes dwelling on her and she blushed. She added in a harsh tone:

— Shall I have him whipped?

— One accomplishes more with gentleness, señora, don Ramon said and turned toward the Indian.

— We understand your bitterness well, Pancuiaco, he said. But you know the law of war and know that bondage is the vanquished’s fate. Take comfort that you have a prominent and noble lady for a master, and that you perhaps won’t always have to continue being a slave. Perhaps the almighty has selected you as an instrument that shall bring happiness and blessings to your people. You will see much that is new and learn many things on the other side of the great ocean. All of that you ought to profit from as others have done. Believe me, Pancuiaco, many have been obstinate like you, but later have become friends with the whites.

— You mean they have submitted to the yoke, the Indian said.

— We are all under the yoke that God has placed on us, don Ramon said. We are all in God’s bonds and chains. No living human can withdraw from God’s will.

— He’s not my God. I don’t know him.

— But you will get to know him and praise his works. Is the white man not powerful, and who after all can be greater than his
God? You will learn to submit in awe of him and comprehend that the white man is your master, to whom you owe obedience, while he owes you love and care.

— You have taken our land, our women, our children and made us into slaves—is that a brother’s love? You didn’t come to us as guests, who asked to share our bread, but as enemies, who took our life and all our property. Is that a brother’s love?

— It is difficult to talk about these things, don Ramon said, distressed. Not everything in our world is perfect, and not all whites are animated by a spirit of brotherhood.

— But what is your God’s commandment?

— You shall render unto God what is God’s, and unto Caesar what is Caesar’s. That means you shall honor and worship God and serve your earthly masters willingly and obediently bear the burdens that are placed on your shoulders. Then God will help you and all his holy men.

— Our gods were frightful when they became angry. Then they shook the earth the way the storm shakes the corn plant. We trembled before them, but they could be appeased, and they never took away our freedom. Your god is a god of bondage whom I will not worship.

— But surely you are baptized?

— They read words over me and sang witchcraft, but no new spirit entered me. Oh, you whites are stupid and ignorant, you believe in the power of dead words, but the gods don’t live in words, they are in living things.

— Take care not to mock the holy baptism, don Ramon said sternly. If someone reported your words, you would fare ill. But go now where you belong, and don’t forget that this noble lady wants only your true welfare. We’ll talk later, Pancuiaco.

The Indian turned and walked calmly down toward the ladder to the orlop deck. Doña Inez looked pensively at his straight back, which radiated pride and defiance.

— What am I going to do with him? she asked.

— Let him reflect on it a bit, don Ramon said. Remember how confusing it is for a primitive native suddenly to be confronted with our modern civilization. And it surely can’t be as-
serted that his experiences up till now have given him the best impression of it. But sometimes it can be psychologically prudent to give an obstinate native a powerful lesson so that he learns for his own good what he has to gain by humility and willingness. Too bad, because he resembles a young Greek god.

—I’m not fond of these violent punishments, doña Inez said irritably. Maybe it was stupid of me to have bought him. I think I’ll give him as a gift to my brother after all.

But she knew she wouldn’t do that. She shrugged her shoulders impatiently and closed her eyes. Don Ramon slipped off with his book.

Doña Inez was not allowed to be alone for long with her anger and agitated thoughts. Samuel Rayburn had long wanted a conversation with the rich widow, and seeing her sitting alone, he found the opportunity appropriate. He approached politely with a greeting:

—Am I disturbing you, gracious señora?

—On such a voyage one is glad for every disturbance, señor, doña Inez said, and invited him to sit down.

—Yes, sea voyages are tiring, Rayburn said. But with a ship like the San Salvador it’s hardly so bad. I have traveled on ships where I had to share quarters with the crew. Here, however, there are modern accommodations.

—If only there were no vermin, doña Inez said. Every evening I have to get undressed stark naked and catch fleas in my gown.

That gave Rayburn a start. But that’s the way these barbarian women were. When very young they were cut off from the world, but when they got older, they claimed a license in speaking that grated badly on decent people’s ears. That was connected of course to the whole papist depravity.

—I would like to have permission to talk with you about Indians, señora, Rayburn said.

—About Indians? doña Inez said. Then the time is rather badly chosen. At the moment I’m tired of everything that has to do with Indians.

—So much the better if the gracious señora will bestow a
moment’s patience on me. I have inspected various mines and haciendas, and it is appalling to observe how poorly these Indians work. They are weak physically and lazy and unreliable by nature, without aptitude for moral training, and there is not the slightest doubt that one can raise the yield significantly if one introduces Negroes as labor. The Negro is strong as an ox, endures even the most difficult climate excellently, and works steadily and surely as long as one provides for sharp discipline.

— But the price difference is also significant, said doña Inez, whose business sense had suddenly awoken. Negro slaves are very expensive, while Indian slaves don’t cost us anything to procure.

— That is true, Rayburn nodded, and he added: I must first tell you, señora, that I represent a concern which is engaged in extensive trade in Negroes, and which until now has had its principal sales in the West Indies. I have been in New Spain to procure new business connections since we intend to expand our trade territory to the continent. I concede that the purchase price for negro labor is rather high, but one must keep in mind the considerable costs. We have to outfit expensive expeditions for procuring the commodity. The voyage across the ocean is protracted and the percentage lost is large since the Negroes unfortunately cannot endure the ocean—that’s the only thing they cannot endure. On the other hand, they have great procreative powers. Just a reasonable stock, and a mine or plantation will become self-sustaining. And the children can be employed, so to speak, right from the time they can walk.

— Nevertheless, I’m not entirely certain it isn’t more profitable to use the Indians.

— May I show you a couple of figures, gracious señora, Rayburn said, and took a book out of his pocket.

— That’s a prayer book, doña Inez laughed. It has a cross on the binding. But perhaps English merchants use their prayer books for accounts?

Annoyed, Rayburn stuck the prayer book back in his pocket and pulled out the right one. He felt like replying that her thought wasn’t completely wrong. English merchants bring God
along even in business. English merchants had nothing to hide from the almighty, and they shunned everything having to do with sin and papistry.

— I have here some calculations from the el Roy mine, which a few years ago switched to using black labor, he said. The pit previously employed two hundred Indians—it is a small mine—and one reckoned on every Indian's lasting on average four years. Now it is operated with a hundred Negroes, and production has risen by fifty percent. As far as one can tentatively estimate, mortality has declined to a minimum. Naturally, that does not say much since we are dealing with fresh, newly imported Negroes, but the experiences from the West Indies demonstrate that a Negro on average lasts sixteen years. Of course, the fact that one does not need to be constantly putting new and untrained people to work results in quite a different labor efficiency. It is a fact that el Roy, which previously was a quite unprofitable enterprise, has been paying off excellently after the shift to Negroes.

— Possibly you're right, señor, doña Inez said pensively. Perhaps it does pay.

Again she saw in front of her the worn-out Indians who worked in her gold mine, the gaunt women, the dying children, and once more her mind was filled with a vague compassion.

— Perhaps you're right, señor, she repeated.

— I believe I am, gracious señora, Rayburn said. I can promise that you will be satisfied with Negro slaves. You cannot imagine how much work a Negro is capable of performing on a couple of handfuls of rice or commeal.

— I can very well imagine trying Negroes in my mine, where the work is rather hard, doña Inez said. But it is of course somewhat unusual to buy people sight unseen.

— You need not harbor any anxiety whatsoever, señora, we deal only with Negroes of the highest quality. And it is the right time to buy. The prices are rising because one must obtain the Negroes farther and farther from the coast, and for that reason the transportation costs are becoming higher every year.

— Good, doña Inez said. For the time being I can imagine
giving it a try with a hundred strong, healthy Negroes who can stand hard mine work.

— I would advise you at the same time to take fifty women, Rayburn said. That means fifty children a year, and even with rather high child mortality, you can not only maintain the stock, but also substantially increase it. I will go down to my cabin now to calculate the price for delivery to the closest port. And tomorrow I will have the pleasure of submitting proposals to you for a contract.

Samuel Rayburn closed his little account book, stuck it in his pocket, and bowed respectfully and earnestly before doña Inez. None of his fellow passengers was in the cabin, and before he began to work out the details of the contract, he bent his knee and thanked God, who this time too had stood by him. And when he got up to get to work, he thought with singular pride:

— She should only know how right she was, the arrogant lady. We humble ourselves before God, and we have him with us in our whole lives, in our sorrows and joys and indeed also in our business.
In the mess the gaming took on a more heated character day by day. The stakes were raised, and instead of dice, the cards had now come onto the table. Most of the passengers were involved; only the clerics were content playing chess in their cabins.

But whether dice or cards, don Luis had a steady run of bad luck. Once in a while he flung his cards down in a rage and went for a walk on the deck, but it was as if he was drawn back to the game. A moment later he was again sitting and sweating and muttering curses with the cards in his hands. He had long since lost the money he had gotten for the gold ring, and now he was in full swing losing the loan he had received on a bill of exchange from an unsuspecting plantation owner. His cheeks got fired up, and he drank a lot of the sour, bad wine, which was poured for the players.

He had only some small coins left, and when they took a break to eat, he drew colonel Gonzales aside.

— Be so friendly as to lend me a hundred escudos, colonel, he said. You’ll get them back as soon as we reach port.

The colonel looked at him stiffly and replied that out of principle he didn’t lend money, and especially not to people he wasn’t more closely acquainted with.

— You needn’t harbor any anxiety about not getting the money back, don Luis said. I’m expecting an inheritance; I’ll get it paid out as soon as we get home. Moreover, my family is well situated, indeed rich.

The colonel shook his head, stern like an old grey wolf. In the political domain Gonzales may have been a dreamer, but he knew what money was worth. He had known many young noblemen who were expecting an inheritance, and he knew enough about young good-for-nothings from good families who were exported across the ocean and weren’t good at anything, not even playing cards.

— If you don’t have money, then you must stop playing cards, señor, he said dismissively. One gambles, makes debts, borrows and cheats and ends up in prison—it’s an old tune. Stay
away from cards, señor.

— That’s my business, don Luis answered angrily.

— In any event, you’re not going to gamble with my money, Gonzales said, and turned his back to him.

— I thought I was dealing with a caballero, don Luis sneered after him.

— Watch your mouth, little coyote, the colonel replied, and without turning around, went into his cabin to take a dram of *taatsch* before mealtime. Don Luis considered whether he should go after him and hit him in the face. But the old idiot was presumably an expert fencer, and don Luis didn’t have the slightest desire to squander his life for his honor. He made do with spitting contemptuously on the deck.

Oh, this miserable, rotten tub—how it stank of Negroes, of rancid meat and prayers, and how one had to be roasted alive for yet another forty days. Don Luis didn’t comprehend for the moment what business he’d had in the new world. He hated these countries with their stinking swamps, dry plains, and trackless mountains, and still more he hated the miserable upstarts who owned mines and haciendas and were stuffed to the gills with gold. He’d had a dream about getting rich quickly and returning home like a Croesus, but not even at the playing table did he have a bit of luck. For a moment the thought crossed his mind that perhaps he could borrow money from doña Inez, but he immediately abandoned it again. It was all too humiliating to ask her for money—yet.

Suddenly he happened to remember the Indian girl he had taken along on the voyage. Like other young officers in the garrison, he had bought a pretty young native girl, and had quickly fallen in love with her gentle gracefulness. She had gotten a child and he had decided to take her and the child along to Spain. It was a foolish whim, and he had regretted it as soon as he had come on board. What was he supposed to do with the girl and the child back home?

— Maybe I can sell her here on board, he thought. After all, she is my property, and it’s my right clear as the noonday sun. I like her a lot, but a caballero can also be compelled to sell a
horse or a dog he loves dearly. And an Indian girl is nothing but a horse—one buys her and sells her and that’s the whole of it. Moreover, it may be that she’ll be much better off with her new master.

But the child—who would buy a girl with a child? It wasn’t likely he could get a decent price for her if the buyer was forced to take the child into the bargain. If he wanted to sell the girl, the child had to go. He saw before him the soft, round body and the small, earnest brown face, and thought sadly:

— What fate awaits such a child? A life in slavery and misery. It will never get any joy out of life, but will be spared many tears if it dies now. It has gotten a little glimpse of this mournful world and goes its way again. And after all it is baptized, salvation awaits it, and it can walk right into heaven without burning in purgatory.

He was interrupted in his thoughts by the violent tolling of the ship’s bell. Sailors stormed past, the order shouted from the bridge resounded, and the passengers staggered out of their rooms. The sailor in the main-mast’s lookout had reported sail ahead, and all hands were called to the deck. Captain van Laahr, a stout and taciturn Fleming, himself went aloft in the rigging to see what kind of ship was approaching.

— What is the meaning of this? asked the viceroy, who had immediately staggered out of his cabin.

— It’s too soon to know yet, excellency, the oidor said. But these are dangerous seas and it’s best to be prepared for all manner of things.

The cannoneers made the ship’s guns ready to fire, balls and powder were brought up from the powder-room. In the meantime all sails were set. If it was a pirate ship, they would have to try to get away or cut through the enemy.

— Yes, these freebooters, the oidor said. They are a pestilence of the ocean and a plague from hell. They cost both the state and the mine owners immense sums. In the past seasons the Valenciana mine at Guanajuato alone has lost over a million doubloons a year on plundered transport ships. That’s a great deal of money.
And one surely ought to think of the human lives, too, in any event in the present case, don Vargas said.

— Would they really lay hands on us if we are taken? don Pedro asked.

— Quite without regard to a person’s status, excellency, the oidor replied. They’re rather crude fellows, and for them it’s an exquisite pleasure to hang folk of rank. I’ve also heard of cases where they played a bit with the victims beforehand, and the playing was not particularly fun for one of the parties. Cruelty is a strange form of lust.

Don Pedro became a little pale and turned toward the inquisitor.

— Would it not be reasonable, most reverend don Jesus, that a mass be read, he said. This ship is swarming with priests, but not a single one is thinking about invoking providence.

— You are completely correct, don Jesus nodded, and had the ship’s priest sent for. A moment later all the passengers were kneeling while the mass was being celebrated. Only Samuel Rayburn had stolen down to his cabin and knelt there in prayer to his own God.

The vessel came so near that it could be clearly seen with the naked eye. It was a brigantine, which was tacking forward against the wind. The gun-ports were closed, and nothing indicated that the ship was bent upon mischief.

— One of the king’s ships, señores, the captain shouted. For once we got off easy. But the devil take all shipowners who don’t take into account what we seamen say. We are all too heavily loaded, and a boy in a fish-chest and with his mother’s gown as a sail could overtake us.

The depressed atmosphere was succeeded by a nervous cheerfulness. Doña Inez had wine brought, and the greater part of the company gathered under the awning, while the San Salvador flew over the waves like a great white bird in the fresh wind.

But don Luis didn’t join this lively company. He went down to his cabin to brood over whom he should get to buy the Indian girl. Rayburn was sitting there on the edge of his bed, with the
prayer book still in his hand.

— The danger is past, señor, don Luis said. It was a peaceful merchantman.

— Praised be the Lord, Rayburn said and mutely moved his lips in thanks to God.

— I’ve heard that you carry on trade with Negroes, don Luis said. Perhaps you are also interested in Indians? I have an unusually beautiful girl for sale.

— I trade only en gros, and Indian women do not interest me in the least, Rayburn said stiffly.

— But couldn’t you think about buying her for your private use? don Luis said. I find myself in a momentary embarrassment and would dispose of her cheaply. When the voyage is over, you can easily get her sold off to a bordello.

— Señor, your proposal is shameless, Rayburn jumped to his feet. You are talking to an honest Christian Englishman.

Don Luis looked at him in astonishment. Why did the man become angry about this in all respects acceptable proposal? But these foreigners were strange, which of course was due to their bad ancestry and complete lack of culture.

— It was not my purpose to offend you, señor, he said politely. She’s really an unusually beautiful girl and gentle and compliant in character.

He went on deck, and when the viceroy withdrew to his cabin, followed him. He asked him respectfully for permission to state his business, and don Pedro nodded graciously.

— I have brought along a brown girl here on the ship, don Luis said. I have taken her along to make a present of her to a noble patron, who is to a very special degree a connoisseur of women. But circumstances force me to sell her, and I find it appropriate to offer her first to your excellency.

— What am I supposed to do with an Indian girl? don Pedro asked, wrinkling his brows.

— Of course I was not thinking about your excellency’s personal requirements, but the girl would be eminently suited as a gift. And there are people who prize this kind of attentiveness. The viceroy looked at him with annoyance. Here was some-
thing that hadn't occurred to him. He had brought along expensive gifts in gold and precious stones, but hadn't thought at all about the possibility that a courtier fond of women or a minister might be more easily won over with a living present.

— Is the girl beautiful? he asked.
— Very beautiful.
— And untouched?
— That of course is rare for these Indian women.
— I want to see her before I buy her.
— I shall fetch her immediately if it suits your excellency to see her now, don Luis said delighted.

Now the point was to act quickly. He got hold of one of don Guilemo’s Negroes and gave him instructions. Then he went down to the orlop deck to fetch the girl. She was sitting on her blanket next to the bunk where her child was calmly sleeping.

— Come along, he said, and avoided looking at her.
— Where to, master? she asked.
— A noble white man wants to talk to you, don Luis said. You needn’t trouble about the child—the whole thing will take only a moment.

She followed him obediently up to the viceroy’s cabin, where don Pedro inspected her critically.

— She is nice, he said. But I have seen prettier Indian girls before. I do not know whether she is beautiful enough to give away as a present.
— One cannot demand the world here under the awkward conditions, don Luis said. But let her get on land, and she will recover and bloom like a rose.
— Yes, yes, don Pedro said. She is indeed in any case quite pretty. And I am willing to buy her, but can I be certain that she will not suffer molestation on the orlop deck?
— There is no great danger of that, don Luis said. Moreover, these Indian girls scratch like cats. And the girl is well trained; she knows she must not have anything to do with anyone except her master. But now I will accompany the girl down there, and I shall return to arrange the particulars with your excellency.
— A nice young man, don Pedro thought. He has polite and correct manners, which is rare among the youth in our day. Naturally, the girl was his lover. But it is certainly a good idea to buy her if I can show attentiveness to someone or other.

Don Luis accompanied the Indian girl to the orlop deck and ordered her to go down. Then he hurried out to the stem, where the Negro was standing with a little bundle pressed tightly against himself.

— Quickly, throw it in the ocean, he whispered.

The Negro looked darkly at him, but don Luis stuck a coin in his hand, and the bundle slipped quietly over the side of the ship.

— So you'll keep quiet, otherwise it'll be the whip, don Luis said, and the Negro nodded mutely.

The bundle rocked for a moment on a foam-clad wave; then it was sucked into the ocean. For a moment don Luis thought about the little brown body, which had been so soft and warm to touch, but he put the thought out of mind. The burden of life had been taken from a miserable little being, an innocent soul had gone home to his savior—and he had gotten a good round sum so he could once more try his luck at the card table.
On the orlop deck the Indian girl was sitting in the furthest corner of the bunk and staring ahead vacantly. In the room next door a Negro was strumming in a melancholy fashion on his stringed instrument, and in the forecastle a couple of off-duty sailors were squabbling over a game of dice. People came and went, watches changed; here was a perpetual uneasiness round the clock, but she had calmed down. She hadn’t cried or complained when she came down and saw the empty bunk, but had merely burrowed deeply into the darkness of the bunk.

— Why didn’t you people prevent them from taking the child, Juan Gomez asked bitterly. She resembled the Madonna herself when she put the little one to her breast. Damn it—are we men or old women?

Don Pablo shook his head.

— Nobody saw it, he said. It was right during siesta, and we were sleeping. Some believe a Negro fetched the little one, but they’re not sure they’re right. The Indian was on deck—otherwise it wouldn’t have happened. It looks as though her lover sold her, but the buyer didn’t want to have the child along. So the matter was taken care of the way lords over life and death have a right to take care of that kind of trifle. Before she was a frail little person, now she has become a thing. She no longer thinks and feels, and they can do with her what they will. It’s best that way.

— Surely they’re human beings?

— No, they’re not human beings, don Pablo said. They’re masters, they’re more than human beings. They have the right to extinguish life, to kill and torment. And if you ask where they get it from, they’ll answer that God has given it to them. They have built mighty churches for him, and in exchange he has beneficently laid his hand on their shoulders and given them a share in his omnipotence. What they do is God’s will, and whoever rebels against them has been misled by Satan. That’s the way it is, amigo, and you ought to have learned it long ago, you who have been one of the instruments of their power.
— When I return home, I want to live on my own land and live by my own work, Juan Gomez said. Their actions are disgusting, but they’re none of my business.

— And one fine day you’ll discover that everything is your business, don Pablo said. And if you don’t discover it, your son or grandson will. Some day we’ll burn their churches and kill those who want to kill. But first we have to become men. It’s not enough that we curse the rich, who have subdued the earth; we ourselves must stop being subdued. You’ll understand that, even if it takes time, because you have a peasant’s heart.

A child’s death was only a trifling thing, and not many noticed that the little life had been extinguished. But the mulatto Christobal also had to leave. Inflammation had infected the hand which had been nailed to the mast, and his arm swelled up and turned red and blue. He groaned and screamed in his bunk, and the others cursed him because he was disturbing their sleep, but one morning Christobal was quiet. He had died during the night.

He was sewn into a leftover piece of sailcloth and, after the mass for the dead, sent overboard. Everyone knew the sea had now claimed its victim. For every voyage the ship had to give the sea a man. That was the price of crossing the ocean, and the old sailors asserted that it never failed. The ocean took its due.

But Christobal didn’t want to remain in the deep; already the next night he was standing by his bunk with water dripping from his clothes. His face was white, and his eyes were begging for permission to be there and complete the voyage. Alberto, whose bunk was next to the one the mulatto had left, saw him standing there and said gently:

— May God’s peace be with you, Christobal, and may all saints help your soul. But you can’t be here—you must go back out there where you belong.

The mulatto sighed, but didn’t move. It was clear enough that he wouldn’t go amicably. He had never been any kind of good comrade while alive, Alberto was thinking, why should he be better now that he was dead. But if his ghost didn’t go back into the sea, the ship would be doomed to go under with all hands aboard, so mercy was of no use.
— Go, Christobal, Alberto said. Go out there where you belong. It’s cold and dark out there, but on judgment day God will surely know how to find you even in the deep of the sea, and you will be resurrected to his glory. Go, Christobal, and don’t lead us all into misfortune.

But the mulatto remained standing stiff by his bunk, and Alberto couldn’t get him to yield, despite uttering his prayers. A gleam of phosphorous surrounded his deathly pale face, and the phosphorescence shone through his wet clothes. He already belonged to the ocean, although only a few days ago he had been like one of the others, taken his turn on watch, squabbled, and drunk with them.

It was in the middle of the middle watch, and the other sailors were sound asleep in their bunks. Alberto got up and woke an old sailor.

— Christobal has come, he said.
— Where is he? the old man asked sleepily.
— He’s standing by his bunk and wants to get up into it, and he won’t yield even though I’ve used the words of the prayer and sacred invocations.

The old man rose and looked over at the bunk where the mulatto had slept.

— I don’t see him, he said.
— But he’s there, Alberto said. I see him, and you know I have the gift for seeing. Christobal was a bad person, and he’s an evil soul. What are we going to do?
— Try to fetch him in there, the old man said, nodding over toward the partition where don Pablo was sleeping. He knows more than his Lord’s prayer.

Alberto went in and tugged at don Pablo, who drowsily opened his eyes.

— It’s Christobal—he’s come and wants to get into his bunk, Alberto said. I can’t get him to retreat. You’re a learned man—maybe you can use strong words that will send him back into the ocean.

Don Pablo was immediately wide awake and jumped out of his bunk. The others had awakened and many eyes stared over
toward the mulatto’s empty bunk. No one dared go over to it.

— Not everyone has the gift for seeing the dead when they come, Alberto said. But if it is granted to you, you can see him standing there, and he doesn’t want to leave, the unfortunate one, although he knows that if he gets permission to stay, every last one of us will go down. If you know strong words, use them now.

— I see him, don Pablo said. Christobal, nobody here is to blame for your death, go your way as you came.

— You see, he won’t yield, Alberto whispered. He was a bad person.

— If you have something to avenge, avenge yourself on the right ones, don Pablo said, raising his voice. Avenge yourself on the rich and powerful, who had your hand nailed to the mast. Avenge yourself on those who took your life, not on your own brothers. If we have sinned against you, it is from ignorance and not from wickedness, but the wickedness of the powerful is like the depths of hell.

— That’s not strong enough, Alberto whispered. Words can’t gain the upper hand over him. Conjuring is also necessary. Conjure him into the ocean if you have the strength to do it.

— Thy will be done, don Pablo said, and stretched both hands in the air. While he spoke several incomprehensible sentences in a deep voice, he slowly walked over toward the mulatto’s empty bunk.

— He’s yielding, he’s yielding now, Alberto said. Chase him up on deck and over the railing. Keep it up—you have power over him.

With uplifted arms don Pablo drove the dead mulatto before him to the foot of the ladder. At the same moment Juan Gomez appeared in the raised frame around the hatchway.

— Turn around, brother, Alberto shouted in terror to him. Don’t get in the way here, turn around! If you get in his way, he’ll take your soul along.

Juan Gomez quickly jumped back, and don Pablo, constantly conjuring in a loud and threatening voice, followed the ghost up the ladder and across the deck. Alberto followed, and after don
Pablo had spoken the last invocation at the railing, they stood together silently for a moment and stared down into the foaming water. The ocean glittered in the moonlight and shone and gleamed of phosphorescence as if the water crackled and burned.

— Your words were strong, Alberto said, laying his hand heavily on don Pablo’s shoulder. His life wasn’t worth much, but nevertheless he really didn’t want to lose it. That’s the way it is: they always come back. We don’t yearn for salvation even if we try to imagine that we do.

— Did you see him crawl over the railing? don Pablo asked.

— I did, Alberto nodded. He turned his head and looked at me, and his eyes were full of anger. It’s rough for them, the poor devils, but one fine day it will be our turn. I’ve seen many come from the ocean, and some I’ve been able to reason with and help with a prayer, but all of them went back into the ocean with grief.

They went back down into the crew quarters, followed by Juan Gomez. Alberto rooted around a bit in his kit-bag and pulled out a little clay bottle with taatsch.

— Go to bed now, brothers, he said to the other sailors. You can sleep calmly now—he won’t come back. But this man spoke such strong words that they singed his tongue like fire and brimstone. That’s why I’m pouring some for him and not for any of you.

Alberto let don Pablo drink first and then took a swig himself, for he too after all had fought with the mulatto. Then he invited Juan Gomez, who had crossed paths with the ghost and was in need of fortifying himself after the danger. Outside the ocean rose and sank in perpetual swells, and it washed against the side of the ship as if something was knocking and wanted in. Now Christobal was once again lying out there and bobbing on his miles-long voyage till some day he drifted up onto a desolate beach. He had tried once again to find his place here in the room, where weary men turned heavily in their sleep, and where they woke up to hard labor with the fatigue still burdening their body.

— Maybe it’s the loneliness they fear, Alberto said. The
ocean is big and a human being’s soul is very weak. Nobody cared about Christobal, but nevertheless it was here that he belonged. He had no other places to return to than his bunk here, where he was a part of us. Now he has to sigh and wail in his loneliness in the cold nights until some day the Lord takes pity on him. Drink, whiskey warms the soul, and some day we no longer feel the warmth.

— But the child they killed, won’t it come back? Juan Gomez asked.

— No, it won’t come back, Alberto shook his head. Its soul was all too tiny—it can’t find its way back. But if you have good ears, you can hear it cry at night. In there she can hear it. All the time she hears the child’s crying, whether she’s sleeping or awake. There’s no use in your talking to her because she hears the child’s crying in her ears.

— But those who killed the child don’t hear it, don Pablo said.

— Nobody knows what they’ll be hearing some day, Alberto said.

— But while they’re alive, they’re so powerful that the dead can’t reach them?

— We’re ill advised to talk about them. Their hearts don’t possess gentleness, but God surely has his plans for them. When God created the earth, he created rich and poor, and the rich he set to ruling, while the poor are near to his heart. Therefore let’s not talk about those we don’t love, but do what is our duty.

— And what is your duty?

— To obey. That’s the burden God has imposed on us. We must obey from the time we begin walking until the mass for the dead is read over us. That’s the price we pay for salvation. Our fathers taught us that, and we shall teach it to our children. God wants there to be rich and poor, and the rich to rule, and how he will later judge those who misuse their power, we must let him decide. It’s not good if we interfere with the Lord’s judgment.

— Always the gospel of bondage, don Pablo sighed.

— We must take life as the Lord gave it to us. And we have his promise of eternal salvation to stick to.
— Oh, this salvation has been sold to us rather dearly, don Pablo said. I’m afraid the rich also take first there and get the real salvation, while only the tatters are left for us. If God has given them everything on earth, why shouldn’t he then also give them everything in his heaven. I don’t think anything good is in store for us, amigo.

The bottle was empty, and Alberto crawled back into his bunk. Don Pablo went along with Juan Gomez up on deck, and they sat down in the prow and listened to the roar of the waves.

— Did you see him? Juan Gomez asked.

— No, I saw nothing, and there was nothing, don Pablo said. Whatever happens with the dead, they’re not alive any more. But I gave the old fellow a night’s rest, and if I hadn’t driven the ghost into the ocean, it would have come every night, and the others would also see it. So great is the fear of death, but it’s worse that we’re afraid of life. Man is a jackrabbit, my good soldier Juan Gomez.

— Didn’t you hear something? Juan said and listened.

They were silent for a bit, but only the roaring of the sea and the creaking of the ship could be heard.

— I think it sounded as if someone were rattling in his throat, Juan said. But maybe it’s all that stuff about ghosts.

He was silent and it gave him a start when a dark figure approached. But the man didn’t come out into the prow to them; he quickly climbed down the ladder to the orlop deck.

— It’s the Indian slave, don Pablo said. The proudest and loneliest man on board. They still haven’t cowed him, but wait. Look at the Negro slaves; once they were also free and proud men. They lived in their jungles, where it smelled hot and aromatic, by a river bank they’ll never see again. But the slave-hunters found them, and they were chained together and led down to the coast and sold. People who are judges of these matters can tell you exactly what each pound of flesh on their bodies is worth in cash. They are black like ebony and their muscles shift and turn like snakes under their skin, and they have white teeth like hungry animals, but look at their backs—they’re striped with scars. The whip has spoken to their flesh and ex-
horted them to obedience. It has sung its song to them so they’ll
never forget it. The priests tell us about the soul, but it’s the
flesh that teaches us to think, and the whip is the best teacher.
When pain drives its awl into us, where is the soul then? Where
is our will, our pride, our manful desire? We believe we are our-
selves, but our tormentors know better. We are nothing but a
body of suffering, and with the whip they can create a new soul
that obeys and doesn’t desire anything but to carry out their will
and avoid new pain. And one day this Indian, whose face shines
so beautifully with obstinacy and anger, will yield to the pain
and kiss the foot that kicks him.

— There are Indian tribes, Juan Gomez said, that carve the
flesh out of their prisoners alive and eat it while the victims
watch. But it’s regarded as a disgrace if a prisoner screams when
the flesh is cut off his bones. He sings a song, a song of death,
in which he mocks the enemies who are about to devour him.

— Oh, if this proud custom became common, what hymn
would ascend toward God, don Pablo said mournfully. A song
of anger, which would drown out all hymns and sacred choruses
and make heaven’s pillars shake.
As soon as don Luis had obtained the money for the girl, he sat down at the card table. He had made a good deal and gotten rid of the slave and the child, who would only have been a millstone around his neck when he got home to Spain. In addition, he had gained the viceroy’s good graces. After the purchase price had been paid out, don Pedro had made inquiries about the young officer’s family connections and in parting dropped a hint that if he could be of any use to don Luis in the future, he would be glad to.

He was amused to see colonel Gonzales’s surprised look when he put a little pile of gold pieces on the table before him. The old idiot presumably believed he’d been completely knocked out of action and wouldn’t appear at the card table anymore during the voyage. But now it was a matter of playing smartly and carefully because all hell would break loose if this money also wound up in the damned colonel’s pocket.

Don Luis ordered a decanter of wine and sat down comfortably in the chair. He wasn’t in a hurry, but had an eternity of time. Calmly and deliberately, he wanted to win the others’ money, take gold piece after gold piece from them, and one fine day the colonel would come and ask for a loan, and don Luis would reply:

— If you have no money, then you can’t play either. And who cares about a bond from a retired old colonel. If it had been a matter of a caballero. . .

Don Luis followed the game attentively, and at last put down his stake and won. He raked in the winnings without batting an eye, and for a long time he played intelligently and appraised every chance painstakingly. The little pile of coins in front of him grew steadily, and don Luis ordered a new decanter of wine.

— I was lucky with that girl, he thought. I have no reason to regret that I took her along. I got more for her than I paid for her back then, and in the meantime I got pleasure from her.

He drank a lot of the sour wine, and his cheeks burned. It was suffocatingly hot in the state-room, which was packed tight
with men gambling and drinking. Once in a while the cool puff of night air swept in through the open door like a greeting from salvation. Don Luis increased his stakes, and was constantly lucky. Soon he had won just as much as he had lost during the whole voyage, and he looked smitten at the gold pile, which was constantly getting bigger. His eyes had a feverish luster, and Gonzales smiled at him:

— You’ve turned your horse, señor, he said. Now make sure you’re sitting firmly in the saddle.

Don Luis looked at him in astonishment. The friendly tone surprised him. So the old boor could be polite when he felt like it. But maybe he had gotten scent of the fact that don Luis had had a rather long talk with the viceroy today. There were rumors about everything on board this damn ship.

— I’ve merely conquered your luck, he said. I took it by the collar and pulled it over to myself. And I’ll firmly hold on to it and won’t let go.

— Luck is like a snake, Gonzales blustered. There’s no use holding tight—sooner or later it will cut one’s hand. No, one has to fondle it and tame it so that it sticks to one voluntarily. But the evening is late—shall we raise the stakes?

— As far as I’m concerned, gladly, don Luis nodded. Maybe he could manage to double his pile of gold once more before the game ended. Seldom had he had such a fantastically spectacular run of good luck.

The stakes were doubled, and they played in complete silence. One heard only the men’s heavy breathing and the sound of the coins tossed onto the table. But his luck had turned, and don Luis now lost game after game. He swore softly, while the colonel’s red face shone contentedly.

The golden pile in front of don Luis dwindled away. When he had lost his last gold piece, he searched feverishly in his pockets, but they were hopelessly empty.

— Luck slashed your hand, señor, the colonel said, who as usual was sitting with a constantly growing heap of money in front of him. It’s good that you have your inheritance awaiting you at home.
— In any event I won’t be living on gambling in the taverns, don Luis said, flashing with anger. There are certain skills a nobleman should preferably be without.
— What do you mean? the colonel jumped up in a rage.
— That you have a quite astonishing ability to tame snakes, don Luis said. And otherwise, I don’t mean anything.
— Are you completely certain of that?
— Entirely certain, don Luis said nervously.
— Excellent, the colonel said. But if you wish to express some personal opinion, you are free to do so. I am completely at your disposal.
— You wholly misunderstand me, don Luis said. I don’t entertain any wish other than to go to bed.
— That’s surely also the smartest thing you could do, the colonel said, and don Luis got up, bowed stiffly, and left. Though he knew the game had been honest enough, he felt like hurling in the damned lout of a colonel’s face that he was a thief and a cheat. Or perhaps he had one or another Indian amulet on him which gave him luck in the game. That kind of thing had been heard of before. In any event, he was a confounded old scoundrel who had systematically emptied don Luis’s pockets from the first day, and if he didn’t fence so devilishly well, he would have gotten to know the truth.
— Thanks for the game, gentlemen, don Luis said, and went out to his death.

The game went on for about an hour until the colonel got up.
— Enough for this evening, señores, he said. I’m prepared to offer you a return match tomorrow. He packed up the playing cards, stuck the money he had won loose in his pockets, and proceeded out of the mess without troubling himself about the meek objections. But a moment later he came back with an agitated and nonplussed expression in his wrinkled and sun-tanned face.
— Come! he shouted. Don Luis de Zuniga is lying out here with a sword through his chest.

The others ran out, and a short distance from the door they saw don Luis lying stretched out on the deck in the moonlight. His chest had been run through by a sword, his face was hideous-
ly distorted, and his open eyes stared vacantly up toward heaven. They lifted him up carefully and carried him into the mess, where they laid him on the large table. For a moment they stood silently and stared at the pale face, which such a short time ago had been young and alive and angry.

— It's a strange coincidence that you of all people should find him, colonel, the oidor said, who had been among the players in the evening. The exchange of words earlier didn't exactly suggest any heartfelt friendship.

— I was totally indifferent to the callous opportunist, Gonzales said snappishly. Moreover, I'm not in the habit of assassinating people with their own swords. He was assaulted, knocked to the floor, and impaled to the deck-planks like an insect on a nail.

The oidor nodded, don Luis's sheath was empty, and it was his own weapon that had pierced through his chest. Then he bent over the corpse and looked at it carefully.

— He wasn't knocked to the ground, but strangled, he said. There are strangulation marks around his throat. Presumably he was already dead when he got the sword through his heart. That also explains why we didn't hear anything, although it happened right outside here. The murderer strangled him, carefully laid his corpse down on the deck and ran him through to make quite certain that he was dead. I propose to you, señores, that you repair to your quarters, and colonel Gonzales and I will summon the ship's captain and together with him consider what ought to be done.

The startled gamblers went to their cabins, while the colonel and the oidor stayed behind with the dead man. The oidor sent the mess-man for the captain and turned to the colonel.

— I am of two minds about whether we ought to summon don Pedro, he said. On the one hand it is of course late at night, and on the other we run the risk that his excellency will take offense that he was not informed of such an incident. I truly don't know . . .

— I'd like to know what use he'll actually be to us, the colonel replied. But if his high position demands that he be imme-
diately informed of the fact that one of the passengers has been so foolish as to let himself be murdered, then better go to his cabin at once and ask him whether he has anything against our trying to find the murderer.

— I'll go to him personally, the oidor said.

The colonel was then alone with the dead man and, tired, sat down in a chair with his hands in his pants pockets and looked at the young face, which had stiffened into a grimace of surprise and horror. His hands played with the gold coins in his pockets while he thought about having come within a hair's breadth of challenging don Luis and killing him. The world wouldn't have lost much by this young good-for-nothing's death; there were so many of that kind of fellow that one could feed swine with them. And still he thought with pity about the dead man, whose life had been so brief and confused.

— Foolish rascal, he mumbled. But maybe you would have become a man at some point.

The captain came together with the mate José Nuñez and immediately afterwards the oidor returned with don Pedro, who had gotten out of his bunk and thrown on a nightgown. Don Pedro looked at the dead man for a moment; then he turned toward the captain and asked crossly:

— How could this kind of thing happen?

The stocky little Fleming didn't answer and the oidor spoke up:

— It was presumably murder with intent to rob, excellency, he said. The door was open the whole evening, and some person or other saw the unfortunate don Luis sitting with a significant sum of money before him on the table. Then he watched for his chance, and when don Luis comes out onto the deck, he hurls himself upon him and strangles him without suspecting that don Luis has gambled away every last shilling. So the murderer finds no money, and in bestial fury he rips don Luis's sword out of its sheath and nails his victim to the deck.

— That may have been the way it happened, don Pedro said. But it may also have been a revenge murder.

— But is it also conceivable that the young man had enemies
on board? the oidor said doubtfully. And notice the way the murder was committed. No man of good family and decent upbringing would ever think of strangling his victim and afterwards mistreating the corpse. The brutality of the outrage itself suggests that it was committed by a crude sailor or some bandit among the common passengers on the orlop deck.

— I am inclined to grant that you are right, the viceroy said broodingly. And what do you intend to do, captain?

— We'll hold an inquiry in the crew cabin, captain van Laahr said. But it won't be easy to find out who was on deck tonight. The watches change, and no one notices whether a man leaves his bunk.

— And there's no one there's a special reason to suspect?

The captain shook his head, and José Nuñez said with embarrassment:

— They're all good seamen, and I wouldn't believe it of any of them. But gold confuses the soul, and who really knows anybody? Not even the priest we confess to knows anything about us.

— And the passengers on the orlop deck? the oidor asked. Are there suspicious individuals among them?

— It's the same people as always, the mate said. Soldiers returning home, and fortune hunters for whom things went awry. No, nobody there could be singled out either.

— Probably there isn't a single one of them who wouldn't stick a knife in his own brother for a gold piece, the oidor said. If the murderer had gotten some booty, we could have searched the ship with a fine-toothed comb and found the money, but now we have to start from scratch. What use would it be to ask the collection of rabble who was on deck at night. The murderer in any event isn't going to report himself.

— I held the young man in high esteem, the viceroy said, and cast a sidelong glance at the corpse. He belonged to a respectable lineage, and his family will value being informed that everything humanly possible was done to find his murderer. I must ask you, captain, if you find anything at all that gives cause for suspicion, to submit it immediately to don Francisco,
the colonel, and me. In other words, we are taking charge of the investigation and will later make a report to don Luis’s survivors. According to what he told me this afternoon, his mother’s uncle is a cardinal bishop and his father’s brother a government minister.

— Foolish rascal, the colonel thought, and shook his head. To the very end you were full of empty boasting and lies. It wouldn’t surprise me if you were the son of a swineherd.

— You wanted to say something, colonel Gonzales? the viceroy said.

— No, the colonel said. I didn’t know anything about the unfortunate young man. But he was of course without doubt a promising young man, and I’m certain that it will alleviate his survivors’ grief to learn that your excellency took personal charge of the investigation.

— I bought an Indian girl from him this afternoon, a slave, whom I intend to use as a gift, don Pedro said. Surely it is not conceivable that she did it—in anger over his having relieved himself of her. To be sure, she made a very apathetic impression, but even an Indian girl can feel jealousy.

— Surely we can disregard that, the oidor said. A slender girl doesn’t have the strength to strangle a strong young man like don Luis with her bare hands. The murderer was a strong limber man, and for the time being I think the smartest thing for us to do is to work from the theory of murder with intent to rob.

They stood for a bit in silence and looked at don Luis, whose features had already taken on death’s remoteness, as if the soul had forgotten life and all its toil and vanity. Something lonely and eerie hovered over this dead body with its distorted face, which death without warning had put its cat’s claw in, and at the same time something gripping and sorrowful. The strong young body lay so useless and unusable on the table planks, one hand still clenched in a death cramp, and the eyes staring vacantly up into the lantern, while the head moved quite slightly every time the ship pitched in the ocean. As if don Luis was shaking his head and denying that he no longer existed.

— Death is strange, the oidor said softly. Only a moment,
and we have gone over into another form of existence whose nature we don't comprehend. I wonder what don Luis's soul looks like. How can one imagine it other than in connection with this arrogant young face, which shone with youth's impure lust for life? How his soul must feel cold and freezing without its body, like a chicken that has come out of the egg on an all too cold winter day. How impotent man is, and at the same time so mighty that he can kill.

— But that power belongs only to the authorities, whom God has given the sword of justice, don Pedro said, a bit reprovingly.

— Nevertheless someone or other has arrogated to himself the power to dispatch don Luis's soul into eternity from its snug shelter, excellency, the oidor said. And who knows whether his soul was ready to fly, and whether it will reach its goal, which is said to be that of all souls, or whether it is hopelessly flapping around and in the end must perish of thirst and fatigue on the mighty sea. I'm afraid our souls are very small and very weak, and that at times it can be very hard for the Lord and his cherubs to keep an eye on them in eternity's infinite space.

— That is why, after all, we have the church's means of grace and its intercession, don Pedro said. But, for the rest, it hardly pays to discuss theology. A shameful outrage has been perpetrated here. A promising favorite of noble Spanish blood has been murdered in the most hideous manner, and it is our duty to make sure the guilty person is found and duly punished.

— As always, I must admire your excellency's uncommon ability to find the kernel of a matter where less trained brains are all too easily lost in unnecessary speculations, the oidor said with a polite bow. And still one can't help asking oneself whether it will be of any particular help to don Luis's soul for the murderer to be caught and punished.

— It is late, don Pedro said and looked with a little concealed shudder at the silent figure with its calmly rocking pale head on the cabin table. We shall go to bed now and leave it to the captain and mate to undertake what is necessary with regard to this unfortunate's soulless body.

The oidor and the colonel accompanied the viceroy to his
cabin and wished him restful sleep. They walked together a few times back and forth on deck and stood at the railing and looked out across the moonlit sea. Neither felt like going to bed immediately.

— A glass of taatsch? the colonel asked. I have a bottle in my cabin.

— Not a bad idea at all, the oidor said.

— He was a foolish boy, the colonel said. And you’re right, his soul was very small, if he had one at all. Altogether, you’re right, our souls are very small and can’t accomplish much. And now I’ll go get the bottle and a couple of glasses.
Don Luis’ corpse was lowered into the ocean the next morning, and an honor salute was fired over it as it sank into the waves. And a few hours afterwards there wasn’t much more left of the memory of him than the consciousness of an unpleasant crime and of the fact that there was a murderer on board. Doña Inez missed him for a moment when she was sitting under the awning and wondering that he hadn’t come as usual to deliver his insipid compliments.

— But of course he’s dead, she thought with a little shudder. And it’s a matter of complete indifference to me whether he’s here or not. He meant less to me than any of my slaves. In fact, I’m really much more interested in my Indian slave.

For a while her thoughts revolved in a half-dreamy way around the handsome young Indian, and she decided to have him fetched. She sat for a while and looked out across the ocean, the eternal ocean which made one sick with longing and filled one with fear of the infinite. Then she woke her chambermaid, who was squatting on the deck behind her chair, and instructed her to send for the slave. A moment later he was standing before her and regarding her with his remote look, which was so full of seriousness.

— You can go, she said to the girl. I want to talk to him alone. Come a little closer, Pancuiaco.

— She pronounced his name so slowly that it sounded like a caress, and she bit her lip in irritation.

— You must not hate, she said angrily. It’s a great sin to hate. Come closer still. Just so.

She put her slender white hand on his strong brown arm. The fresh animal odor from his body confused and intoxicated her and filled her with a spiteful desire.

— You must learn to understand that I am your master, she said. I am your master because our God, who is stronger than your gods, has set me to rule, and countless men of both your and my own people must bow before my will. But you must not be afraid of me—I mean you no harm.
— I fear no one.
— That’s what you think, but fear resides in all humans.
— He who lives in death has no fear.
— He who lives in death? doña Inez repeated. But no person lives in death. Life is life, and death is death. And if you yourself want it, some day I can make you a gift of freedom and make you richer than any chieftain among your own people.
— I desire nothing, the Indian said. And you can’t make me a gift of anything.
— You talk like someone with no more sense than a child. Whoever has power can make a gift of his power to others. You are now living in our world, and surely you have seen and learned something. Who owns this ship with its cargo of gold and people, who commands that it shall sail across the mighty ocean from coast to coast? This ship is like a picture of our whole world, which fate has now also made yours. There are people here on board who must work and obey, and their lives are full of toil. They live a wretched existence, always with the whip across their backs and with the prospect of a pitiful death. And there are others who live in freedom and joy and can satisfy their hearts’ every desire. They rule over life and death because they own every plank in the ship that carries us, and all the treasures it holds. They determine what is good and what is evil, and may God have mercy on him who does not submit to their will. You are smart, Pancuiaco, and I’m sure you understand which life you would do best to choose. In my fields and on my plantations the Indians work stooped under the burning sun. They see their wives fade and their children languish and notice how their own strength dwindles. A word from my mouth, and it will be your future to work like a draft-animal under the overseer’s whip.

— And does that give your heart joy?
— Doña Inez looked at him and didn’t immediately know what to answer. Did the knowledge that she ruled over life and death bestow joy on her soul? Was the slaves’ dirge a hymn to her power and strength, which made her feel like more than a human being, a power of doom and suffering, but still close to a
god? She wrinkled her eyebrows and looked at the slave sternly.

— To rule gives every heart joy, she said. You, too, can come to feel that power is beautiful.

— When I crack the whip over my brothers’ backs as your calpixqui, Pancuiaco said and smiled very weakly. A smile that was like veiled scorn and made her cheeks burn.

— Most people feel that it is better to use the whip than to taste it themselves, she said. You, too, will perhaps have that experience. In any event, many before you have had it, and defiance, which was wilder than yours, was checked. Have you ever loved a woman?

— Yes.

— Was she beautiful?

— She was mine, and I loved her.

— Tell me about her, tell me all about your life. We must talk together and learn to understand each other. Remember, I am also a woman.

She gently touched his arm, but it was as if he didn’t notice her cautious caress at all. She drew him a little closer, took his hand and placed it against her breast.

— And you are a man, Pancuiaco, she whispered. I can bestow more delight on you than any other woman. You don’t yet know enough about life, and its sweetness and strength, but I shall teach you.

— He calmly let his hand rest at her breast, but it was like a flaccid and lifeless thing. There was something more insulting in his complete passivity than if he had withdrawn his hand or shoved her away. Doña Inez’s mind once more became filled with a dark and dangerous anger. She let his hand go and sat up straight in her chair.

— But presumably you are a eunuch and not a man, she said. Good, take my fan, and stand behind me. You shall fan me while I rest.

She pointed to the big fan of bamboo fiber, which lay beside her chair. There was a tiger-look in her eyes, but the Indian didn’t look at her at all. With an immovable face, he stared out across the sea, its waves gleaming in the sun so that it pierced his
eyes. The fan remained lying untouched by her side.
— Can’t you hear! she sneered. Are you going to obey!
— Imperturbably his glance glided calmly, almost apathetically over her, with no fear or agitation.
— Your understanding cannot be great, he said. I told you I won’t obey. Don’t you understand a man’s word, woman?
— You’re a slave, she whispered. And if you don’t obey, you shall get your punishment. You can go, but just you wait.

She didn’t dare look at him when he left, but lay back in her chair. The anger scorched her like a fire. She tried to collect her thoughts about all her property, about her estates, her plantations, her houses and farmsteads, her manufactories, and to imagine all the people who now, at this very moment, were working for her. She saw herself roaming in her fields, in her olive groves, on her manorial estates and haciendas, or striding through her weaving manufactories, where the looms made a din, and everywhere men bowed in the dust before her. Wherever she came, people were ready to obey her, and that was only nature’s order, for she was born to rule over men. Power was for her sweeter than wine and more intoxicating, and it had penetrated her whole being, and without power she didn’t wish to exist.

She thought about the heavy gold bars in the ship’s hold that belonged to her. They would be minted as shining gold money, and every coin would mean new power over people’s bodies and souls. She felt the joy swell in her while she thought about how rich she was. But the joy quickly faded away again, and the heavy, dark anger filled her once more. For what was her power if she could not coerce this Indian’s unyielding mind, could not subdue his defiance? No man had ever dared to bid her such scorn, and none had she ever desired so hotly and blindly as this foolish ignorant Indian, who after all in reality was nothing but a royal half-savage animal.

— An Indian slave, she mumbled and felt her degradation and shame like a physical pain. A slave, whom I can have killed. I, who have the power of a queen, love a savage, a slave, an animal, and he doesn’t want anything to do with me.
In the evening two cannoneers fetched the Indian down on the orlop deck. He didn’t resist, but calmly let himself be led along and bound to the main-mast. Doña Inez went over to him, and stood a while watching him.

— Have you thought it over? she asked, and her voice trembled so the words almost sounded like a request.

— I don’t know what you demand of me?

— Obedience.

— I owe nobody obedience, the Indian answered.

— Then you must take your punishment, doña Inez said. I will punish you the way one disciplines a disobedient child. And some day you will understand it was for your own good, you fool.

She remained standing as if expecting him to say something, perhaps to yield and beg her for mercy. But he merely looked down apathetically at the deck like a person ready to meet his fate and accept the inevitable. The passengers had gathered in small clusters and regarded the scene with curiosity. Don Ramon went over to doña Inez.

— You are going to punish him, gracious señora? he asked.

— Nothing else can bring him to reason, doña Inez said, trying to keep her voice calm. Nothing works, and this afternoon he committed an act of gross insubordination. The man must learn to understand that he is a slave and has to obey. I’m sorry it’s come to this, but what should one do? I really can’t acquiesce in a slave’s not caring the least about what I order him to do.

She was annoyed about having given this superfluous explanation, about her nervousness, her anger, and her sorrow. Don Ramon shook his head. He saw before him the earnest Indian youngsters who played ball on the lawns at the university, he saw them sitting with dignity and meekness on the benches at the lectures and absorbing wisdom’s good nourishment. Oh, what rich abilities and possibilities there were in this people! But also much stubbornness, wickedness, and savagery, and sometimes
there was no other means than punishment, tough corporal discipline.

— Only this one time, señora, but do it thoroughly, he said. The man is intelligent, and he will be a source of delight for you.

— I hope so, doña Inez said dismissively. She wasn’t in the mood to accept good advice from the learned little theologian.

— The Indians are basically good, don Ramon said. Like all humans, by the way. The point is just to find one’s way to the original human goodness and liberate it. It sometimes happens that we have to handle a person roughly; in order to enable goodness to get the chance to grow freely in the light we have to clear away the obstacles and pull up the weeds. And especially these primitives we have to treat like children, good children or stubborn...

Doña Inez stamped impatiently on deck.

— Your principles are undoubtedly very honorable, fray Ramon, she said. But it’s a matter of total indifference to me whether my slaves are good or evil, sinners or saints, as long as they obey my will.

— Forgive me, señora, I understand that the Indian has roused your anger, don Ramon said. And naturally slaves must obey. Both the divine and the natural laws demand it.

When will the day come when the white and the brown man will extend their hands to each other, he thought. The Indians have been driven from the rich plains and the coast’s luxuriant, easily accessible regions, or they earn their handful of corn as slaves on the plantations or as tenants or day laborers on the huge haciendas. But in the depths of the jungle and behind the impassable mountains they still live, wild, proud, and full of hate. They hate the conquerors who overthrew their empires and made their gods homeless. And if one comes too close to the jungle, a poison arrow comes whizzing out of the dark, green depths. The snake still has its sting.

Perhaps it was God’s will that these empires be conquered and the true faith be disseminated for the salvation of the heathen, and punishment cannot be dispensed with, insubordination must be subdued. But power must also serve good, fray Ramon
believes, and some day compulsion and slavery will be replaced by Christian brotherhood, people will love and serve one another in piety and humility, and together white and brown will seek the sources of wisdom at don Ramon’s university. That’s why doña Inez’s reply torments him, for this lady is very rich and powerful, and she could do much to alleviate the Indians’ conditions.

Don Ramon sees how one of the cannoneers is preparing the whip for use. It’s a scourge with a short handle and long leather straps with lead balls. He sees the young Indian standing and waiting for the punishment, calmly, as if what is now about to happen had nothing to do with him. Couldn’t this brother be spared? he asks himself, couldn’t he be turned toward obedience by wise and gentle words? But oh, even if the church bells ring in the cities, and the mother of God has her temples, the serpent goddess Nakawe is still alive, and Mother Eastwind and Mother Westwind take turns blowing across the plains and rocking the ripening corn.

The first blow of the scourge whistled across the Indian’s bent back. A trembling went through him, but no complaint came from his mouth. Then he began to sing in a voice that mounted into an ecstasy of pain, but also of pride and obstinacy. Astonished, doña Inez listened and turned toward don Ramon.

— What is he singing? she asked. You understand his language, fray Ramon.

Don Ramon translated slowly, fumbling for the right words:

The whip sings over me,
as it has sung over my brothers.
It plows my back,
as the cornfield is plowed,
before the rainy season comes.
And the blood streams from me,
like the goddess, the eternally streaming,
which twists in brooks and rivers.
Afterwards comes the harvest.
Afterwards comes death,
and let it be welcome.
My enemies stand around me
and enjoy my torment.
Contemptible are they,
with small and evil souls.
Nothing can they do to me,
for pain is my brother
which puts its cloak around me
and exhorts me to leave
the house, which no longer is my soul's.

With song I will go,
from the house which is now a house of bondage.
With joy I will go,
for never did my enemies overcome me.
Contemptible are they,
and even more contemptible is their god,
a god for thieves and robbers.
Swallow them up, mother of the waters,
let them suffer an ignominious death,
and permit not their breath
to pollute the pure air.

The strong, stocky cannoneer used the scourge calmly and systematically, and the led balls tore off the skin in strips. The Indian stood as if clothed in a cloak of blood which streamed from his chest, shoulders, and back down over his thighs and legs and collected in a puddle on deck. And steadily he sang, but his voice became weaker, as if death were approaching. Doña Inez couldn’t take her eyes off him, and she had to keep her wits about her in order not to rush over and embrace the bloody body and hug it weeping. A sorrowful horror seized her mind, and in a strange way the sight of the indomitable slave under the whip blended with the memory of the stooped, gaunt men in the gold mine, their joyless wives and famished children. Each of the blows struck her like a terrible torment in her soul. It was as if she saw a child mistreated, and nevertheless the slave was not a child, but rather a young god, suffering for humans’ sins and drop by drop tasting death’s bitter chalice. She had a feeling of being far away from reality, and as if in a bad dream she could
not move a hand or a foot to stop the scourge whistling across his bloody back.

The cannoneer lowered the scourge and turned toward her, and there was something cold and hostile in his look.

— Will that do? he asked. Or does the gracious señora wish that I whip him to death?

— That will do, she heard her own voice say, and she was surprised by its calm and everyday sound. She felt like screaming, like抛herself down at the feet of the semi-unconscious slave and begging him for forgiveness for all the evil in the world. But she remained standing and saw how the two cannoneers half dragged, half carried him away, leaving a bloody trail behind him on the deck planks.

She heard that someone was talking to her, a voice that came from far away. Then she slowly awoke from the nightmare and discovered that don Jesus was standing next to her. He had apparently said something or other and was waiting for her answer.

— Excuse me, she said. I don’t know where my thoughts were. What your right reverend said escaped me.

— I was talking about your slave, señora, said the inquisitor, a little offended. I don’t know whether you understood the words in his song, but it contained a gross blasphemy. He flung out words of scorn against the Almighty. I take it for granted that his immortal soul’s salvation is on your mind.

— Naturally, doña Inez said.

— Would you turn your slave over to me, don Jesus said in his friendly, old-womanly fashion.

— What will you do to him?

— Do what I can to save his soul.

— With torture?

— With all means, and is a human soul not worth it? You have had him whipped to teach him obedience to you, but isn’t it more important that he learn obedience to God? What his body comes to suffer will perhaps save him in eternity.

— But I don’t think this slave can be subdued, doña Inez said. He is created out of different material than other humans.

— The person doesn’t exist who can’t be subdued into hear-
ing God’s voice and yielding to God’s law, don Jesus said gently. It would be bad, señora, if we didn’t know how to use pain to get the soul to speak. Be assured that we know how, and if you will turn the Indian over to the inquisition, he will become a new testimonial to the fact that no one can stand his ground in the struggle against God.

— But he scoffed at the whip.

— How is a primitive cannoneer supposed to know how one speaks to a human soul through pain, the inquisitor said. One could just as well set a blacksmith to forging an ornament of gold and precious stones. But I shall put a purple cloak of suffering around his shoulders and press pain’s crown of thorns around his temples, and in the pain his soul will open itself to the light and mercy will pour forth over him as it did over the disciples that blessed Whitsunday morning.

Don Jesus no longer resembled a good-natured old woman. His cheeks had taken on color, and in his eyes an ecstatic fire was ablaze. He had seized doña Inez’s hand and held it firmly in both of his, as if fearing she would go her way before he managed to finish talking. She wanted to tear herself loose, but couldn’t; it was as if the all too soft hands were holding her tightly in an iron grip.

— No, she whispered. You can’t have him! I myself will try to save his soul. I will make sure he receives instruction in the faith; I will give him the best teachers. I won’t turn him over to you, right reverend.

— You love this slave, señora, I know it, don Jesus said. But I, too, love him. And while your love is carnal love, I love his soul. I love him as God has commanded that we love our brothers, and I will guide his soul to God.

— As an executioner you want to torment him . . .

— As God’s executioner, yes. You whipped him to coerce his body into submission, I want to do it to coerce his soul into salvation. And don’t speak with contempt about the executioner, doña Inez. You are a rich and powerful woman, but what would your wealth be if the executioner didn’t guard it, and what would your power mean if the executioner didn’t exercise it? One can
vault a heaven of splendor over kings and princes and fill the
world with song in their honor, but it's the executioner who
keeps their thrones afloat, and without his sword and wheel, his
tongs and scourges, the kings' scepter would be only a foolish
toy. It's the executioner's hand that guides our world, his coarse,
humble, and merciless soul, that bears all the earth's power and
splendor, and without him the mighty would lose their riches,
their might, their estates, plantations, and haciendas, their hosts
of servants and slaves, their lives as kings. With sword and
gallows he watches over your wealth when you're sleeping, with
whip and scourges he carries out your will, punishes the pre­
sumptuous who want to rise up against power, and checks the
headstrong minds, and it is God's work he carries out. For God
is the God of the mighty, and God wants there to be poor and
rich, strong and weak, and by the executioner's hand he bestows
upon us his mercy. From death and suffering the Almighty has
created all power, and with death and suffering he strengthens it,
and so it will be until judgment day, when he will judge the liv­
ing and dead and as the great executioner himself hurl the con­
demned into the everlasting torments.

— Frightful words, don Jesus, whispered doña Inez.
— Words of truth, doña Inez, the inquisitor said. And as an
executioner of God, I carry out his work and coerce obstinate
souls into submission. You believe I wish to torture your Indian,
and you are right—I want to. Along pain's dreadful path I want
to wander into his soul and save it. With fire I want to drive the
Devil out of his flesh and cleanse it; with iron and boiling oil I
want to force him away from the abyss of perdition, for even a
slave's soul is dear to God. And what does the suffering he must
endure mean against the salvation he gains? I am God's execu­
tioner, but my hand is guided by divine love, and no earthly love
knows of my love and care when the wretched scream frantically
with pain, and of my heart's joy when the flesh abandons its
resistance and the peace of the holy ghost pours forth over the
tortured soul. I beg you again, sefiora, turn over to me your
slave, whose soul is so full of defiance and heathendom, and let
me lead him through suffering to blessed redemption.
— No, doña Inez almost screamed. You can’t have him, right reverend.

— As you wish, señora, don Jesus said, and released her hand. But then you must bear the heavy responsibility for the loss of his soul. I will pray for you.

Crook-backed, he shuffled like a tired old woman into his cabin, and doña Inez slowly began to feel her old self again. After all, what had happened? She’d had an insubordinate slave whipped—that was all. She’d had so many unreliable servants punished before—every single day slaves and serfs were whipped on her estates. And this slave was young and handsome, and she liked him, but in the final analysis, he was of course a slave like all the rest.

Again she saw the defiant brown face before her, and it was as if a hand clutched her heart tightly. For the point was that he was not a slave, but a man, whose indomitable will she couldn’t bend, and the power he had over her was greater than the power she had over him. She could have him killed, and he wouldn’t die, but live on like something dark and threatening and at the same time something happy and unattainable in her mind.

She tore herself loose from her thoughts and hurried over to the nearest cluster of chattering passengers. They became silent as she approached, as if realizing that something horrible had happened, and that she, a queen, had become a slave’s slave.

— These punishments are barbaric, she said in a forced way. Unfortunately they must, of course, take place now and again. But let’s drink a glass of wine.

She almost forced them to sit down in the chairs under the awning and had the wine fetched from her cabin. She didn’t let the conversation come to a standstill even for a moment; she extinguished, as it were, the memory of the Indian’s punishment, and she herself noticed how the world again became light and bright around her. But darkness and shame still shrouded her heart of hearts and would not let themselves be banished.

— I will guess that the right reverend don Jesus was prepared to take charge of your unfortunate slave, don Vargas said. I hope you didn’t let him?
— No, doña Inez said.

— Naturally, one ought to do what is in one’s power to save an immortal soul, don Vargas said. But I must confess that under these restrictive spatial conditions, the smell of burnt flesh would not be especially pleasant. And don Jesus, who is an outstanding specialist, has a predilection for the application of glowing irons. Your slave . . .

— Let’s talk about something other than my slave, doña Inez said.

— I merely wanted to remark that don Jesus’s thoroughness is incomparable, don Vargas said, glancing over at her with curiosity. I heard about a case of a man prosecuted for witchcraft. His own wife informed on him, and the matter appeared so open and shut that a less conscientious judge than don Jesus would simply have had the man burned. Don Jesus, however, deemed it right for certainty’s sake to have the man subjected to examination by torture, but the man denied the accusation with an obstinacy that was quite amazing after he had been treated according to all the rules of the art. He was strangled, squeezed, stretched and burned with glowing irons, whipped, pinched, and stuck, but not even boiling oil in his eye sockets got him to confess his guilt. And at the last moment, as he was about to give up the ghost during the interrogation, his wife confessed that her denunciation was false, and that she had wanted to get rid of her husband in order to marry her lover. Don Jesus’s exemplary thoroughness in fact saved the unfortunate man’s life.

— And what became of him, doña Inez asked.

— To be sure, he was no longer a real person, but don Jesus displayed great sympathy for and interest in him and procured permission for him to collect alms on the uppermost step of the cathedral’s stairs. He sits there now blind and rather disfigured and begs for his daily bread, but he can’t praise don Jesus enough, who in fact saved his life, and who afterwards had his wife broken on the wheel and burned, so that both earthly and heavenly justice were done in the most beautiful manner. But let’s leave this topic and ask don Guilemo, who seldom keeps us company, to tell us about his travel experiences.
The old man, who was sitting crouched in a chair and sipping at his sherry, blinked his eyes like a sick hen.

— We have heard about your expedition to find the fountain of youth, doña Inez said. It must have been a great disappointment for you.

— These countries are full of gossip and malicious twaddle, don Guilemo snapped.

— Miraculous if it existed, doña Inez said. Who doesn’t dream of regaining his youth.

— In any event, there seem to be forces in nature we still aren’t familiar with, despite the rapid development of modern science, don Vargas said. I’m not thinking of the sacred sources, where divine forces are at work and from which countless miracles can be reported, but of nature’s own fountain of health. I once knew an 80-year-old man in Zaragoza who preserved his youth by drinking a can of warm breastmilk every morning.

A glint of interest appeared in don Guilemo’s eyes, and he munched with his mouth like a rabbit eating a tuft of grass.

— He explained that the treatment was unfailing, don Vargas continued. And in truth, this old man’s strength was so marvelous that he himself impregnated his own wet nurses. It was said, moreover, that he did it with the greatest enjoyment and extraordinary energy.

Darkness was about to fall, and doña Inez had lights and more wine brought. The night darkness surrounded the little party like a wall; only the foaming seas and the phosphorescence shone. It was quiet, but once in a while the sails flapped when a gust of wind took hold of them, and each time the conversation died out. It was as if all of them held their breath and sensed their hearts beating for fear of something threatening and fateful which came out there from the sea or perhaps from the depths of the ship. But immediately afterwards the conversation started up again, a bit too ardently, as if it were necessary to speak in order to soothe the heart’s inexplicable unrest.

— What are we afraid of, doña Inez was thinking. Is it the lone man who is himself without fear and alone dares defy all our frightful power? Perhaps the ground we’ve built our might
on is as fragile as the thin planks that separate us from the ocean deep.

Again she felt the insuperable longing clutch her heart, and while once more pouring wine into the glasses, she decided she would see him yet tonight. She would kneel before him and beg him for forgiveness, and mournfully bitter and humiliated she whispered anew:

— An Indian slave. A slave whom I could have killed.
The Indian was dragged down to the orlop deck, where the cannoneers put him on the floor and went their way.

— Dirty work, he said, the one who had cracked the whip, after they had gotten back to their quarters. You flog a human being half to death and don’t even know what he did. And what do you get for it? They fling a couple of miserable cents to you when you’ve carried out the backbreaking work for them.

The other one nodded, and they sat down to eat their dry bread and tough mutton, while they drank the lukewarm sour country wine.

— A hell of a life. But that Indian was a man. I wonder if any of the swells who were standing around watching could have endured that treatment without wailing.

— If I’m ever allowed to use the scourge on one of them, I’ll truly not spare the rod. Is he going to die?

— No, I don’t think so. The last blows I didn’t put much force into. But if I hadn’t stopped, the she-devil would have let him be whipped to death. And why do we do it? They say it’s our duty, but why? Tell me why?

— If you begin to speculate about that kind of thing, you quickly speculate yourself right down into smoldering hell. Damn, the wine is sour today.

Pablo Avarano and Juan Gomez lifted the Indian up into don Pablo’s bunk and examined his wounds. His back was a mass of bloody flesh, he was unconscious and moaned weakly. Juan Gomez fetched a bucket of fresh water and carefully began to wash off the blood and bathe the wounds. His broad, clumsy peasant fists handled the sick man as carefully as a woman’s hands.

— They really gave it to him but good, he mumbled. I wonder whether he’ll ever become a real person again.

— No, he’ll never become a person because he’s been in the claws of power, don Pablo said. But presumably he’ll get better and become a useful slave. God created man in his image, but the mighty transform him with whip and chains. And we let that
happen to save our miserable life. The soul clings on—it doesn’t want to leave the body. It’s our shame that we fear death more than oppression.

— But he was without fear, Juan Gomez said.
— He was, don Pablo said. In truth he was without fear. But now the free, fearless man is dead, and from his dust arises a slave, who is full of trembling. The whip has spoken its language to him, and his body has understood its speech. The scourge has marked him; its scars will never disappear, and they will remind him that if he wants to save his life, the sole point is: to be obedient. He had a free man’s soul, and now they’ve given him a dog’s soul, and he’ll live as if he’d been begotten on a dungheap.

— Now don’t be too certain, Juan Gomez said. I think they can whip him as much as they want without his being subdued.
— Everyone can be subdued. The person hasn’t been born whom power can’t coerce. But there’s an herb that grows in the depths of hell called herba diaboli and it’s red like fire and stinks like sulphur. If you can go through hell’s flames, fetch its seed, and sow it in man’s heart, it will sprout a hatred so glowing that the heart can’t be coerced by any power. Not until we learn to fight evil with evil will we become free men.

The sailors came in from the forecastle and looked at the mistreated Indian. They said nothing or muttered a curse when they contemplated his bloody back.

— Oh holy mother of God, Alberto finally sighed. And that’s a woman’s work! Their hearts are colder than the stones at the bottom of the ocean, and their souls full of wickedness like a shark’s entrails. Who can explain to us why God tolerates it, he who let fire rain over Sodom?
— God has surely abandoned us, old man, don Pablo said. He’s disgusted with us because we don’t know how to take revenge.

— Vengeance only engenders vengeance, and the last vengeance is never taken, Alberto said. And vengeance belongeth to me, the Lord said.
— And he is forbearing and takes a liberal view of their
transgressions, don Pablo said mockingly. Oh, you fools! What do you want with life? You’re sated with the most wretched food, drink wine that’s so thin and sour that others don’t want to touch it, drudge like animals, sleep like animals, love like animals, and let yourselves be whipped like animals—is that a life for men? Here you sail a ship across the ocean loaded with gold, and the gold is forged into new chains for you and your brothers.

— Nobody can escape his fate, Alberto said. You run from it, and it’s waiting for you at the next milepost. But may God curse them and make them suffer the same as they make others suffer.

But a couple of the others mumbled: — By all the saints, he’s right. They lounge all day, while we have to live a slave’s life. They drink wine and eat fine food, while the lice eat us in our bunks. They own cases and boxes of gold, while we have an empty purse. What he’s telling us is no lie. And why did they flog the wretch half to death?

— Well, but he was only an Indian, one of the sailors said.

— And are you a grandee? Alberto asked. Don’t you know that God gave every human a living soul? Maybe it would be smarter if you didn’t talk about other people’s skins, but tried to find your own soul in the whorehouse where you forgot it. One day you’ll be asked for it, and then you won’t have it. What will you reply, you son of a castrated monk?

The Indian girl sat huddled in her bunk and stared with her vacant eyes at the people who came and went. She didn’t cry about her murdered child; there was nothing more that could happen to her. The sailors looked at her uncertainly and muffled their voices, as if afraid of rousing her to consciousness. And one after another they stole into their rooms, flung themselves into their bunks or tried to get the dice game going. But a dark, dull mood shrouded the orlop deck, and Chaparrito, who had gone down there a couple of times on a pretext, said to José Nuñez:

— It doesn’t look good down there among the crew. They have fire in their eyes like bulls. It won’t take much before they begin using their horns.
— Damn those grandees, José Nuñez said. They don’t know what they’re up against. They think the whip can take care of everything, but it should be taken away from them when they’re on the ocean. They’re playing with their own lives.

Later in the evening the Indian regained consciousness. He got up in the bunk and wanted to get out of it, but Juan Gomez pushed him back carefully.

— Stay in bed and rest, he said. And here’s wine, drink as much of it as you can guzzle down. It soothes the pain.

— I can easily stand the pain, the Indian said.

— Why did they whip you?

The Indian shook his head.

— Your question isn’t smart, he said. They wanted to whip their will into me, and when my back is healed, they’ll try again. They want to make me into a thing, as they have made all else into things. Did I ask my spear whether it had a will? No, if it didn’t obey me, I broke it and made myself another. They demand that my will be an instrument in their hands.

— He understands it, don Pablo said, grabbing Juan Gomez by the arm so that it hurt. They call him an uncivilized savage, but he knows what the rest of us have forgotten. It’s a matter of power over our work and toil, over all our property, over every word we say, every thought we think, and over our innermost core. They’ve made most of us into things, and they want to make him into a thing, a talking instrument for their will. You know that, Pancuiaico.

— I don’t know your customs, and I don’t always understand your words, the Indian said. The life I led, back then when I owned it, was simple, and there was nothing in it a person couldn’t understand. We, too, craved power, but not over one another. We took it over the land, over animals and plants, rivers and plains, with the gods’ blessing. At times we ranged far to find the sacred plant Hikuli, which gives the earth crops and summons the deer. We left, and the whole tribe fasted while we were away to please the gods, and we returned with it, and wives and children and the old men danced their way toward us. We didn’t crave power over one another, but the power of the one
was the other’s power, and we worked together and went hunting
to find our food, and together we thanked the gods for our for­
tune and prayed that no anger be vented on any of us. But these
things went down in the sea. The mother of the gods is no longer
alive.

— The whites came, don Pablo said.

— Yes, the whites came, the Indian said. We had heard of them, but our valleys were far off, and we didn’t think much
about them. Our gods had given us power over the land, and we lived amid fertility and crops, and our wives became pregnant.
But they came, more terrifying than lightning and thunder, and
our weapons and all our bravery were of no use to us. They took
our houses, our land, our gold, our wives and children and us
ourselves. They came as a new and terrifying power we hadn’t
known before.

— But what do you want to achieve by your resistance? Juan
asked.

— Can I live when I’m not myself? Pancuiaco asked. And
how can I be myself when others have power over my whole life.

— One can always live, Juan Gomez said. Oh, one can live
on grass and leaves and with the whip whistling over one’s head.
When I was a boy, the drought came and scorched the grain in
the field. The cattle died, little children starved to death at their
mothers’ breasts, and old people dropped dead. There was no
more wine, and we had to drink water, and what the drought
didn’t take, the estate owner and the tax collector came for. It
was as if the whole earth was to be scorched, and no living thing
left.

The Indian nodded. He had himself cultivated the land and
knew what it meant for people when the gods turned their backs
on them and wouldn’t listen to their prayers for rain.

— We carried our own images of saints around in the fields,
and we borrowed a wonder-working Madonna, but nothing
helped. The priests told us it was punishment for our sins that
was now finally befalling us, and we begged God for forgiveness
and promised to reform, although we were not conscious of our
great sins. Those who had money went to other districts to buy
food, but the poor had to stay home and die. I swear to you, Pancuiaco, our land became a desert in those two terrible summers, in those two hunger years.

— And nobody helped you people?

— Nobody helped us, we had only ourselves, and in our village we were only a little handful of poor peasants. We lived on roots, which we dug up from the soil, beetles, larvae, and grass, and our stomachs became distended like drums, but our limbs were like dry branches that crack in the first storm. Children were born who had no skin on their bodies, and there were some who lost their minds and took their own lives because they couldn’t endure the horrors of hunger. Others of us, however, lived. We wanted to live. We no longer prayed to God, we didn’t entreat the saints, we didn’t go to mass. We thought only about one single thing: that we wanted to live to the end of that day and maybe the next one. And when the two years had passed, the drought was gone. The rain once more poured down, and plants grew with a luxuriance like never before. That’s life, I’ve always thought, harsh and cruel, but also gentle. We have to go through the bad years when it looks as though we’re lost, but after them come others, when the spring once again has water. If you give up, everything is lost, and the meadows will never turn green for you.

— I understand the words you speak, the Indian said. I, too, would fight for my life if the gods turned their eyes from me or evil spirits stole my luck.

— Then fight now, Juan Gomez said. Yield to the storm and say to yourself: I want to keep living, until my grapevine once more turns green.

The slave shook his head.

— You didn’t prevail over the drought by surrendering, but by fighting against it. It said to you people: You shall die! and you replied: No, we will live, we will survive you and become old men whose grandchildren shall play at our feet. You scorned the drought to make it retreat, and I would do the same, but here I’m fighting against other enemies, and what they want to take from me is worth more than my life. They want my will
and my soul after having robbed me of everything else, and I would be cowardly and pitiful if I surrendered to them just to live the miserable life they begrudge me.

— Save your art of persuasion, Juan Gomez, don Pablo said. This flogged Indian has greater love for life and freedom in his earlobe than you do in your whole old-soldier head. Let him pursue his path, which is a path of greatness and dignity, and let’s hope he can walk it to the end.

— There are also other paths, Juan objected meekly.

— Yes, there are also other paths, and they can only be found by men with angry hearts, don Pablo said. Each living person has his path, and if we went down that path, all the world’s women and children and old men would dance their way toward us, and when the anger attained its goal, it would transform itself into love.

They sat for a while in silence, while Juan Gomez made sure the slave got more wine to drink. Then don Pablo bent down over Pancuiaco and asked softly:

— You killed the young nobleman?

— Yes.

— Why did you run his sword through him? He was dead, wasn’t he?

— I wanted to let him taste his own power. Steel is sweet for warriors’ hearts.

— Try to sleep now, don Pablo said almost affectionately. Nobody will ask about you until your wounds are healed. And it won’t be long before we’re in port; then maybe you can run away.

— I don’t care about running away, the Indian replied. No sun shines over my world; my gods are dead. Isn’t a man created as a man in order to fight to the last? I’m not the first of my tribe who has stood tied to the stake. Your gods demand that I die in fear and trembling, but ours want us to go to them erect.

— And the vengeance? don Pablo whispered. Don’t you want to live to take it?

— One shouldn’t speak of vengeance, the Indian replied. One should take it, but never mention it. Perhaps Nakawe will
grant my heart its last joy, and perhaps not.

He turned his head toward the bulkhead as if he wanted to sleep, and don Pablo and Juan Gomez went up on deck to find a place to sleep there. A little later Chaparrito made a new round on the orlop deck. He came back to José Nuñez and said:

— I think that’s over and done with. The Indian is sleeping in a bunk, and most of the off-duty watch has also crawled into bed. If only they manage to sleep on it, nothing will happen, and luckily they don’t have any more whiskey. But it is foolish.

— All of these fine and rich people are fools, the mate said. And they deserved to experience a quick little mutiny. They load the ship down with gold till it’s ready to sink, and they themselves sit under the awning, tippling their wine. And they have no idea that all that’s needed is an ember and the fire will break out and scorch their flesh like a fish that’s grilled.
Later that night captain van Laahr sent word to the viceroy, the oidor, and colonel Gonzales asking them to come to his cabin at once for a discussion. It was urgent, since new information had come to light about the murder of don Luis. The viceroy had gone to bed early and was very cross when, drowsy and with rumpled hair, he finally put in an appearance long after the others.

— It must be very alarming news since you routed us out at this time of night, captain, he said ill-temperedly.

— I had the impression your excellency wanted to have anything new submitted to him, van Laahr said. The thing is that a man from the orlop deck has come forward who claims to know who don Luis's murderer is. I didn’t wish to interrogate him without your excellency’s and the other gentlemen’s presence.

— Oh, in that case, that undeniably changes the matter, don Pedro said, appeased. And so who is this person?

— An old soldier on the homeward trip to Spain, the captain said. I’ve had him wait outside, and we can call him as soon as it’s convenient for your excellency.

— Excellent, don Pedro said. I would suggest that you, don Francisco, conduct the interrogation. So let’s get hold of him.

Van Laahr fetched the man. It was the old veteran without a nose. He stood for a bit and stared with his red-rimmed, sullen eyes at the three patrician gentlemen.

— Well, the oidor said gruffly. Come closer. Don’t you salute?

— Of course, your grace, the veteran said and bowed.

— What’s your name?

— Mariello Corridan.

— Where were you born?

— In Toledo, year 1615, your grace. I’m a poor soldier who has served the king faithfully for many years.

— And what can you tell us about don Luis?

— I’m very poor, your grace, the veteran said. An old man am I, who has no other alternative but a beggar’s bowl. I’ve
sacrificed my nose for the fatherland. A damned Indian cut it off with a machete.

— Did you wake us up at this time of night to tell us your memoirs, the oidor said. Don’t you think we have other things to think about than your nose?

— Don’t get angry, your grace, but I thought my information would perhaps be worth a small reward.

— We can talk about that after we’ve heard what you have to say. Do you know who murdered the unfortunate don Luis de Zuniga in such a shameless way?

— Yes.

— Who was it?

— The Indian.

— Which Indian?

— The Indian slave the rich señora had whipped just today. He strangled the young gentleman. I myself heard him admit it. He mocked the blessed deceased. I thrust the sword through him, the presumptuous one said, for steel is sweet for the warrior’s heart.

— And why did he do it?

— That he didn’t mention. But the heart of an Indian is a fountain of malice whose bottom no human eye can glimpse. I myself heard him admit he had killed the young and virtuous nobleman.

— Tell us everything you heard and don’t hide anything. That will stand you in best stead, old man.

The veteran recounted what he had heard of don Pablo’s conversation with Pancuiaco. He told the story slowly and at great length, and his eyes darted from the one to the other, as if he was trying to discover what impression his story was making.

— I see, the oidor said pensively. There’s surely something to the twaddle. But I just can’t get it into my head why he killed don Luis of all people. What was the motive? I can’t believe that this primitive Indian slave was able to hit upon a way of committing a robbery-murder. That kind of thing as a rule is found only in higher cultural stages. What did he have to avenge against don Luis, to whom he had scarcely ever spoken a word?
— He was perhaps angry about don Luis’s having sold the Indian girl to me, the viceroy said.

— Your excellency has hit the bull’s-eye! The Indian girl, of course. Tell me, old man, did some kind of relationship exist between the two of them? Did he sleep with her?

— How should I know? I don’t lie awake all night eavesdropping on that kind of thing. But he was always together with her and the child until it disappeared.

— The child? don Pedro burst out. Did the girl have a child?

— Yes, an infant. But it was in the way, in some way or another, and a Negro came and fetched it. Presumably he heaved it overboard, and now she sits in her bunk and stares straight ahead as if her mind were dimmed.

— Had I known that she had a child, I would truly not have bought her, don Pedro said indignantly. I must say, I had not expected such behavior in business matters by don Luis, who was from such an honorable family. It is of course manifest that no one will buy a girl with a child in order to give her away as a present.

— Precisely for that reason he had the child disappear, excellency, the oidor said.

— I paid an especially generous price for the girl because I had the impression that don Luis was an estimable young man, who was in a momentary embarrassment. And then he sells me a girl who naturally is emaciated and half out of her mind after her child’s death. I concede that I am piqued that the deceased could have abused my goodwill to such a degree.

— That’s especially understandable, excellency, the oidor said. But in any event the matter now seems to be absolutely clear. If don Luis conducted himself less honorably in his business dealings, he wound up paying a frightful price for it. Presumably the slave, who is of a rebellious and intractable disposition, wanted to avenge the killing of the child, although of course in both senses it was don Luis’s, and he therefore could do with it as he wished. The only thing that remains now is to interrogate and imprison the Indian slave.

— Can that be done without doña Inez’s permission? the
vicey asked doubtfully. She is a very charming lady, and I
would definitely not want to encroach upon her.

The viceroy and the oidor looked at each other. Doña Inez
had influence, and if she felt offended, there was no telling
whether she might not drop a word in the right place. An un-
pleasant and fateful word. Besides, the oidor had a sense that
she valued this slave highly, very highly.

— A murder is a murder, the colonel suddenly said with ir-
ritation. The damned slave must be interrogated immediately
and afterwards imprisoned even if he belongs to doña Inez ten
times over. The fellow has murdered a Spanish nobleman, and
even if he belonged to the king himself, he must be imprisoned
and immediately subjected to examination by torture.

— Colonel, sir, the viceroy said stiffly.

— Your excellency! the colonel replied, trembling with rage,
and gave him a dirty look. I respect your high birth and promi-

ten position, but we’re dealing here with a crucial principle.
How is it possible for us to rule over our immense realm and

guard our wealth and our own security in general if we don’t
make every crime against a white man into a mortal sin which is
punished without mercy? How shall we build up our mighty im-

perium if with fire, sword, and gallows we don’t teach the mil-

lions of Indians we rule over the most unconditional obedience

and slavish respect? It’s not a matter here of some private aver-

sion toward Indians or toward any other nation, but only of prac-

tical politics. No breach may be committed with regard to this

rule of severity and reason. This Indian must be broken on the

wheel alive, torn to death limb by limb, and no one has the right
to intervene, not even doña Inez, whom I admire and esteem

highly. Here we have to strike hard.

— It appears to me that the colonel is not totally wrong, the
oidor said.

— In principle, the colonel’s viewpoints are indisputable, the
viceroy said. But here we are talking about certain forms of

courtesy which cultivated people must observe. The slave be-

longs to doña Inez, and we ought to inform her before we pro-
ceed against him. It is simply a question of etiquette.
The veteran had followed the conversation with curiosity, and since there was now a pause, he said:

— There’s perhaps also another whom your grace ought to punish. He’s a heretic and blasphemer, and he does everything he can to sow dissension among the crew. He’s said terrible things, and I’ve heard them with my own ears.

— Who is he? What’s his name?

— A vagabond named Pablo Avarano. A godforsaken dog, who’s always yelping against the rich and preaching hate and vengeance.

— Do you know whether he had anything to do with the murder of don Luis? the oidor asked.

— I don’t know, but he’s capable of any and every evil act. And there’s another, his friend—a furloughed soldier, I’m ashamed to say.

— What did he do?

— He’s always together with him. Maybe they’re concocting something or other.

— But you don’t have any definite charges to direct against them?

— This Pablo Avarano committed witchcraft. He conjured a ghost into the ocean.

— That’s good, the oidor said, and flung a few coins on the table in front of the veteran. You can go. We will send for you if we have more to ask you.

— Your grace, the old man wailed. I’m a poor man who will now have to live by the bread of charity. My nose I sacrificed for the king—an Indian cut it off with a machete. For forty years I have fought for the faith and justice and put up with much evil. Would your grace not repay my zeal a bit more amply?

— That’s what your information is worth, the oidor said. You can go.

The veteran looked imploringly at the others, stuck the money in his pocket, and turned to go. The colonel shouted at him:

— Haven’t you learned politeness, old scoundrel? It doesn’t look as though you’ve been a soldier at all.
The veteran clicked his heels and saluted with military decorum. His ugly disfigured face was wan with anger, and he had tears of disappointment and hatred in his eyes.

— I'm a poor old man, your grace, he mumbled as he left.

— It has always appeared to me an inappropriate extravagance that they rewarded Judas with thirty pieces of silver, the oidor said. That old robber here came first and foremost because he had a bone to pick with the two knaves he informed on at the end. It is of course very unlikely that they would have had anything to do with this obvious revenge murder.

— But he did charge them with inciting to mutiny, the viceroy objected.

— If we had to deal with every utterance that is passed between sailors and shabby passengers when the whiskey bottle is on the table, we'd have enough to take care of, the oidor said. The crucial thing is not what they say, but what they do. Let them complain about their fate and the injustice of the world as much as they want as long as they just confine themselves to that. These whites who have washed ashore or are grave-robbers as a rule are not dangerous. They are people who have been unable to hold their own in life because they lack the ability to act, and their lives have become a mill that grinds drunkenness, squabbling, and nonsense. Our time isn't to be used investigating an old bandit's accusations against two carousers who probably cheated him at cards. For grumblers there can't be any worse punishment than simply letting them grumble. Only if the grumbler gets to be the leader of a crowd of like-minded or misled people is he dangerous and must be crushed.

— And there's no danger of disturbances, captain van Laahr? don Pedro asked. We ought to keep in mind, of course, that this ship is no ordinary ship, but contains immense assets.

— There's always the danger, the captain said. One day there are too many cockroaches in the food or the water is stagnant, and then it all starts. But I haven't noticed anything.

— Precisely, the oidor nodded. Make sure their wretched feed is just what they think they have a claim to, give them their usual ration of hard toil, stupor, and suffering, and they'll find
that everything is all right. But don’t make any change, either in one direction or the other. They’ll be ready to murder if a wretched shilling is missing from their wages, but the riches lying right under their feet they don’t give a thought to. The most contemptible thing about man is that he’s a creature of habit, sluggish, and stupid like an ox under the yoke, and who can acquit himself of this charge? Don’t touch the customs, and if you want to rule, then slowly accustom people to obey, and one day obedience has become their nature, and they will demand to submit and will cut the throat of him who tries to make them free. That’s why there’s nothing more dangerous than situations that force people to think. Because what’s dangerous is that the rabble really can think even if they haven’t discovered it. A Pablo Avarano, or whatever our old friend called him, is in general harmless and not worth concerning oneself with, but the day the food is spoiled or the water runs out, he is truly not harmless.

— And that is precisely why one ought to put that kind of agitator under restraint beforehand, don Pedro said.

— One shouldn’t do that, excellency. For one thing, they’ve become accustomed to him, and one shouldn’t encroach upon their habits. One would risk that they begin to imagine him as a kind of martyr. And one should create martyrs with circumspection and under reassuring clerical control. Moreover, excellency, you know better than anyone that the art of ruling rests to a certain degree on casting a tinge of freedom and voluntariness over the absolutely necessary compulsion. This grumbler’s foolish chatter gives the sailors a sense of freedom and that they have the freedom to hold what opinions they will, and if I am not very mistaken, his tirades at the same time have such an abstract character that they can’t lead to anything. In all probability he won’t discover at all that now too many cockroaches have gotten into the food and that therefore a revolutionary situation has arisen. Reality seldom exists for that kind of muddle-brain—or their own inner cowardice prevents them from seeing it clearly. Oh, I wonder whether there exists such an evil and stupid and filthy animal as man. I’m inclined to believe that the creator af-
ter the act of creation turned from us in disgust and loathing, if indeed our origin isn’t totally mistakenly ascribed to divine providence and in reality is due to a satanic power, which first created predators, sharks, and venomous serpents, and afterwards brought forth its masterpiece with us, where gloom and bestiality found its perfect form. I can’t explain in any other way the impulse to death which is in us, the impotent hatred of life which sometimes seizes us.

— It cannot be your opinion, don Francisco, that we too...
. the viceroy interrupted.

— Precisely we, the oidor said. Because sometimes I have a sense that the people who toil hard and live like animals, and for whose existence I naturally have contempt, just as you do, excellency—perhaps have preserved a purity and strength in their hatred that is pleasing to God. They are stupid, the gods must know that, because if they discovered their own powers, if they began to think, it would be all over for us and our power. For power altogether, because the day power becomes everyone’s possession it will no longer exist.

— I find such a train of thought totally incomprehensible, don Pedro said coldly. And I find it dangerous and subversive.

— The danger isn’t great since I generally make certain that my thoughts don’t reach out into wider circles. But even in the powerless, sluggish anger that never turns into action, but fills the soul with a black gloom, lies a latent strength, and maybe one day it will nevertheless turn into action. We don’t know everything. But we possess neither real hatred nor love; we are fossilized in all our sterile power, and although I have contempt for this riff-raff and these fools, I fear our own sterility, which is incapable of distinguishing between good and evil and only hates the foundation of existence itself.

Colonel Gonzales had followed the conversation with a face that was very harsh and disapproving; now he turned red and his eyes flashed maliciously underneath the bushy eyebrows. He forgot his usual deference to the viceroy, and stepped forward a step as if he were going to lay his hands on don Francisco.

— This scandalous conversation must now be over with, he
said, and was so worked up that he could barely get the words out. I am a man of old duty and virtue, who honors God and the king and also wishes a befitting honor for myself. The lawless words that you, most honored don Francisco, have found it appropriate to utter are not just an affront to all authority, but also to me personally. For what do we have to live by if these observations hold good, what will remain of our struggle, of our whole life, of our conceptions, our pride, our honor?

— Precisely, the oidor said tranquilly. You’ve reached right to the heart of the matter, dear colonel.

— The heart of the matter is that it is our duty to defend power, which is sacred and comes from God. It is power that gives our life its purpose and meaning; everything that is great and beautiful and heroic unfolds in its radiance. My whole life I’ve been a humble and proud servant of power and lived in its shadow and defended it with my sword. If power is not of a good nature and if the obedience we owe it does not precede all else, then what is all of our existence? Like the foam on the waves!

— You’re completely right, that’s the problem, the oidor nodded. You express it with uncommon clarity.

The colonel stared intensely at don Francisco, who looked at him with his friendliest ram face.

— Well, Gonzales said, and suddenly became calm. What’s the point of discussing—one merely smothers all action in chatter. It was the criminal slave we were talking about. I’m just a simple soldier, but I’m of the modest opinion that murder at all events must be punished. My great respect for doña Inez cannot prevent me from demanding that her slave be imprisoned immediately and placed in irons.

The viceroy and the oidor looked at each other doubtfully, and the colonel once again turned scarlet and stomped in a rage.

— But what the devil, don’t you understand anything? he shouted. Precisely by forsaking our own laws we demolish them. Precisely by not being hard as steel we turn ourselves into miserable oxen. If we don’t take ourselves seriously, then who will? At this moment presumably the entire crew knows it’s the
slave who murdered don Luis. And if he isn’t apprehended immediately, then everyone will know the reason. And the riff-raff will smile and think: that’s what their justice is like. This slave belongs to a patrician woman—that’s why he’s not put in irons. But our justice must be hard and fast like lightning from heaven. It must strike immediately and be without mercy, and other considerations must yield to it. If we are to govern this world, we can’t use the old rule of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. We must condemn to death for a tooth and to eternal torment for an eye. Here doña Inez’s feelings mean nothing; if she is offended because her slave is apprehended, then she’ll have to be offended. Señores, I won’t conceal that I regarded don Luis as a young good-for-nothing, and that it is a matter of indifference to me whether he’s dead or alive. But he was a white man, a Spaniard, a nobleman, an officer, and his murderer must be ripped to death joint by joint, while his death-shrieks make the ship tremble. It is necessary with regard to our principles, our Spanish discipline, our position as a master race. Here no sentimentality or sidelong glance at a mighty lady’s feelings is of any use at all; for here much more is at stake. An aura of horror must surround our power if we are to preserve it; the mere thought of opposing us and violating our legal system must fill people with terror.

— Your principles are to a high degree sensible and estimable, colonel, the oidor said. And yet I can’t quite refrain from thinking that the slave basically did nothing more than avenge the murder of an innocent child. For surely we may safely consider it as a fact that don Luis got rid of the child in the hopes of getting a better price for the girl.

— The slave’s motives are neither here nor there. If he had killed don Luis in self-defense, his crime would be just as great.

— I merely was fastening on the fact that you mentioned the word legal system, the oidor interjected.

— I’m no judge of subtleties, the colonel said. By our legal system I understand our sacred right to unconditional inviolability regardless of what we undertake. We are masters and the others are slaves. We are the absolute authority, and we have re-
responsibility only vis-à-vis those who exercise the supreme power, in the final instance God. That's the kind of views by which our race has lived and been advanced to what it is today, and it will be fateful if they are not permitted to prevail.

— I have to say that colonel Gonzales is absolutely right, the viceroy said. Personally I am opposed to offending doña Inez, but I cannot see any alternative to having the criminal slave put in chains. I suppose it won’t do to disturb her at night, but first thing tomorrow morning I will pay her my respects and explain to her what has happened.

— She’s a very temperamental lady, the oidor said.

— Still we have to do it—the colonel’s observations are completely correct. My respect for the deceased has, to be sure, sunk considerably now that I hear that the girl had a child, and that he therefore acted dishonorably in a business matter, but nevertheless he was a Spanish nobleman, and we cannot show any kind of consideration. I am convinced that doña Inez will understand our motives. There is nothing else to do, captain van Laahr, but to get the man right away and interrogate him.

— And the two others the old man mentioned? the captain asked.

— In any event, they of course had nothing to do with the murder, the viceroy said. For the time being we have to get hold of the perpetrator.

The captain went to turn out a couple of cannoneers and get the Indian slave. The others sat and waited without talking. The viceroy was perceptibly nervous, drumming his fingers on the table, while he considered the entire embarrassing affair anew. The oidor without doubt was right that doña Inez was not to be trifled with if she got angry, and she had power and influence. A word whispered in the right place could do irreparable damage just now when he needed to be on good terms with the court. He was annoyed that he had become mixed up in this stupid matter. What business was it of his that a fool of an officer had been killed by a half-crazy Indian?

Van Laahr returned and remained standing a moment in the doorway silent and breathing deeply.
— Well? don Pedro said. So where was the man?
— His bunk is empty, the captain said. Nobody knows where he went. We’ve searched the orlop deck thoroughly—he’s not there.
— What in heaven’s name does this mean? the viceroy said with irritation. Is this supposed to mean that the man is on the loose, and possibly intends to undertake more murderous deeds tonight? I very much deplore that this kind of thing can take place on a decent Spanish ship.
— Presumably he’s committed suicide, the oidor said. Probably he jumped overboard, which might not be said to be unreasonable in light of what was in store for him. But I suggest we inform doña Inez immediately.
— Yes, certainly, the viceroy said. A thorough search of the entire ship has to be undertaken, and we shall be forced to disturb doña Inez’s night rest. Would you personally ask her to come, van Laahr?

The captain turned to go, but at that very moment doña Inez entered.
She had sat alone for a long time and stared out into the night while her thoughts struggled in her mind. She clenched her fists in anger when she thought about a slave’s having defied her as no other man had dared, and she felt a melancholy which was about to make her cry until she remembered his back bloodied under the whip’s lashes. She could still hear his song with its savage and indomitable pride and hatred, and she realized that today she had experienced something she had never known before. She had loved men and learned to have contempt for them, she had given birth to her children and seen them die as infants, and she had hardened her heart against grief and suffering until she believed that nothing could befall her. She had surrounded herself with an armor of wilful power and she had subjugated her own world to herself, and now she didn’t know whether she felt like a woman or like a mother to a half-savage Indian. Whether she most felt like killing him in an embrace or laying his head to rest at her breast as if he were a child who merely needed to sleep. She heard the ocean roar against the side of the ship and the tramp of the sailors’ feet, and it seemed to her remote and unreal. Only one thing existed—the scorching pain in her own heart.

She got up and stamped impatiently as if an enemy were standing in front of her. Something had to happen that could make her forget the pain and despair and give her back her proud contempt for people and life.

—I can have him killed, she thought. He’s mine, and I rule over his life. Or I can throw myself at his feet and beg him to forgive not just what I’ve done to him, but everything I’ve lived and thought. I can treat him like an obstinate animal, which is punished by death, or like a young god I beg for mercy. I don’t know what he is, and I don’t know anything about myself. Am I rich and mighty like a queen, or am I merely a beggar who begs for a miserable alms and is rejected with scorn?

She determined she would see him and talk to him, although she didn’t know what she had to say. And she was seized by a
torpid tranquility as she went down the ladder to the orlop deck. She didn’t notice the heavy close air, she didn’t see the sailors staring in surprise at the noblewoman.

— Pancuiaco, my Indian, is he here? she asked out into the room, and when no one answered, she shouted angrily:

— I’m inquiring about my slave. Tell me where he’s sleeping.

Old Alberto slowly got up from his bunk, where he had flung himself with all his clothes on after his watch. He went over to her, bowed awkwardly and growled:

— He was sleeping in there, gracious señora. Inside the partition with the poor passengers.

— You say slept—is he not there any more? she asked and suddenly felt so dizzy that she had to lean against the long, dirty table.

— No, he’s not there, Alberto said, looking severely at her. He wasn’t there when they came to get him a little while ago.

— Who came to get him?

— The skipper and a couple of cannoneers. They didn’t find him in the bunk where he was supposed to be, and they searched for him in all the nooks and crannies. They thought he had hidden, and maybe he has. In a place where only God can find him.

— You mean he’s dead? she screamed.

— I mean he’s been killed, Alberto said. But nobody can kill the soul. If one whips a horse till it jumps into the abyss, is that then its own fault? And if one tortures a human being till, being crazed, he seeks his death, did he take his own life or is it merciful God who has shown the way to peace? You’re smart, señora, and I’m only an ignorant seaman, with gross sins on his conscience to boot. You can explain to me how he who forces another to take his own life is judged, gracious señora.

For a moment she felt as if the room with all the wild faces and curiously staring eyes were wheeling round and round. Then she pulled herself together, her figure straightened itself up, and she forced herself to be completely calm.

— Ask your father-confessor, she said. I didn’t come here
to discuss questions of conscience occasioned by an insubordi-
nate Indian.

— The conscience will awake one day if the Lord will, Alberto said. All of us will be held accountable one day if we
dare believe the Lord’s own word. Even those who rule over
people have their consciences, gracious señora.

— Are you out of your mind—do you dare preach to me! Do you want to tell me how I should treat my own slave? Have
you gotten yourself drunk, or have you escaped from a mad-
house, foolish old man?

She looked angrily at Alberto, and he tried to meet her gaze,
but before long he had to lower his eyes. Oh, the mighty could
commit any act of injustice, and who was allowed to reproach
them? Their hearts were hard and wicked, but God had given
them power and set them to ruling over the earth and its people.
The Lord alone could call them to account; He alone could
punish this arrogant woman who forced others to lower their
eyes because her power was from God, even if she used it for
evil. Alberto felt the same impotence as when the mulatto’s
ghost wouldn’t retreat, and he mumbled humbly:

— Your slave is gone, gracious señora. That’s all we know. Maybe he jumped overboard. What doesn’t the soul do in its
torment? God will judge us all.

The sailors stared at her as she hurried through the dirty
stuffy room and climbed up the ladder. She was beautiful and
full-blooded, but for them she wasn’t a woman. They hated her,
as they hated all the rich and mighty people who slept securely
in their cabins while they themselves worked hard, but they
dared not show their hatred. A word might have terrible conse-
quences, a look might mean ruin.

— You claim you slept with a harpy—then why did you
become so afraid of her, old man? one of the sailors shouted
from his bunk.

— Don’t talk about things you don’t understand, Alberto
said obscurely. God will judge her, but it’s his will that we be
subservient. Stick to the scripture and yield to evil when it
comes from God. Everyone has his own sins to repent and his
trials to endure. Maybe she’ll burn in purgatory while the rest of us will be reposing in Abraham’s bosom. Don’t forget it’s God who rules.

Doña Inez groped her way across the deck in the dark. The moon was hidden behind clouds, and only a couple of lanterns shone sleepily. Finally she found the captain’s cabin and opened the door. She stood for a while and breathed heavily while the four men, silent and bewildered, looked at her pale face.

— Where is my slave? she finally asked.

— Won’t you sit down, doña Inez, the viceroy said. Captain van Laahr was just on his way to ask you to come, although we found it extraordinarily deplorable to disturb you at this time of night. It is precisely this Indian, your slave, it is all about.

— Where is he?

— The trouble is that we do not know, señora. But let me submit the whole matter to you. An old soldier approached captain van Laahr and informed him that he knew who don Luis’s murderer was. We interrogated the man, and everything points to the Indian’s having killed the young officer, for whom I have the most profound sympathy despite certain flaws in his character.

— But in heaven’s name, why did he do it?

— The Indian was of course wild and insubordinate—you yourself know that best, gracious señora. You had to have him whipped. It appears to be an act of revenge, something to do with an Indian slave woman whom don Luis disposed of—by the way, to me. According to the information we have gotten, the girl had a child whom don Luis had drowned in order to get her sold. That fired up the Indian, and he attacked don Luis, as he was coming out of the card-party, strangled him and ran him through his chest with a sword.

— But where is he? doña Inez shouted. What business of mine is don Luis’s death? Where is the slave?

— Doubtless one must assume that one way or another he got news that his crime had been discovered and jumped overboard. The captain has looked for him but he’s nowhere to be found.
— I don’t believe he’s dead! I don’t believe it! He was brave, he would never take his own life for fear of punishment. Why, you heard how he sang while he was being whipped, how he mocked his own suffering. He must have hidden some place or other like a wounded animal. Captain, I demand that you find him; a search must be set in motion at once.

— But is it not best if he is dead? the viceroy said. After all, a terrible punishment awaits him. He murdered a white man, and you know what that means, gracious señora.

— Of what importance was that absurd hothead don Luis? doña Inez said. I’m certain the Indian didn’t do it. What soldier did you talk to? Of course an old scoundrel who merely wanted to earn a reward. And he got one, didn’t he? But I’ll procure ten witnesses who will swear they were in the company of the Indian at the time don Luis met his death. He’s my slave, and I have the right to conduct his defense, and I’d like to see the one who will dare lay hands on my property. By all the saints, señores, I, too, know how to act toward my enemies!

She had gained color in her cheeks, and her eyes flashed. A wild splendor attended this large, fully mature woman whose anger made her forget her grief and anxiety. She was transformed into a dangerous predator whose path humans shouldn’t cross, a lioness who whips the sand with her tail before it jumps and brings death with her terrible claw.

The men didn’t dare look at one another, but the oidor said softly:

— What was it you wanted to say, colonel Gonzales?

— Nothing, the colonel said, his voice a bit hoarse.

— Before you were urging a series of principled observations, and perhaps it would interest doña Inez to hear them.

— Let us keep to the subject, the viceroy said. I’m compelled to admit that doña Inez is right. The testimony the veteran gave must naturally be tested more closely; of course, it cannot be denied that he was very eager to get paid for informing. One also ought to pay attention to the two other persons he informed on. Perhaps in the final analysis the theory of robbery-murder is the most likely. And besides, we cannot regard it as wholly pre-
eluded that the old scoundrel himself murdered don Luis and is now trying to throw the guilt onto the Indian slave.

— A new and highly interesting theory, the oidor said. And of course the most important thing at all events is to make an example. Out of regard for discipline—wasn’t that what you meant, colonel?

— Yes, precisely, the colonel said. At all events the harshest possible punishment must take place.

— All true statesmanship consists of compromises, and I believe we are about to find the path to a very happy compromise, the oidor said. Juridically, of course, the point is merely that someone or other is broken on the wheel in order to frighten and admonish, and from the point of view of general deterrence it’s rather a subordinate matter who that is.

— Completely correct, colonel Gonzales nodded. It’s necessary to strike hard, to strike really hard. Our entire civilizing work depends on it.

— But the Indian has to be found, doña Inez said. He must be found, and that must happen yet tonight. He’s lying sick and suffering some place or other, and maybe he’ll die because no one is taking care of his wounds. He is to be brought up to my cabin—I will take care of him myself.

— Listen, this is about to develop into a public scandal, the oidor whispered to the viceroy. Can’t you intervene and reason with her?

— No, God forbid, don Pedro mumbled. What is it, van Laahr?

The captain had opened the door and listened, strained. And now the others heard a dull noise like blows of an ax against a tree trunk. It came quite regularly, and for every blow, it was as if the ship trembled with pain.

— All hell’s broken loose, the captain said, and lurched out into the dark.
A couple of minutes later the ship’s bell tolled and wild confusion arose on the San Salvador. The sailors on watch below came running from the orlop deck, and the passengers emerged from the cabins half-dressed and startled. The lanterns were lit and moved in the night-time darkness, and in the midst of the noise and the shouting the weak, hollow blows could be heard steadily from the bowels of the ship.

Captain van Laahr didn’t take time to answer the passengers’ questions. He had hurried up to the bridge and shouted his orders through the speaking-trumpet. The viceroy made his way through the crush and reached him up there.

— What does this all mean, captain? he asked in a voice hoarse from exasperation.
— It means it’s a matter of life or death, van Laahr said.
— I am entitled to a clear answer. What in heaven’s name has happened?
— Don’t you hear the blows, man? the captain said, totally forgetting his respect for the viceroy’s high position.
— Where is the noise coming from?
— From the bottom of the ship. The Indian slave is gone, and one of the carpenter’s axes has disappeared. If he succeeds in knocking out one of the ship’s planks, the tub will go down in less than a quarter of an hour. And we’re at least two hours’ sailing from Isla de Pinos. We’re too heavily loaded, all that damned gold . . .
— Well, then go fetch the scoundrel up, or blow his head off, don Pedro shouted. That’s what you have your cannoneers for. You can’t just let him sink the ship without undertaking anything at all.
— Now there’s a bright idea, excellency. First we have to find out where he is on the ship. There are many cargo holds, but the investigation is in full swing. Now just go down—this is serious, and there’s no time for palaver.
— The viceroy was about to complain about this lack of respect, but at that very moment José Nuñez came running.
— We found him, he said. He broke the hatch midships in the ‘tween-decks and crawled down that way.
— Is the water rushing in?
— I think so.
— Fling a couple of Negroes down to him, and promise them freedom and a reward if they can kill him. We have to try to get the leak repaired. Take the cannoneers along and let them see if they can get a shot at him with the muskets. I’ll give instructions to the second mate and Chaparrito to man the pumps and make the boats ready. We’re on course for Punta Brava.
— The viceroy noticed his legs shaking under him as he clambered down from the bridge. In the dark he ran into a man who took hold of him so as not to fall. It was don Jesus.
— What’s happening here? the inquisitor asked. What in the name of everlasting God is going on here?
Don Pedro explained to him what the captain had said, and don Jesus squeezed his arm.
— I don’t fear death, he said. I do not fear it. But it’s terrible to meet it here in the cold loneliness of the ocean. A Christian can’t die that way; God will not permit it. Death must be full of solemnity, and one should surrender one’s soul to God without terror. But not this horrible cold deep! Don Pedro, we must immediately secure ourselves space in one of the boats. God doesn’t want us to die this way.
— The boats first have to be prepared, and after that is done, I assume one will make proper allowance for rank and station.
— Do you think we’ll go under, don Pedro? the inquisitor whispered. Say you don’t think so. It’s not right if heaven lets me die now. I still have many souls to save, still have work to do in God’s vineyard. Have I not earned the Lord’s and all the saints’ mercy? Have I not fought against sin and heresy my whole life? One can’t let me die in this unworthy way.

He cried, desperate like a child or an old woman, and his grief suddenly made don Pedro calm. He remembered he was a man of an old and honorable lineage, and that his forefathers had had the courage to look death in the eye, indeed, to seek it out. Now the time had come when he could show that he had sangre
azul, blue blood in his veins. If he perished now, presumably someone would be saved who could recount that he, Pedro Cara­javal, had met his death like a man.

In the lanterns’ weak gleam he saw people stagger past, shouting and crying. He caught a face here and there and noticed features distorted by terror and almost unrecognizable. He saw a glimpse of fray Ramon, who was clinging to a young brother in the order, and he shouted to don Vargas, who rushed past. But the Jesuit didn’t hear him—he was on his way to the long-boat in the stern. A group of members of the order knelt on the deck and sang in clanging, fearful voices:

— Miserere nobis, Domine!
— Miserere mihi, Domine! don Jesus wailed, and don Pedro took him by the arm and led him over to the kneeling priests and monks. Then he went up on the bridge to the captain.
— How do things stand? he asked.
— Not well, she’s already lying a bit lower in the water. I’d recommend that your excellency remain near the boats.
— I find your advice quite inappropriate, don Pedro said. In my family it is not customary for us to try to save ourselves before others. I shall remain here.

Captain van Laahr looked at him with astonishment and hit him on the shoulder so hard that don Pedro almost went down on his knees.
— Pardon, excellency, but it’s good to meet a man! he said.

And don Pedro felt so aglow with pride for this spontaneous recognition from a gruff and simple seaman as if the king had made him knight of the golden fleece. He straightened his small, gaunt body a bit and thought about the fact that he was adding a new glory to his family’s chronicle of heroes. Now he was ready to die.

José Nuñez had gotten hold of a couple of Negro slaves and summoned the cannoneers. One way or another, colonel Gonzales must have gotten news of what was going on, and joined them. They stood for a moment on the between-deck and looked through the hatch down into the dark deep.
— Listen to the water, the colonel said. The ship is leaking.
— Down with you! José Nuñez shouted to the Negroes. If you can get the upper hand on him, you’ll get your freedom and a thousand escudos. If you don’t get a move on, you’ll be shot.

— The two Negroes looked at each other and cast a glance at the cannoneers standing with their muskets at the ready. Then they put their knives in their mouths and climbed down the ladder.

— And now after them, José Nuñez commanded. While he’s fighting with the Negroes, we’ll overpower him.

Colonel Gonzales was the first man with sword in hand. José followed with a lantern, and last came the cannoneers muskets at the ready.

They reached the bottom and were standing in water to their waists. José Nuñez lifted the lantern up over his head, and in the weak gleam of the light they saw the Negroes standing with their strange gray-wan faces. The Indian slave wasn’t there.

— He drowned, the colonel said. He used the ax till he fell down from exhaustion. But he did his work, and how the hell are we going to get the leak stopped?

José was already on his way up to the carpenter. The colonel waded over to the side of ship and found the leak.

— Hopeless, he mumbled. This leak can’t be repaired. And I prefer to die under the open sky than to drown like a rat in a hole.

Cursing, he climbed up the ladder, and the others followed behind. He felt a deep sorrow, not because he was going to die, for he had been close to death many times, but because he wouldn’t be allowed to carry out his plans for the conquest of the northern border districts. He had hoped to erect a memorial to himself as a conquistador, and now who would remember colonel Gonzales? The officers in his garrison in half a year’s time would learn that he had died at sea and would drink a good glass to his honor, but his life’s great idea would die with him.

— To hell with it all, he thought. Who can see any meaning in life? A damned Indian goes crazy and everything is over with. And it’s exclusively a result of the soppy humanitarianism of modern times. The damned slave should have been whipped to
death. But at least I’ll be spared seeing how the whole thing ends. Let the rest of them worry about it.

The priests’ trembling voices rose toward heaven and melded with desperate screams and wild oaths. The sailors struggled with the two long-boats to get them into the water, while the passengers swarmed around them and tried to climb into them. Pablo Avarano and Juan Gomez had found a corner in the forecastle deck where they sat and listened to the noise and the screams. Don Pablo had been in the mess and found a couple of bottles of the sour wine, and each put his bottle to his mouth.

— This will probably be the last drink we enjoy together, you good soldier and peasant Juan Gomez, he said. And what are we going to think now? Probably you’ll never get the chance to sit on your own farm and drink wine with the alcalde. But life goes on, and it will be tit for tat among humans until they learn to rule over it. People like us two will be born by the thousands, and they’ll be confronted with the same problems, and their sluggish brains and sleepy hearts will some day perhaps learn to hate, as this slave hated. Hate those who take our freedom from us and make ourselves masters of our own lives.

— He’s also taking innocent people to death with him, Juan Gomez said.

— We’re all guilty. What are you and what am I? Didn’t you draw your sword for injustice, didn’t you let yourself be used for repression and violence? And wasn’t I a God awful fool, when I should have fought and let myself be tied to the mast and sung the song he sang? He was an Indian and a primitive, but a new world shall be built from his heart’s pride and courage when the old one goes down like this ship. Are you afraid to die, brother Juan? Take comfort that there’s a drink more bitter than a little salt water in your mouth.

— I’m not afraid, Juan Gomez said.

— It’s the gold that’s dragging the ship down into the deep, don Pablo said. It’s the bloody gold that’s to blame for all of humanity’s destruction. See how low we’re already lying in the water. In a bit we’ll have to jump out and try to find a piece of wreckage to cling to. But just in case, farewell amigo.
They hugged and kissed each other, and took off their outer garments and shoes. The clouds had scattered and the moon had risen. One saw the struggling crowd around the boats, and the coast of the Isla de Pinos could be glimpsed like a bank of clouds. And the monks’ and priests’ miserere rose steadily toward heaven, at times drowned out by wild screams and accompanied by the roar of the waves, which had come quite close. Doña Inez had sat down in her customary chair under the awning and stared absentmindedly at the eerie scene which was being played out in the ghostly light of the moon. She saw the kneeling and singing clerics and glimpsed don Jesus’s figure, which had collapsed and lay like a shapeless bundle on death’s rack.

She awoke from her thoughts when the oidor sat down next to her.

— Why aren’t you trying to get into one of the boats, don Francisco? she asked, wishing merely that he would go and leave her in peace.

The oidor didn’t answer immediately, but bent down and took the gallon jug doña Inez’s company had drunk from a few hours ago. He shook it, confirmed there was still something in it, and poured it into the glasses.

— For one thing, gracious señora, the overcrowded boats will inevitably capsize, and for another it isn’t easy to decide who ought to live and who ought to die. I’ve never felt edified by religious ceremonies, but at the moment in a strange way I’m filled with great joy. In a little while I’ll be freed of something that has plagued me my entire life. It’s quite simply all over for a lick-spittle, an ambitious jurist, a foolish oidor, whose shame it is that he knew better. I’m gloating a bit over the fact that the beast didn’t succeed in worming his way to governor.

— He was a man, doña Inez said.

— Who? the oidor asked with surprise.

— My Indian. And isn’t it strange, don Francisco, that I never met a man before? I was married, and I had lovers. Not at all so few lovers. You could also easily have been one of them.

— With my ram face.
— No, really, you could have been. But I never met a man before. It’s very strange. He came from a world we consider primitive, and he was my slave. I had a right to kill him, I could do with him what I wanted. But I, who loved power and only it, could not gain power over him. Now that everything’s over with, I know how terrible power is. It killed in me what should have been allowed to live, it killed him, and it killed us all. It destroys everything that is originally genuine in us, everything that should give us joy.

— That’s also my experience, the oidor said. But if I lived on tomorrow, I’d begin where I left off today. It’s this disgust with ourselves that kills us. Perhaps not purely physically, but it hollows us out and makes us into lovers of death. I’m actually sitting with my soul full of hatred and looking forward to the fact that the oidor don Francisco must die. I rejoice at his dread of death, for he has been my worst enemy. If his calf muscles at this moment tremble a tiny bit, it fills me with a joyful thrill. Let him just suffer, for he destroyed my existence. Power created him and ruled over him, and he prevented me from getting joy from my life. To your health, doña Inez. Now look there!

With one hand, which was shaking perceptibly, don Francisco pointed toward the San Salvador’s stern. The one boat had been put into the water, and a wave washed it against the side of the ship. The sides of the boat were smashed, and it rolled over. One saw people struggling in the water and disappear one after the other. The ship was now lying so low that the waves swept over the deck, and the singing and praying clerics fled up onto the quarter-deck.

— One isn’t lacking clerical participation at the burial, the oidor said, and laughed a little. On this occasion both priests and choir singers have to follow along into the grave, which seems to be disagreeable enough. They forgot to take don Jesus along, and now he’s going overboard.

A wave foamed over the deck midships and sucked the unconscious inquisitor out with it. He rocked for a moment on the waves and disappeared. The other boat was now in the water and rowed away from the sinking ship. It was overcrowded with
people and had barely gotten a boat’s length from the ship before a wave filled it, and it sank.

— Miserere, the oidor said gently. And in a few minutes it will be our turn. It’s odd, highly odd. I believe there’s still one more glass of sherry left.

He poured, lifted the glass, and drank to doña Inez.

— You flattered me more than you suspect with your comment that I could easily have been one of your lovers, he said.

— But I don’t think I could have loved you.

— That would also have been asking for too much. But in any case I’m glad for the honor of dying together with you. If the priests would just stop bawling so loudly. Our Lord must surely have heard them. Do you believe in God, doña Inez?

— No, doña Inez replied.

— I don’t either, the oidor said.

— Let’s sit completely quietly, doña Inez said. In a moment it will be all over.

She emptied her glass and closed her eyes. She saw before her her fields where the Indians worked stooped in the scorching sun, she saw their worn-out wives and gaunt children they carried on their backs. And in her gold mine the children didn’t get past a couple of years old, and the wives hadn’t the strength to cry at their small graves, and there was nothing else to do but sentence them to harsher punishment, the over-calpixqui said. And there stood the slave Pancuiaco, tied to the mast, the whip lashes wrapping themselves around his bloody back.

— But I loved him, don Francisco, she said. I loved him.

— Yes, the oidor replied. But whom did I love? Oh, at this moment I don’t remember anything of my life.

The evening of the next day a boat drifted through the breakers on the coast of the Isla de Pinos. Five men rode in its wake. A foolish and worn-out sailor, Alberto, an English merchant, Samuel Rayburn, a middle-aged soldier, Juan Gomez, a clever rogue, Pablo Avarano, and an old man, count Guilemo Castillon, who promised to give two gold candlesticks to the cathedral in Havana as thanks for his salvation.
Set in 1679 on a Spanish treasure ship carrying a huge cargo of gold from the New World colonies to Spain, The Slave embeds a philosophical allegory about power and its impact on its subjects and objects in a plot with "features of a bloody and violent sensational film." This historical novel in the ship-of-fools genre is populated by a full spectrum of social types ranging from senior Spanish colonial administrative, military, and judicial officials, a Catholic inquisitor, aristocratic estate and slave owners, an immensely rich female capitalist, and an English puritan merchant-capitalist to sailors, cannoneers, and black and Indian slaves. Hans Kirk wrote The Slave in 1941-42 while imprisoned by the Danish government at the demand of the Nazi occupying powers. In the aftermath of his escape from a detention camp in 1943, the Germans destroyed the manuscript and all of Kirk's research materials. Starting from scratch, Kirk reconstructed the novel after the war because he was persuaded that its theme—the recurring modern question, faced by Kirk and other political prisoners, of how to respond to tyranny—was still important and topical.

First published in 1948 and still in print in Denmark's most popular and prestigious paperback series of literary classics, The Slave had been translated into eight languages before finally appearing in English. Hans Kirk (1898-1962) also wrote The Fishermen, the best-selling Danish novel of all time, which, like The Slave, was translated by Marc Linder and published by Fanphlu Press. Both works are distributed by Prairie Lights Books: (800) 295-BOOK or info@prairielights.com.

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