

ABELAO



a l e x i s d í a z - p i m i e n t a

To Teresita Fornaris
and Juan Carlos Rodríguez

CHOCOLATE MILKSHAKE

1

The man who was going to be poisoned found a gray hair when he looked in the mirror, his first gray hair and spent almost five minutes stroking it and wondering whether to pluck it out or leave it in his tangled beard. He knew the popular myth that if you pluck a gray hair more come out and he wasn't very happy with the image of a young man with a political life to sprout a salt and peppered beard. The man who was going to be poisoned played with the gray hair, stroked it, stretched it, hid it in the black hairs of the beard and looked at himself from different angles. The mirror also looked back. First with his own piercing eyes; then he looked full into the mirror, indifferent; later he took in the quicksilver, with the frame, with the small light bulbs that bordered the edge. The mirror and the man who was going to be poisoned knew each other very well; perhaps that is why the mirror knew before him, the fate of his first gray hair. It knew even before the curly black hairs that wrapped around it. When the man who was going to be poisoned donned his cap and took two steps back and smiled sure of the decision he had taken, the mirror already knew that the gray hair was the forerunner of others.

2

The glass that was going to be used to poison the man of the recently discovered gray hair was a common glass, transparent and tall, one of those the waiters called a 14 ounce glass. If there was any distinguishing marks these could be the ridges that broke its perfect cylindrical exterior, fine edges to break up the circular reflection of the liquid or to help grasp it. But, after all, this did not make it exclusive. There were, at least, eleven glasses with these same ridges, they were made of the same glass, occupied the same station, the same shelves, the same tables, the same glass holders, the same counter, the same water faucets, the same hands of the same waiter. Consequently, eleven glasses could be protagonists of the poisoning. This created tension in the cafeteria. The man who was going to be poisoned could enter at any moment, any day, and it would be pure chance which glass would be picked. Or no, there wouldn't even be a selection. Chance would decide which glass would receive the lethal potion, which would be the protagonist of this story. Then, this glass could only do what others do who are implicated in the poisoning: wait. If there was something that gave him confidence was thinking that the last two times the man who was going to be poisoned entered the cafeteria, it had been it and no other, the glass Santo had used to serve his favorite drink. Only it would know, and no other, before anyone how the man was going to be poisoned while he savored the perfect mixture of cocoa and milk, how he savored it with excited breath and looking strait ahead, over the top edge of the froth. It had been the one to discover the first gray hair in the beard of the man who was going to be poisoned, and no other. It had been it and no other. So this time, the next time, the final time, it had to be it.

3

The place the chocolate milk shake lover, who was going to be poisoned, was the cafeteria of a Havana hotel, but not one of the little hotels of the many that lit the mythical nights of Havana during the fifties, nor the old stately colonial hotels, but a modern hotel, an impressive skyscraper inaugurated by Batista towards the end of nineteen fifty eight, the last purchase of the Hilton chain, this time in the very heart of Havana, that, it should not be forgotten, was the heart of everything. The hotel where the man with the

recently discovered gray hair was going to be poisoned, had changed the traditional view of Havana, with its mere presence of concrete and great windows. Its height and grandeur had for ever shadowed those around: the trees looked small and the walls of what had once been the Reina Mercedes hospital that became the Cabaret Nocturnal and then the famed Coppelia; the small apartment buildings; the small Radiocentro; minute buses that went up and down 23rd street along L street; the taxis look ridiculous and the people walking along La Rampa, like ants; thousands of two legged ants listening to a portable radio, of any size, the men to follow the National Ballgame Series, the women to listen to the last hit of Tito Gómez with the Riverside or Meme Solís, others with nothing more important to do than look up at the building and count its floors, drinking Hatuey or Coca-Cola or, why not, savoring a chocolate milk shake prepared by Santos, perhaps the same glass used by the man who was going to be poisoned, the perfect mixture of Brazilian cocoa and bottled milk.

4

The milk that was to be used in the poisoned milk shake had arrived at the cafeteria of the hotel that very morning in a refrigerated bulk liquid container and had been stored in a refrigerated tank. It's surprising to see how customs change and how the relations of man with his basic products are conditioned. In Havana, during the first decade of the XX century, for example, cows still wandered with their bells clanging and mooing in the morning along the main streets of the city, leaving their droppings in the kerosene smelling puddles and old rain, their hoof prints left in the mud and tar, in the midst of the rails of the streetcars and heels of the pedestrians. But more than the fly festered cow dung the people from Havana knew that the early mooing and clanging bell announced the arrival of the milk. Then, with the thirsty punctuality of the family man, everyone opened their doors and windows, gates and railings to place their canteens under the cow udder enjoying that sound of the white liquid on metal, the beautiful froth overflowing. But of course during the next decade Havana changed very much and very fast, the city spread out everywhere (especially up) uncontrollably. By the early fifties very few streetcars crossed the city, the tar in the streets had hardened and paving appeared in the great avenues. By then the cows no longer mooed

at the doors of the homes, nor did the carts carrying sugar cane cross the heart of the great city offering sugar cane juice in every corner; by that time the National Capital, the Civic Plaza and the Havana Hilton had been completed; this was another Havana, a city populated by gangsters and pimps, whores and soldiers, tourists from the US and Black boxers, of day laborers with their sharpened *guámparas* and dented canteen, and gambling and sugar magnates, remnants of the colonial sugarocracy that is now Yankee, with Vedado mansions and children studying in the high schools, naïve contenders to enroll in the Ruston Academy; yes, Havana was another, a city marked by electoral wars and political chicanery, a city where the cows became symbols of prosperity or misfortune. Cartoons of skinny famished cows appeared among sensational headlines, cows who gave no milk cows that had dried up, they seemed taken straight from Mauthausen. The inhabitants of Havana had to adapt to the silence of six in the morning in their narrow streets. No mooing, no clanging of bells, and certainly no cow dung in the paths, or broken up sidewalks; certainly not the stream of milk hitting the bottom of the family canteen. Now milk came bottled. This was progress. No one saw the full cow udder being emptied. Now the children open their eyes and already the milkman had full bottles of milk on the counters. The cows no longer existed. Milk was a separate and independent product. It didn't matter if it was for a newborn baby, for an ill person's diet, for clients of a luxury hotel. Milk arrived at the hotels in large refrigerated canteens. From there it was served at breakfast, with coffee, or with cocoa; or alone as a refreshing drink; or in milk shakes, with different flavors, of tropical fruits, of strawberry, of vanilla, of ice cream, of chocolate . . . , this latter was, undoubtedly the star flavor, preferred by children and adults, men and women, tourists and natives, poor and rich, white and Blacks, politicians and pedestrians; the milk and chocolate was set free from the cow and the cocoa plantations; milk and chocolate were mixed restfully, fusing to perfection, a cross of texture and flavor and aroma, an incomparable treat. Santos knew it. And the man who was going to be poisoned also knew it. The Central Intelligence Agency knew it. And Polita Grua. And Mongo Grau. And Manolo Campanioni. And each and every twelve fourteen ounce and imperceptibly ribbed glasses. Only the ice cubes didn't know because the ice became part of the fateful milk shake that night in March of sixty three, and it was still not ice, but water, only water (and water does not think as we all know).

Chocolate that was going to be used to kill the man with the recently discovered gray hair was one of the few products that continued to arrive by sea to the Havana port. Behind was the time of great fleets from northern ports, when thousands of Havana inhabitants rested on the seawall, Malecon, to watch them dock and children ran after the sailors – innocent reminder of a Havana besieged by corsairs and Dutch and English pirates – polychrome Greek, Spanish or US sailors who, once disembarking, went to the whore barrio, to change the bitter flavor of herring and *aguardiente* for the cheap carmine colored liquor and lascivious perspiration, leaving on the skin of the Cuban girls their remains of anger and lust, all the months of onanism. They were robust men, brothel flesh, men who knew nothing of politics or revolutions. They never understood because, all of a sudden, they were forbidden to walk the streets of Havana, of betting in its casinos and venting their anger in the brothels. They didn't understand who these *barbudos* were, who frightened the bosses of the large shipping companies and even more; who were the gringos to decide that the Veracruz port yes, the Maracaibo port yes, the Cartagena de Indias yes, as in colonial times, but it was completely forbidden to set sail past the Havana Morro, forbidden, very forbidden, don't even think about it, leaving many of them with their ripe tongues and tense groins, including those sailor who couldn't say good-bye to their latest native acquisition. Nothing, that's it. Forbidden to unload their merchandize in this port, forbidden to disembark. Zero mulattas, zero rumba, zero Habanos, zero everything because Havana is going through a bearded epidemic that is more dangerous than cholera, than European plagues, an epidemic that not only affects persons, but buildings also, companies, industries, radio and television stations, never seen before, the worse epidemic that has struck humanity affecting human beings, but not this one, this one affects walls, papers, windows, rolls of money, stamps, electric cables, means of transportation, everything is contaminated, contracts die out, working days die out, rents are dead, laws are dead, total chaos, a catastrophe and explained, as clear as that, the sailors are calmed down, they accept reluctantly, they like a good time very much, yes, but not to such an extent, they are sailors not martyrs, so Havana is in quarantine so we'd best continue to jerk off, play poker, dominoes, dice among ourselves, on deck or in the bunks,

we'll get to safer ports,
yes, yes, this will pass
if the Americans have gotten involved, with the advances of medicine in the
past years no epidemic will last forever; the sailors delight in their memories
of previous years,

ah, the summer of fifty six,
ah, the spring of fifty seven
its true that there were rumblings already of this epidemic of the barbudos in
Oriente, yes, but it hasn't reached the whorehouses of China Town nor the
casinos of the Habana Riviera nor, also those of the Habana Hilton, and if
they did get there they blended in very well, there was a firm and claiming
argument,

tropical climates are prone to all kinds of epidemics ... there is
no need to worry.

But of course, five years have passed since that Christmas of fifty eight
where the epidemic of the barbudos spread to all the island and three years
since the gringos declared complete quarantine, absolute isolation of the
infirm island. They have been five long years, five years without drinking
Hatuey or Arechabala, not smoking Partagás or H. Upman. It's too much.
For an English sailor used to impregnable beaches in other places, it's too
much. For a Greek sailor, descendants of Ulysses it's too much. For the
great grandchildren of Vasco de Gama, it's too much. Even for a Brazilian
sailor although their country has exuberant beaches, luscious women, candles
for Ochun, sensual dances, it's also too much. That's why there was almost
a mutiny aboard the *O Samba* and although it may not have been in fact, at
least in spirit it was, mostly in the holds, a great ruckus of dissatisfied sailors
led by someone called Sebastiao de Oliveira, a huge Black, strong, who did
not accept that this was the last shipload of chocolate from pier four to be
unloaded at Havana because the *O Samba*, according to the captain would
never dock again in any Cuban port until the epidemic is over. Sebastiao de
Oliveira was very upset, he was grabbing the pike and screaming that he
was going to bed an indescribable woman from Guanabacoa, arguing that
chocolate was rich in caffeine, phosphorus, magnesium, iron, potassium,
calcium, vitamin E, thiamine, theobromine and tannin, that its consumption
would be efficient to get rid of the epidemic. Poor Sebastiao de Oliveira,
who also stuttered and in spite of his size, was pitied and laughed at nipping

the mutiny in the bud. But, of course, he was right although he never knew it. Without knowing it Sebastiao forecast the use of chocolate in the plot to kill the man who was going to be poisoned. We still don't know how the thoughts of Sebastiao fell on the ears of Polita Grau, on the minds of the Mafiosi John Roselli and the CIA agents William Harvey and Robert Maheu, perhaps it was a simple historic coincidence but what is true is that the CIA, the Mafia and the members of Brothers thought the same as the angry Brazilian sailor: that chocolate could end the epidemic. Among them, through telephone calls and invisible messages in the style of James Bond, they hid the poison inside the properties of caffeine and tannins because of their capacity to mask the other flavors in any mixture. In a chocolate milk shake, for example, it would be difficult to discover, mostly if the milligrams needed were mixed and beaten by the elegant hands of Santos de la Caridad, the efficient Santito, one of the best waiters of the cafeteria of the former Habana Hilton. It was clear, decided: it was perfect. Chocolate was the solution against that epidemic of the *barbudos*.

6

The poison that was going to be used to kill the man with the recently discovered gray hair was not like any other. The CIA did not want anything like criminal literature, nothing ridiculously irrational. When Johnny Roselli and Robert Matheu met in the Brown Derby restaurant in Beverly Hills, they still didn't know what the poison would be like. Neither knew Santito nor his flare for making milk shakes; neither thought that Polita Grau could be the *in situ* boss in that carefully planned operation. Only after the meal in the Brown Derby, Johnny Roselli, with the alias of John Rawiston contacted some people in Miami and presented himself as a Wall Street business man interested in Cuban nickel. This John Rawiston speaking in a clear low voice sounding his c's and z's clearly, said

the job had to be well done and cleanly.

At the beginning the CIA was in favor of an assassination in the Roselli style for the pleasure of seeing the man who was going to be poisoned, be shot down in the midst of his people, before the cameras to later broadcast that he had been shot by his own people, tired of this communist epidemic. Of course, Rawiston-Roselli, specialist hit man, disagreed,

that it would be difficult to recruit someone for such a dangerous operation.

Rawiston–Roselli preferred a poison that leaves no traces, as suggested by his direct boss, Salvatore Giancana. Then, gradually the idea of poison took force. In the CIA laboratories, real artists in the work with toxic substances, thought, proposed... Some poisons were rejected because they were not soluble in water; others, like cyanide, because its effect was in minutes and, consequently, the Fourth Type was easily discovered... also (Scheider thought)

it could be like Rasputin where Yusupov put it in a sweet wine and the carbon of the cyanide combined with the wine's sugar neutralizing the effect.

Arsenic wasn't a good choice either because in spite of its aspect (a white and insipid powder, odorless, looking like sugar or flour), no, its symptoms were too well known. They had to continue to think. Then one windy winter afternoon, just right for a warm winter coat, Scheider appeared with the ideal, final proposal, the magic capsules. He got comfortable in the armchair, fixed his collar, spoke of the *botulinum* or botulism toxin, the only toxin that fulfilled all expectations when tested in monkeys. The words spoken by Scheider sounded like heavenly music to everyone, hesitant to interrupt him. Scheider tried to be really clear, with little technicalities,

explained that the botulin is a botulism toxin,
the disease caused by canned meats.

He spoke without gestures, barely moving his lips,

adding that it was used in spastic
paralysis in small space timed doses,
while the others looked at him like schoolboys and Scheider made only one movement: his pupils moving from one to another, while he explained
its usefulness in medicine, but lethal, devastating
with only 0,02 milligrams.

His listeners knew nothing of milligrams but the adjectives, "lethal" and "devastating" certainly did. Bingo! Great euphoria of the threesome. Now Santos Trafficante and Tony Varona joined the group forming a happy pentagon, five minds and bodies and glasses of whisky, five men with only one voice and one thought.

*It is perfect.... You are the best
Mr. Scheider.*

Months later, while in Miami Beach they were all together for the Floyd Patterson–Ingemar Johansson fight for the heavyweight crown, while boxing fans shouted with glee or horror, according to their favorite, a short distance from the ring another meeting was underway with the threesome Maheu–Roselli–Giancana. This time in a suite of the Fontainebleau Hotel. It was still a scalene triangle: Salvatore Giancana was the sharp hypotenuse, the powerful boss, the one who made decisions even if these came from the Agency, represented by Robert Maheu. Comfortably seated, oblivious to the counts of protection on Patterson – they were beginning their own count down, the final one, for the man who was going to be poisoned – Johnny Roselli spoke with discretion and professionalism, Robert Maheu repeated his favorite phrase,

now or never

and Salvatore Giancana kept his eyes on the door, in silence. The suite had red rugs, tasseled lamps, huge windows, large mirrors reflecting the triangle from different angles. They were happy, sitting in a triangular order, drinking whisky and weighing all the possibilities. Suddenly the door opened to let in the one they were expecting, Santos Trafficante with a mysterious gray haired man and dark glasses hiding his eyes. Seeing them, the three knew at once, it was finally the one. In other words, the First Guy, the point of the plot that would lead them to the Guy of Truth, the waiter of the Habana Libre Hotel cafeteria. The Maheu–Roselli–Giancana threesome welcomed the First Guy with hand shakes who responded to all returning the welcome saying

I am Tony Varona,

losing his alias and was identified with his name,

I am Tony Varona.

He settled into an Elizabethan armchair, crossing his legs and lighting up an Habano. He had the air and harshness of when he had financial interests in Cuba, during the Prío presidency, becoming one of the rivals of Meyer Lansky in Havana and Florida. All were lounging comfortably but tense, the scalene triangle looking at the First Guy, Santos Trafficante moderately demonstrating his rank in Florida and the First Guy waiting to hear the details of the mysterious Operation Poison. At once, Maheu opened a black briefcase that was on the table and without uttering a word, placed ten thousand dollars on the knees of Tony Varona,

it is just an advance
he said, while Tony Varona seemed to smell rather than see wad of bills. It was a conditioned reflex developed in the Havana casinos. While the other gamblers and croupiers handled the money, weighed it or looked at it longingly, he smelled it and calculated the amount of dollars. Cuban pesos didn't smell the same, or Francs, or Pounds Sterling. Now Tony Varona spread his nostrils, half closed his eyes with pleasure and repeated to himself,
the advance is all right.

Then Maheu interrupted his smelling inspection, took his hand, keeping it open, palms up, and placed three small capsules in the center, capsules that looked innocent enough, more like a medicine. This time Tony Varona didn't smell them; instead he looked at them, weighed them in his hand, and touched them. The Maheu–Roselli–Giancana triangle then began to explain simply and calmly, with professionalism, of what the Operation consisted, except the participation of Polita Grau, Manolo Campanioni and Santos de la Caridad, Santito, who would be the Second, Third and Fourth Parts of the puzzle, respectively. They couldn't explain this because they still didn't know it. It would be The First Guy, Tony Varona, who would pick the following ones. It was all clear, detailed, because Tony Varona would have to explain it further up.

Don't worry,
this leaves no clues,
the symptoms appear after
six hours and can take up to six days,
Maheu explained getting comfortable in his chair and taking a sip of Kardhu.

The sooner the
symptoms appear, the surer the death,
Roselli explained without taking his eyes off Maheu, looking for support. Tony Varona asked nothing, just listened.

The man would continue his normal life,
give his speeches, have no fever but,
suddenly his mouth would be dry, he would see double,
would not be able to see up front, have trouble swallowing, and would
not be able to mutter a
word

and now they couldn't hold back their snickers imagining the man who was going to be poisoned in silence, trying to deliver a speech with sign language. Santos Trafficante asked two or three questions, keeping his distance as if sensing the doubts of Tony Varona in his altar of Great Capo. Roselli answered all, sometimes in the voice of Roselli and others with the voice and gestures of Rawiston, always with a smirk on his lips, as if the plan were funny or imagining how happy his bosses back in the Agency would be once they heard how all was going. Now, with a common pause, the five lifted their hands and drank, five mouths savoring the refreshing Kardhu. The first to break the silence was Maheu;

they had to get them into Cuba as soon as possible,
but Tony Varona was thinking of something else, curiosity of a capo,
I suppose.

Where did they come from?

It was now Rawiston who jumped to answer, silencing Roselli, expertly,
what does it matter,
but Maheu was more diplomatic, he was an operations expert for the Agency;

they were prepared by Dr. Scheider,
our best chemist,

speaking in a persuasive tone, he knew it wasn't enough just to convince the First Guy explaining that the poison took several days to have its effect, that it had no symptoms and left no clues; he knew that this First Guy had to convince many people and that the main feature of success was in the anonymity and surprise but also to insure that the perpetrator would get out unharmed. He didn't go into details, he didn't explain that the botulin was derived from a bacteria called Ricin extracted from the Castor Bean; he didn't speak of spores, nor of vegetable cell nor of toxins; no he wasn't Scheider nor was Tony Varona, Santito, so he simply explained that botulin was soluble in any liquid and left no clues, it had no taste or strange smell. There was a pause and, suddenly, they all began to laugh and began disorderly comments, as if everything was ready, as if they could see the man who was going to be poisoned drinking his milk shake, suffering muscular contractions, progressive paralyses, going mute, pupils that did not react to the light, drooping eyelids, inert thorax, falling down. The five were talking at the same time. They all had more or less important reasons to kill the man

who was going to be poisoned. Maheu, even, quoted wise words expressed by Kissinger, saying

why do we have
to stand apart watching
how the country became communist
as a result of the irresponsibility of its own people

and all that was missing was a clapping of hands; in a short time they would be part of the History of America; they, the five, would be received in the Oval Office and would dine in Camp David, without ignoring the great business deals that would open up in Havana. Yes, all right, Okay, making victory signs with their fingers. They served another round of Kardhu and toasted for a Free Cuba, a toast that where only the glasses of Polita and Santito were missing; she's now meeting with her comrades of Rescate¹, he's setting up the Osterizer for milk shakes, adding ice, sugar, chocolate.

7

A chocolate milk shake is just simply a refreshing drink, pleasant tasting, harmless; no one could suspect that it would be used for an assassination, not even the man who was going to be poisoned, experienced in these kinds of things, used to distrust and protect himself against the fierce will of the enemy. Not even his Orishas², although everyone was sure that he was protected, that he was the legitimate son of Chango³, the warrior orisha. Not even his personal guard, watchful men with many hands, many legs and many ears. No one. The March night of sixty three when the man who was going to be poisoned arrived in the Havana Libre, thirsty, with his disheveled beard, cap tilted back, and the chocolate milk shake was ready to be mixed with the botulin with no one suspecting anything. It was the time when the man who was going to be poisoned ate anywhere when he was hunger, without any precautions. He even had a suite on the 21st floor in the Habana Libre to catch a few hours sleep. The enemy knew this. Also, the

¹ Rescate= Brothers to the Rescue, a counterrevolutionary organization based in Florida.

² Orishas = spirits of African religions

³ Chango = a warrior orisha represented as St. Barbara in the Catholic religion.

inexperience of his Security service was commented in the halls of Langley and the White House.

It isn't so difficult,
the CIA representative repeated in the hall of Polita Grau's house,
although his movements
are random, this very haphazardness
is in our favor,

Polita insisted, in the cottage terrace of Mongo Grau,
the fish dies by the mouth,
Campanioni said sententiously while leaning on the bar of El Recodo, where he liked to go to drink a Rum Collins with Santito, Bartolomé and Saciero, to talk of «business and politics». In that same bar of El Recodo, a week before the poisoning, Santito and Campanioni were on the point of changing the plans, desperate because the man who was going to be poisoned was not showing up in the hotel; that is when they talked of killing the brother of the man who was going to be poisoned, or Che, or Efigenio Ameijeiras who went to El Recodo frequently. When they told Polita of the change, she mentioned it to Capdevilla and Capdevilla informed Tony Varona by phone and Tony Varona told Roselli and Roselli discussed it with William Harvey and Maheu and the latter approved the change informing Polita in a coded message to the CIA station in Havana and then Polita told Campanioni again and he told Santos again, who was going to do it.

So, when the man who was going to be poisoned entered the cafeteria that night in March of sixty three, the conspirators were prepared to abort the plan, or change it for the assassination of some others. So that some one – especially the man who was going to be poisoned – should stop and think of the dangerousness of the chocolate. Three years had passed since the campaign of Parental Rights, but the echoes of Radio Swan were still not turned off, harangues by Pancho Gutierrez continued trying to convince mothers to send their children to the United States to save them from the savage communism. Every night Pancho Gutierrez took the mikes of Radio Swan where he harangued the listeners in the name of God, the Family and Democracy, and you could imagine the thick veins in his neck and the perspired forehead. At eight thirty at night thousands of Cubans were glued to their Zenith, like it was when Chibas struck out; like when detective Chang Li Po discovered crimes in spite of changing his r-s for l-s; like when the

soap opera *The Right to be Born* kept every one keyed up, some mothers cried, others doubted others were furious with impotence ...

Cuban mother, listen to this!

The next government law to be passed
is to take children from the age of five
to eighteen from their parents and when they are returned
they will be monsters of materialism ... Cuban mothers,
don't let them take your child!

He sounded disturbed with a deep hollowed voice,

Cuban mother; the government will take
your child away to indoctrinate him with communism!

Putting emphasis on the word «indoctrinate» and «communist» stressing the Russian phobia in the Island. From the early years of the sixties there were rumors that in Russia, the womb of pregnant women were bayoneted and the children taken away to indoctrinate them; that in a Havana bay port there was a Soviet boat ready to take the children to Moscow from where they will returned in tins of meat; about fifty mothers from Bayamo had signed a pact to kill the children before handing them over to Castro; rumors of instructions were spread, rumors by the monster Bryan O. Walsh and Polita Grau Alsina, yes that great Polita who all of a sudden became a mother of the homeland, a matron concerned over the millions of innocents who would be killed for tinned meat to fatten the barbudos, the same Polita that years later would take, hide and distribute Scheider's capsules, Polita Grau giving instructions over the telephone to Pancho Gutierrez to prevent «the Russian tragedy» at all costs, to broadcast...

you, Cuban mother, can have your
clothing and food taken away and even be killed but your right
to raise your own child cannot be taken away by anyone, remember
that the most dangerous beast is the mother who protects her cub!

The night they were going to poison the man with the recently discovered gray hair, three years of these events had passed, its true, but it was still mentioned in broadcasts in all spaces and at all times, in whispers, in loud voices and the name of Polita Grau kept coming back to mind. Polita's house was used to issue the visa *wavers* for thousands of children who left by sea and air to the North; the house of Polita was used to study the orders that arrived from Tony Varona, doubts of Maheu and Roselli were answered,

everything. 1963 had been named the “Year of Organization” but, there was great confusion in Havana. The city was the center of calls to the sugar cane harvest with songs by Bob Dylan, revolutionary slogans with the sweet ballads of Clara and Mario, the backfires of the militia in the new Volgas, the explosion of petards in some stores, with the last processions of Holy Week. And the man who was going to be poisoned was always everywhere, in the center of everything, on the side, on top, below, the ever-present, loquacious and elusive man. Something strange was happening in 1963: it was as if everyone was young, or as if there were more young persons than ever in Havana than anywhere else. Wherever you looked there were adolescents or post-adolescents going about anxious to do something; the boys showing off their smooth looking getup – *guapitas* – with tight belts and wide trouser cuffs; the women with bows at the neckline with long necklaces, crossed breasted jackets and skirts that went below the knees; all young, younger than ever, with short hair and sailor blouses with hair died and varicose veins hidden and bright red lipstick; females with a jaunty gait and busts emphasized by opened shirts. Ah, fashions. The women of the capital were prepared to fight, to cut cane, to pray but always in style. They went to church or to the fields; they walked in the middle of the street, but always in style. Because in sixty three everything was new, different, progressive. They all forgot something, or someone, to be in Havana, near the *barbudos* and the hustle and bustle of the city. That year, for example, the cosmonaut, Pavel Popovich forgot the cosmos and shared the salt and heavy Havana air with Ann Lisa Tiesko, who forgot for a couple of days, the unions of Finland and shared posters and slogans with the anti-Franco Marcos Ana, who forgot, for several days, his struggles in Catalonia and Madrid to see the *barbudos* close up who were putting order to what was, by definition, disorder in itself. And among one and another, mostly the men, the voice of Benny Moré floated in the air who, in February, forgot how much he was needed in the world and was dying (the spoiled genius) leaving the bars and nightclubs in Havana flooded in tears and silence. And between the coffin of Benny and the cafeteria of the Habana Libre hotel where the poisoning would be carried out, noisy ANCHAR taxis drove by with their windshields covered with revolutionary stickers and stamps of the Virgin de la Caridad and the merchant boats that could not dock in Havana, while Polita Grau and Santos de la Caridad continued to wait, anxious, for

the man who was going to be poisoned. But nothing doing. The ever-present, loquacious and elusive man was not showing up at the cafeteria of the Habana Libre. Everything was ready. The chocolate, the milk, the ice, the capsule, the hands of Santito but the man who was going to be poisoned only appeared on television, he was electrifying, delivered long speeches, waved his hands, and signed laws. Santito was despairing, whispering to himself from the great windows of the hotel that looked out toward Radiocentro,

but you're right there,
come to have some refreshment,
you must be thirsty

you've been talking for many hours,

now Santito moves away and looks at the TV and sees the man who was going to be poisoned, sweating, moving his hands, moving about in his seat. Santito thinks

of the chocolate milk shake, cold and frothy... come on man,
we're waiting for you,

but no way: not today either. The man who was going to be poisoned drinks water in front of the cameras, says good bye and, before leaving the building, behind the studio curtains he reads some international cables.

*Adlai Stevenson announces another
aggressive campaign against Cuba...*

*France announces the explosion of its first
hydrogen bomb in the Mangareva Islands, south
of Tahiti...*

In Germany the Berlin Wall is sabotaged...

he reads it all, devours it all, as if the enemy does not exist.

8

The hotel where the man who loved chocolate milk shakes was going to be poisoned had a short history in spite of its pompous inauguration in fifty eight. In a little less than a year, it had changed owners, and even worse still, had changed the name ...

but free from what

Polita complained who couldn't understand how that young man, who her uncle, Ramón Grau, the former president of the country, had known during

the forties when he was merely a struggling lawyer of the Ortodoxo party, dared to play with politics. The nephew and niece of the old Grau, Mongo and Polita were disturbed by this. And very much together. Because of the «*grand barbudo*» Mongo Grau was no longer an important man, a fact that was surely upsetting; but the case of Polita was more serious. Polita had returned to the United States when Batista fell, enjoying the possibilities that opened up for her uncle (and, of course, for her) but, all of a sudden, she realized her mistake, all possessions were confiscated, years and years of work in the National Lottery gone to the winds,

how crazy, my God,

I'll no longer be able to stroll as the First Lady of the Republic, no longer the grand ostentatious lady with power, capable of taking care of her uncle's bachelorhood, the single Dr. Grau, she was a powerful woman, the *barbudos* had also gone against her and

that was intolerable.

It could be said that Mongo and Polita thought as one, remembering old times and they were decided to regain them. Thanks to her, "the old man", as the former president Grau was called by the people, had built highways, barrios, hospitals and had made the public accounts profitable, accounts of a country plundered by several sharks. Except him, of course: during his government she had been the only shark, his Polita. Doctor Grau was a decent physician, a veteran of the revolution against Machado, a man in the midst of bad company and poorly advised when he was president, betrayed by Prío Socarrás and by Chibás and by Batista and by the minister, Sánchez Arango and by the man who was going to be poisoned according to Polita's plans, the ever efficient Polita, always on the ball, strange and old fighter for democracy, a huge woman with specific weight and balls well placed although the masses thought of her as a big wheel like the shark who promoted what the people called the "bidé de Paulina"⁴, that large fountain in front of the Sports Center as you drive along Boyeros. But, well, after all, what do the masses know, what do so many illiterates and followers of soapies know: nothing. Polita is too much woman for a country such as this. She can take it all, knows about all, water fountains and public funds, of the National Lottery, of the real estate of lands, of false revolutions and of orders given by the Church Commission, of chalets in Miramar and luxury hotels in

⁴ The bidé de Paulina is a fountain that was popularly known as bidet of Paulina

Vedado. That is why, now, Polita doesn't understand why the Habana Hilton has been orphaned,

like taking the surname from a man,
she complained during nervous walks around Mongo,

free from what, my God
and she tried to imagine the great Habana Hilton bound feet and hands,
behind huge bars, a captive hotel that the *barbudos* wanted to liberate and
give it a new owner,

ridiculous,
Polita and Mongo Grau were clear about that : the man who was going to
be poisoned had gone crazy or took too seriously his role as a historical
messiah. They often rode up and down along 23rd Street just for a sight of
the big hotel and think, nostalgically, about the days they had spent there
with their friends drinking brandy, beer, smoking Habanos and playing poker.
Polita most of all. Almost every day she told her chauffeur that she was in
no rush, and they headed to 23rd Street avoiding the noisy busses, the 64,
the 10, the 22, the 32 or the 9, driving slowly along. She didn't look out at
the scenery, or at the pedestrians, or the surroundings. Polita only had eyes
for that hunk of a hotel, for its bright sign, adulterated, with a new surname
and she repeated to herself, ad nauseam,

free from what, my God.

The drive was, to say the least a curious drive. Since she crossed the 5th
Avenue tunnel and went up Zapata to the Avenida de los Presidentes ("her
Avenue"), Polita began to ooze adrenalin, her hands perspired until she
crossed 23, turned off a bit further up and took to the main artery, La Rampa,
always with a perfumed hankie in her hands and the dark glasses hiding her
eyes,

please slower,
she would tell her driver, and looked up at the floors of the hotel and yearned
for the terrace in which she and Mongo and the unconditional followers had
spent such good times. That drive was like therapy, later she had new
strength to work on her historical mission: overthrow the man with the re-
cently discovered gray hair. Not Mongo. Mongo also wanted to over-
throw the man who was going to be poisoned but he was not given to the
nostalgic drive along La Rampa. Mongo liked to go on foot, walk around
the hotel, unnoticed among the people,

political perspicacity (Polita would say)
professional deformity (Mongo himself said)

wanting to take a stroll (his friends said simply)

but the truth of it was that Mongo Grau, at midday and two or three times a week had a “medianoche”⁵ and an Hatuey, in the Carmelo of 23 and walked down La Rampa watching the people. He couldn’t understand how a country could get so crazy. The so-called Revolutionary Government was picking couples living together and marrying them; it was sending the children (alone!) to the countryside; was filling Havana with *guajiros*⁶, what a crazy thing, even the Habana Hilton was filling up with *guajiros*. This was really too much, pure show, demagoguery, political schizophrenia of the man who was going to be poisoned. Mongo Grau adjusted his glasses and whistled softly, as if lost in thought but his thoughts were far off, flying high. He knew that his sister, Polita, was involved in something big, that she had contacted with the Americans and had met in the Spanish Embassy with some people prepared to fight. His stroll was always the same. He left the Carmelo of 23 and went towards the Malecón⁷, turned right on M toward 25 and went up turning along L towards Radiocentro and later went up 23 that had become the heart of this passionate youth. He would go the same route two, three times, looking at the hotel from different angles, the entrance, the side, the warehouses... A few times he went in, sat at the cafeteria to read *Revolución*, *Hoy* or *Bohemia*, a press filled with ominous paragraphs because they began to speak of Havana life in the past, to conjugate verbs with a suspicious accent, as if everything was irreversible. Nonetheless he read the dailies; he felt a pressing need to be informed of the changes. Most times he would leave Carmelo and walk, whistling, carrying a paper or magazine under his arm to read them later. Looking out from the terrace of the hotel, or even from the cafeteria, Mongo Grau was hard to identify. Another passer-by. That is why Santos de la Caridad, while he carefully put away the capsule of botulin Polita had given him, although he would look out the large glass pane windows once in a while and he couldn’t

⁵ A medianoche is a thick sandwich made with sweet bread coated with tomato sauce and mayonnaise and slices of ham, pork, cheese, and dill pickle.

⁶ *guajiro*, the popular name given to the people who till the land.

⁷ Malecón, seawall boulevard.

imagine that the elegant and slow man who circled the hotel so many times was Mongo. Also, for a man like Santito it was unthinkable that the nephew of a man who had been president and he, a simple waiter of the old Habana Hilton – it was difficult for Santito, Bartolomé and Saceiro to say they were workers of the Habana Libre; they referred to themselves as “workers of the former Habana Hilton”. – could be involved in the same plan that, at the same time and a few feet from one another, were asking, ...

when the hell will the man who was going to be poisoned
come to the hotel?

A man like Santito only wanted to shake the milk and cocoa well and perfectly mask the presence of botulin, to win some points in the eyes of the previous owners of the hotel so that when they got back they would give him a promotion, improve their salary or make him, for example, the captain of some restaurant.

But, of course, Santito knew that Bartolomé García and José Saceiro, the captains of the two hotel restaurants also had botulin capsules and were waiting their opportunity. Polita had repeated tirelessly that

the Man eats and drinks
anywhere, where he finds himself
when he is hungry. The only thing to do was to wait
and be ready.

Each knew what he had to do and was convinced that it was easy. But Santito had a slight advantage: the man who was going to be poisoned was very fond of his milk shakes. Polita was clear, she said it clearly when she left the embassy she made the historical remark and using the tone of her enemies:

Comrades, the die is cast.

Now all that is left is to wait and not to worry: that was the strategy. The capsules had been put in a safe place and at hand when the man would appear. Santito felt that it would be him, something told him, it was a unique opportunity and this time he would not let it go. The day of the inauguration of the Habana Hilton, Batista had greeted all the workers when he had just gone to the warehouse. And twice, the very same Meyer Lansky and Santos Trafficante had been in the Casino and the Salón Caribe, but it was not his shift. Bad luck because with these “US businessmen” one never knows. Santito knew many who ended up working for them and were lined with

dollars. Well, this would be his chance. No one better than him to do the job. Bartolomé and Saceiro said nothing but surely prayed that the man who was going to be poisoned would come hungry and not thirsty, when the day came. But, no way, they weren't smart or they were afraid, they had hidden the capsule too much. Santito knew that since this,

in an operation like this (this had been the exact phrase
Polita used),

the most important was the swiftness and calmness and for that it was best to have the capsule within reach. But of course, he wasn't going to go about with it in his pocket, he was not going to put it on the bar, would not use a ring with a symbol embossed like in the Third Reich like the crimes against the Popes or the Caesars. No. In this case his strategy would be better. The capsule would always be in place, near the chocolate, the milk, the ice like another ingredient of a fresh drink. His capsule would be under the cafeteria freezer, well conserved and within reach without causing suspicion. When the day came he only had to take it, one only and logical motion: open the freezer and take it out at once, the ice, the milk, chocolate and the capsule. Perfect. This time it would be him. There was no doubt. Also, he knew that he, Santito, was liked by the man who was going to be poisoned. He rarely drank his milk shake without making some comment. Or he thanked him. Once he even gave him his hand. In other words, the man who was going to be poisoned, at least once, had shaken his hand, and when the time came he would take the capsule and mix it in with the ingredients and he would serve the milk shake.

9

When the man who was going to be poisoned took the glass of milk shake in his hands, at the very moment that he felt the chilled glass, the neighbors of the buildings in front of the hotel, on L street (all except the little boy in the second floor that had gone to the bathroom) were watching *San Nicolas del Peladero*⁸, laughing at the dialogue between Agamenón and the Mayor's

⁸ A very popular TV comedy about the wheeling and dealing of pre-revolutionary government politicians

wife and those living in the building on 23 and M, watching the same program except for three apartments: on 3 B where an old man was alone, a widower who was listening to Daniel Santos on the radio, in 2A where the couple were preparing *conгри*⁹ for supper, in 1C three couples were drinking rum and loudly arguing about their TV favorites, drunk, instead of watching San Nicolás del Peladero, praised Enrique Santiesteban and compared the program with *El Show del Mediodía* or poked fun at *Casos y Cosas de Casa* or told Enrique Arredondo jokes, some with a learned air, others gossiping about show biz as if living near Radiocentro gave them the right to speak of their favorite artists; they knew Germán Pnielli, Rosita Fornés and Armando Bianchi, they felt like co-protagonists of each and every anecdote. In sixty three, everyone felt like a co-protagonist of something in Cuba, more so because they were televised. Before, only artists appeared on the air but now, thousands of Cubans appeared every time there was a demonstration, like a huge film super production. Let us not forget that Havana was the first capital in America to enjoy television, even before Washington and this transmission “precocity” and collective protagonists had given rise to television fever. That is why, among other things, the man who was going to be poisoned had transformed that small screen into a platform of political struggle, with long speeches, with the signing of laws, live, with direct trials... But television in sixty three was not in color nor did it use so many cameras, nor did it have simultaneity via satellite. That is why every one remembers the poisoning in black and white, and what is worse, in a straight line, as if those minutes had only been followed by events, not others, and exactly so, not any other way. Mistaken interpretation, of course.

When the man who was going to be poisoned took the glass of chocolate milk shake and brought it to his lips, smiling at Santos as he had done so often, the world didn't stop; none of the others took notice of that harmless gesture. The Havana taxis continued going up and down along 23rd and L Streets, in their Chevrolets, their Plymouths, their Fords, without noting the nervousness of Santito; in the University bus stop that used to be a streetcar stop, the passengers were restless over the delays of the buses without suspecting what was going on at the same time; those on the 64, 9, 32

⁹ This is a typical food made rice and black beans

looked out their windows to the hotel, exactly towards the cafeteria, but did not perceive the danger; in the Salón Caribe, Norma Reyes honored the guitar, tensed her muscles and whirled all her curves around at the rhythm of the strings, to please the instrument; inside Cinerama, in front of the hotel several couples kissed holding hands, looking at *El esqueleto de la Señora Morales*, another story of poisoning, without suspecting that a few meters from the concave screen and the three cameras that gave a 3D effect, an identical action was under way, only in this case it was not Arturo de Córdova, the poison wasn't injected in an egg, the body wasn't hidden; here it was about the man who had discovered a gray hair, and the poison capsule had slept for weeks in the freezer and the body would be shown once the assassination was achieved, like a trophy in the Capitols of Havana and Washington. All this was happening, of course, in black and white. Rather in sepia tones. The man who was going to be poisoned arrived in sepia tones at the Habana Libre hotel crossing the lobby followed by his personal guard and other «poisoned» politicians; in sepia tones he greeted every one; in sepia tones he went to the cafeteria; in sepia tones Santos de la Caridad, the worried Santito, saw him come up to the counter and made comments in sepia tones to the others in sepia tones; in sepia tones Santito bid him Good evening and the man who was going to be poisoned told him

to serve him a cold shake;
please,

in sepia tones, Santito answered

with pleasure,

all in sepia tones and with very fast movements if we compare the scene reproduced now in television; yes, it was all in sepia tones, that is the true color of memory.

10

Santos de la Caridad was an experienced waiter, but knew very little about conspiracies. He had been chosen for the operation by Manolo Campanioni who, for his part, was guided by the Grau siblings who received instructions from William Harvey and Robert Maheu, but Santos didn't know anything about it. He didn't know, for example, who was John Roselli, one of the points of this network to kill the man who was going to be poisoned. John

Roselli was a well known member of the Cosa Nostra, a man with colts under his armpits, with his hat at an angle and dark ties, one of those men who have lost their face in films and have become part of the folklore of Chicago and Las Vegas, glamorous gangsterism. But, here and now, Roselli was a real, bone and flesh Mafiosi. Almost a year before the man who was going to be poisoned entered the cafeteria of the Habana Libre and drank the milk shake prepared by Santito, John Roselli had met with William Harvey in New York, who, at the time was head of the Project Rifle, one of the many plans to kill the man who was going to be poisoned. The contact for the meeting between Roselli and Harvey was one James O'Connell, who had also participated in the New York meeting, where everything began. At that meeting they talked for hours and smoked and drank and wrote down instructions in their own diaries; that was when the three capsules were shown, small weapons destined for Havana, one of which Santito had to put in the milk shake. Days later Harvey and Roselli met again, this time in Miami and Roselli said that he was in direct contact with Tony Varona, a really tough character, a guy who, in addition to «the little pills», also wanted weapons and radio equipment like in the Bay of Pigs. Harvey said yes to Roselli, there would be weapons and everything else, but they really weren't necessary, that those capsules worked

anywhere and against
anything, *man*.

Of course, neither Harvey nor Maheu nor Roselli nor even Tony Varona knew who Santito really was. Nor did Santito know that the capsule had come from so far away, from the Laboratories of Joseph Scheider. Separating Scheider and Harvey there was a whole world; between Harvey and Roselli another; between Roselli and Santito there were many people moving about: Tony Varona, Jaime Capdevilla (the attaché of the Spanish embassy), Polita Grau, Mongo Grau, Alberto Cruz, Manolo Campanioni ..., even the other candidates to carry out the poisoning. Bartolomé Pérez García and José Saceiro. Bartolomé had been owner of the Bulnes and Gato Tuerto bars and now worked as a restaurant captain in the Habana Libre, a hurt businessman because the man who was going to be poisoned shut down his brothels. Bartolomé complained that first he had lost the business of the sailors (with the wailing of the prostitutes, with the suicide of a mulatta who claimed she was going to marry a Brazilian sailor) and that the majority of the whores had begun to study sewing...

where was that ever seen before? ... how ridiculous that not even in Chinatown could Bartolomé find a source of money. The case of Saceiro was different, more like Santito: Saceiro missed the owners of the Habana Hilton and expected that with the poisoning he would gain points. They, too, did not know of Johnny Roselli. Well, the *Cosa Nostra*, yes, of the *Cosa Nostra* and its plans to share out Havana, yes they had coincided once with Santos Trafficante and Meyer Lansky in the Sans Souci Casino and in the Habana Hilton; but believed that this business of the capsules was the business of the Grau sibs (for political ambitions) and of the North Americans (for historical ambitions). The web was getting tangled. The Santos–Bartolomé – Saceiro triangle was clear. But the Polita – Capdevilla – Campanioni triangles was superimposed on the Roselli – Harvey – Varona triangle and all its angles, the hypotenuse was shrinking, the sides were getting longer and at the center of this spider web, the two sides of the obtuse angle, the side of the «chocolate milk shake» and the side of the «botulin capsule» both waiting for the arrival of the third side to close the triangle: the side of «the man who was going to be poisoned».

11

The man who was going to be poisoned had survived a number of different attempts of assassination, all discovered and broken up way before the planned actions by those who had only one mission, work, responsibility: to protect him. But something failed in this case. The time waited for by Santito for weeks. The man who was going to be poisoned was entering the appointed place, where everything was prepared, the chocolate, the milk, the ice, the lethal capsule, the hands of Santito... however, this time the Security team had not discovered anything. Three men of his personal guard went to the cafeteria with him, but they didn't know anything. It didn't happen in any plans with rifles with telescopic lenses, it didn't happen with the bazookas set up under a false roof in the eighth floor of the Misiones 29 in front of the Presidential Palace, nor with the plastic C-4 explosive that they would put in the sewer system under the platform where he would give a speech; nor with the plan to shoot him while he made a hit in the Cerro Stadium, nor with poisoned pens, nor underwater explosives, frog-men, the powders to make his voice squeaky during his speeches, the depilatory creams to have him lose his beard in public; something like this had never

happened before, his personal guard had always discovered the conspiracies. But this time the plan had reached the peak without discovering anything; what's more, the time had come. There was the man. It was March 18, 1963. The night was warm and life was moving around the hotel, in sepia tones, but alive, several couples, holding hands in the Cinerama Radiocentro, watching Arturo de Córdova cleverly hiding the traces of the poisoning of his wife, Mrs. Morales, some in neighboring houses laughing with San Nicolás del Peladero; others are listening to the radio, others are setting the table and sitting down to eat (conгри with chicken); others discussing about *Casino de la Alegría* and the horror of the Soviet films; the pedestrians and the bus passengers to up and down along 23, along L, along M, along 25, going around the hotel building but ignoring that the man who was going to be poisoned was walking towards the milk shake, slowly. Everything was ready, prepared. The man who was going to be poisoned wearing his military cap looser than other times. Santos sees him coming and swallows dryly,

give me a very cold
milk shake, please

and in sepia tones Santito answers,
with pleasure

and with the hands of an experienced bartender he approaches the refrigerator, with the hands of a budding conspirator, of an inexperienced poisoner. They are mechanical movements, fast and sure, the same movements of every day of every month for at least six years. The milk is fresh, in glass bottles. The chocolate is the best, from the last cargo from Minais Gerais. The sugar is native. The ice recently made. Santito then takes a tall glass with barely visible ridges, thinking that the man who was going to be poisoned would find the grasp stronger. Now the blender. A dash of salt, the exact amount that brings out the unequalled flavor of the milk shakes Santito prepares. And now the capsule. There it is; Santito and the capsule have waited days, weeks, for this moment; there is the capsule brought from the Joseph Scheider Laboratories; there it is, near the coil, waiting for Santito to take it in his hands and mix it into the delicious mix. Now Santito thinks that it would have been better if the occasion had been for his colleagues, Bartolomé or Saceiro. But there is no time. He slips his hand under the freezer, to the coil and touches the capsule. To his back he feels

the unmistakable voice of the man who was going to be poisoned and the laughter of some of his comrades. With his index finger he tries to loosen it, but he can't. The capsule is stuck to the coil with ice. Of course, no one had thought of that. With his thumb and index finger he tries again, he moves it a bit but nothing. Then he grabs it firmly, pulls it and something unexpected happened, something that had not been thought of by all the triangles; the capsule breaks. Because Santito may know a lot about mixing shakes and combinations of aromas and flavors but nothing about physics. Squeezing the surface of the partially frozen capsule it breaks in half and the poison spills along his fingers and the sides of the refrigerator. It's unbelievable. Santito trembles with astonishment, with anger, fear, disappointment, impotence, but no one notices. He looks around. He thinks of Saceiro, of Bartolomé, of Polita Grau, of Campanioni ... He thinks of his bad star while a knot forms in his stomach and another strangles him. But Santito is a professional, let us not forget. So, in a few seconds the familiar sound of the Osterizer is heard in the cafeteria of the Habana Libre and the movements of the milk shake ingredients can be seen going up and down and around, the chocolate, milk, sugar, ice and that dash of salt that is his secret. A minute later, he pours it into the typical fourteen ounce glasses of the cafeteria; the man who was going to be poisoned, tastes his milk shake, offers his comrades in camaraderie and enjoys it to the last drop,

thank you very much, it was delicious

as always, and very fresh,

he puts the glass down on the counter and pulls down his cap, turns and leaves followed by his people. But before leaving the hotel he stops in front of one of the big mirrors of the lobby. The gray hair is still there, alone. Then he smoothes his beard to hide it a little and moves off in the long strides of a survivor.

Aguadulce, Almería, Spain, July 1, 2002

The CIA used the US Mafia to introduce the capsules of synthetic botulin in Cuba to assassinate Commandant Fidel Castro. This plan was researched and acknowledged by the US Senate, in addition to seven others in 1975.