

A black and white close-up portrait of Oriana Fallaci. She has long, dark hair and is looking directly at the camera with a thoughtful expression. Her hand is resting under her chin. The background is dark and out of focus.

INTERVIEWS

with

HISTORY

and

POWER

ORIANA
FALLACI

ORIANA FALLACI



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CONVERSATIONS
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Translations of interviews with Robert Kennedy, Ayatollah Khomeini, Dalai Lama, Muammar el-Qaddafi, Ariel Sharon, Lech Walesa, Deng Xiaoping © 2011 by Elisabeth Fay

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Robert Kennedy

New York, December 1964

The appointment was at the Hotel Carlyle, where he lives when he's in New York (his home is in Long Island, not Manhattan). His bodyguards opened the door for me: two armed men who follow him everywhere, one in front and one behind on the street, one on either side of him indoors. Even if you're just a journalist they sit there staring at you, glowering, suspicious, seemingly ready to shoot at the slightest provocation. An equally cold and hostile secretary informed me that the Senator had run to the doctor's office to take care of a knee injury and would be half an hour late, but that it was unlikely we'd be able to make up the lost time: it was John-John's birthday—his nephew, Jack's and Jacqueline's son—and if the Senator was late to the party, John-John would cry. So I waited, feeling their ill-concealed displeasure, in a hotel room that seemed more like a church, family photographs covering each table like devotional candles. Photographs of him with his sons, of him with his brother Ted, of him with his dead brother. Photographs of his dead brother. The largest, in a silver frame, was of his dead brother, and the Senator brushed by it as he entered the room.

He seemed younger than his thirty-nine years but already old, smaller than the others, defenseless, sad. His head drawn into his shoulders, eyes fixed on his tie, he advanced timidly, hesitating. Facing people cost him dearly, a sacrifice that was clearly legible in the way he held his outstretched hand: it sought mine as though hoping never to find it. When it did, his grasp was unenthusiastic. His eyes met mine with a distant, surly gaze, and he blushed to the roots of his blond hair, which gathered on the left in an upturned curl, that Kennedy curl. Looking at him, it was difficult to convince myself that he was, in all likelihood, a future President of the United

States, as well as the most loved and hated man in America, judged by some »insensitive, hard, vain, arrogant, impetuous, unscrupulous, cunning, a sore loser,« and by others »fearless, decisive, exuberant, quick, competitive, aggressive, a born winner.« Above all, I remained unconvinced by the various portraits of him that I'd encountered.

His father: »Of all my sons, Bobby is the one most like me: he knows how to hate like I do. Jack used to persuade people to do things, Bobby likes to order people to do things.« His mother: »Bobby's the seventh of nine children, four boys and five girls. He grew up in Joe's shadow—my oldest—and in Jack's. He was always with his sisters and with Ted—my youngest. He was the shortest and the skinniest; we were almost afraid he would grow into a spoiled little girl. We quickly realized there was no need to worry about that, the opposite, really.« His sister Jean: »Bobby's a volcano, not even Jack was as volcanic. But Jack spent a lot of time in the land of doubt, a land Bobby never really explored. Bobby's motto was >competition and victory.<« His wife, Ethel: »His world is divided into white knights and black knights. The white knights are with us, and the black knights are against us. Bobby sees only good and bad, good things and bad things. Good things for him are manliness, courage, movement, anger. He has no patience for the weak and uncertain.« Himself, confronting gangster Joe Gallo: »You think you're a tough guy, but you're not a tough guy. I'd like to step outside and prove it to you.« Himself, confronting a group of delegates: »You're a bunch of whores.«

His silent surliness and modest blush made a few other portraits seem more convincing: Kennedy as »Savonarola in knee socks, a grown man in a Boy Scout uniform,« a man who loved chocolate ice cream with chocolate syrup, who had the habit of constantly bouncing a small rubber ball, a man with all the elegance of an altar boy, a millionaire who felt vaguely guilty about all that money. A man who felt a fierce, puritanical love for his family, for his eight children (with the ninth on the way) and his wife, Ethel. Ethel, the cheerful, uncomplicated woman who once said: »Make of it what you will: I love movies like *South Pacific*, plays like *My Fair Lady*, books like *The King Must Die ...* we've never felt comfortable with intellectuals and

incomprehensible music.« Ethel, who freely confesses, »I met Bob skiing, I was one of Jean's school friends. Bob and I dated for a few weeks and then he fell in love with my sister, Pat. Two years later Pat married an Irish architect and Bobby came back to me, thank God.«

Blushing hostility: Hadn't I seen him just like this about a month earlier, when I was covering the New York elections? Hadn't he seemed rigid, composed, and polite, speaking to the crowd as though he was repeating something he had memorized beforehand? His eyes were as creaseless as his perfectly pressed pants, and he let himself smile so rarely that the slightest movement of his lips set off a lightning storm of flashbulbs. He so rarely raised his voice that the crowd jolted at the slightest change in tone. I remember thinking that he resembled his brother physically, but only physically. Then he raised his head, his eyelids, and his blush vanished: it was clear that he resembled his brother in more ways than one. His craggy, manly face had the same energy. His white buck teeth had the same infectious quality. His blue, implacable eyes had the same strength: they looked right into your brain, and suddenly you understood why everyone was here at this Harlem rally, crushed together to see him, to hear him; you understood why the Justice Department feared him; you understood why he was appealing to men and irresistible to women, even if he lacked warmth, *savior faire*, rhetoric.

It's because he's a Kennedy, from his blond curl to his toes, and there is something in those Kennedys that goes beyond their sex appeal, their wealth, their magic name: the ability to win, always, no matter the cost. In spite of the hate, the bad blood, the curse that haunts them like some kind of Greek tragedy. In spite of deaths, murders, sickness, plane crashes. Because he might be the most Kennedy of all the Kennedys. They say he never wants to place second, that he never stops promoting himself, that he abhors defeat, that he does everything well, be it basketball, or tennis, or golf; be it politics, or writing books, or fathering children.

One thing is certain: I've never met a shy person able to intimidate a confident person quite like Robert Kennedy does. I am not shy. Nonetheless, I folded immediately in the face of his strategy: to say as much as possible by saying as little as possible, not to reveal

himself, not to confess anything, not to come down from his pedestal of modesty and dignity. This is why he always says »President Kennedy« and never »my brother.« His phrasing is brief, dry, impersonal: every sentence contains a full stop, closing the subject under discussion forever, without any pretense of returning to it later. Rarely have I had an interview as tiring, as difficult. In the thirty-five minutes I spent with him, the only thing I truly wanted was for him to dismiss me. He wasn't at all rude: on the contrary. He was courteous, patient, and kind. He never seemed displeased, he never refused to answer a question—even if they were brutal, cruel, indiscreet. But the more time passed, the more he closed in on himself, turning to stone on that melancholy, cold pedestal, never moving a muscle: legs crossed, hands folded, voice unchanging; that voice like a monotonous, broken siren; that voice that never allowed itself to become cordial, trusting.

»Is he always like this?« I asked his bodyguard when he got up for a moment to answer a phone call. »Oh, yes. Always. Didn't you know? Getting him to talk is like pulling teeth. You've got to extract each word with pliers.« My last question was the most delicate: I asked if there was any truth to the rumors that Bob Kennedy was aiming for the presidency in 1972. He answered me with disarming sincerity and with a kind of clarity I'd never heard him use before. Then he raised his shy, implacable eyes to mine, he blushed again, and he murmured »May I go now?«

If he had chased me from the room screaming, I wouldn't have moved any more quickly. I thanked him hurriedly, said my goodbyes, and rushed to the elevator. By strange chance, the elevator doors opened on the ground floor to reveal the most open and friendly face in America: that of Hubert Humphrey, the Vice President. »Hello, Mr. Humphrey! How are you? Congratulations!« I exclaimed. I'd never met Humphrey, and he clearly had no idea who I was. He answered me with an affectionate clap on the shoulders, asked me where I was from, talked with me briefly about the beauties of Italy, and he thanked me. This last encounter, along with the interview that follows, paints another portrait of Robert Kennedy.

ORIANA FALLACI There's a phrase, Senator, that your brother had engraved on a cigarette case he gave you years ago, which says: »To Bob. When I'm through, how about you?« I was thinking about that phrase while you were fighting for your Senate seat in November, I'm thinking about it now that you've won, and I know that I'm not alone. One question springs to mind: did you already think, did you always think, that you would take his place one day? That you would be elected, in one way or another, in his stead?

ROBERT KENNEDY No. No, I didn't think about that. Or rather, I didn't think about it much, then. I certainly didn't think about it as a boy, when I was younger. As a boy I only thought that I would have liked to work in government, and later, when President Kennedy was alive, I was doing so much with him, for him—as Attorney General—that I didn't even consider the possibility of being elected. Or rather, I didn't consider it much. I began thinking about it a lot, insistently even, after he died: as a way of continuing what he had begun, or rather, what he and I had begun together. You see, not just the President, but all of us were very engaged with certain responsibilities, certain dreams. And he wanted to see these through, carry them out. And then suddenly, he was gone. And suddenly I decided, I understood that it was up to me to see them through. Carry them out. So I ran for the New York senatorial seat. Anyway, that phrase doesn't really mean »take my place.« He had it engraved right after the electoral campaign and he wanted to say, rather, what will you do when I'm through ... you as a human being ...

OF Many think that the final push that convinced you to run was Johnson's refusal, last summer, to consider you as a possible Vice Presidential candidate. And everyone knows that you don't like to lose; that you were hurt by that refusal.

RK Yes. Of course. When that happened ... I had to think long and hard, to decide what to do with my life. Should I continue to work in the Executive Branch, should I stay in politics, or not? I wanted to stay in politics, but if I was going to stay, I needed to be elected; at least this time. So I decided that I wanted—that I had to be elected.

OF Even knowing that you weren't well-loved by American voters. Do you realize, Senator Kennedy, how little you are loved? I find the hostility people feel toward you somewhat surprising.

RK Yes. Oh, yes! Yes, I realize. I know so well how little I am loved that I'm no longer even surprised by it, no longer disturbed by it; I don't even care anymore. On the contrary, I understand why people feel that way: I was directly involved in too many battles, too many struggles. But there are also many people who do like me: after all, they elected me, didn't they? Poor people like me. Negroes and Puerto Ricans, for example. The marginalized. They're with me, I know they are. And the people who understood President Kennedy are with me, the people who understood our administration during those two and a half years. I've been surprised at how many there are. I didn't think they would be the majority. So everyone else can say what they want. Oh, I know what they say about me.

OF They say you're hard, arrogant, inflexible, impulsive, cunning ... unscrupulous.

RK Yes. That's what they say: unscrupulous. What do you want me to say? I'm not objective on that subject, I'm biased. I hold the bias that it's not true. The certainty. But I won't psychoanalyze myself. There are plenty of other people willing to do so, it seems everyone is intent on psychoanalyzing me, psychoanalyzing the Kennedys. Is he an angel or a demon? A saint or a Bengal tiger? Those who voted for me evidently don't think that I'm a demon.

OF And then they say that you've used your brother's name, that you were elected because of it. And then they say that one Kennedy in the Senate—Ted—wasn't enough for you, and that two Senators Kennedy are too many.

RK Having my brother Teddy in the Senate fills me with joy: when I found out that he'd won, I was almost as happy for him as I was for me. I love Teddy very much. I've never worked with Teddy to the same extent or in the same way that I worked with President Kennedy; but we're still very close. The Kennedy brothers have always been close. Our family is very united, it's a family full of love, and I'd say that this affection and this unity are the basis for our strength, or at least one of our strengths. The idea of two brothers serving in the Senate doesn't trouble me at all. It's not an everyday occurrence, fine, but nor is it without precedent. It's the second time it's happened in American history, the first being one hundred and

fifty years ago. As to being elected because of President Kennedy, of course, being his brother helped me greatly. There's no doubt about that. The Kennedy name is often an obstacle, but more frequently, it's an opportunity. But I didn't use him ... I remembered him, always, constantly. Isn't remembering him part of the cause I'm fighting for? Aren't I fighting to continue what we were doing together?

OF And then they say ... well, they say that you want to make the Kennedy family into a dynasty. A monarchy. And to support this—and I don't know if it's true—they cite one episode in particular: a photograph you're said to have. It's a photograph of your son David in the White House, and on the back John Kennedy is said to have written »a future President of the United States inspects his future ...

RK ... property.« It's true. That photograph really exists. It's on my desk right now, and that phrase is written on the back. But I would say to that, I have said, »that proves the existence of a dynasty?« That? What proof? It only proves that most people don't have a sense of humor. Nobody with even a little sense of humor would see a phrase like that as a threat, a danger. Everybody draws the conclusions they want to draw: the Kennedys have a sense of humor, in abundance. They also have a taste for politics. When you ask me if I would like to see my son, my sons, in politics, the answer is yes, I'd like that. I wouldn't push them or influence them, but I'd like that. Politics can be very harmful, but there are plenty of other ways to be hurt by life. And so why not get hurt here?

OF And yet, I get the impression that this career weighs on you, Senator. I followed you for a few days during your Senatorial campaign and it seemed to me that showing yourself to people, talking to people, was a great sacrifice ...

RK Oh, no! I like it a great deal. I would say that I had fun. Sometimes, of course, it got to be a bit tiring, but for the most part it was a pleasure. Maybe it seemed that I didn't like it because I wasn't used to being someone who needed to be elected. Before, when I managed President Kennedy's campaign, I was always in the shadows, working for him, whereas this time I was working for myself. But I can say that I enjoyed myself much more this time than last time. I had more fun, working for myself. I was more excited, because it was harder, more ...

OF ... risky. Of course. That crowd pressed around you like a vice, and you in the middle, defenseless. It was terrifying, I was often afraid for you. Senator, if you'll allow a somewhat brutal question: Were you never afraid that they would kill you too? Aren't you afraid that they could kill you too?

RK No. Never. I was never afraid of that. They were pressed around me as friends, they were friends. I'm not afraid of that. No one wants to kill me.

OF Nevertheless, you have to go around with bodyguards.

RK I don't have bodyguards.

OF That man sitting right over there is your bodyguard.

RK No. He's a friend.

OF As you wish, Senator. At this point I have to ask you something I've asked myself many times: If you ever have the temptation to abandon everything. You're so rich, Senator, that you could live in peace with your millions. There must be moments when you think what a relief it would be to just to relax and enjoy the sun, to catch a plane to, I don't know, Acapulco. Why, instead, do you ... why?

RK It's hard to say why. I would risk falling back on rhetoric. And I don't like talking about myself. I'm not used to it, I don't like, I don't want to. All these articles that you've brought with you, for example: I never contributed to them. When I ask myself questions, I don't know the answers. For example, they say that I'm the one most like my father. I don't know. In a certain way, maybe. Perhaps. He wasn't the kind of man who relaxed in Acapulco either. I can only say that I prefer doing this to relaxing in Acapulco, that getting into trouble isn't—as you said—a sacrifice for me. On the contrary, it makes me happy. This is the life I want and I won't give it up for anything. I still find time to relax: tonight I'm going home and I'll be staying with my wife and my children for four days. I dedicate a lot of time to my wife and kids, even when I was Attorney General, I ate with my family every night. Often, when I travel, I bring my wife and my oldest children with me. They went with me to Europe, Asia, when I stopped in Poland and Berlin—that wonderful trip where people were applauding, well, applauding the way you wouldn't applaud a demon. They don't seem to think I'm a demon, a hard, unscrupulous

man. Next year, after my wife gives birth to our ninth child, I'm going to take her to Italy, stay in Naples for a little while. No, this isn't a sacrifice. Really, I'd say that it's the only interesting way to live, for me. A constant challenge. It's what I want to do, what I've always wanted to do. It's my reason for being.

OF What if you had lost? I know you don't like this word—lost—that you almost can't accept it. I know that you love winners, always, never losers. But if you had lost, Senator?

RK I would have started teaching. I've said that before. And it's true. I like being with young people, I feel I'm in my natural habitat with them. It's no accident that I have eight children, and that I'll soon have nine. So, yes, I think that I would have taught, at least for a while. Not forever. No, I don't think I would have stayed out of politics forever. And, to be honest, I never really, truly considered the possibility of losing, or of what I would have done if I'd lost. Just like young people, like children don't, I never really thought about the distant future, about the years to come, certainly not about defeat. I had other things to think about, things I could only take care of as a winner. The problem of education, for example, the problem of the poverty that afflicts the American people. Other countries don't realize the kind of poverty that we have in America, and I don't necessarily, I don't only mean financial poverty. Ours is a poverty of education. We have people giving up their studies, giving up culture so that they can start earning, start making money. Then there's the problem of our responsibility to the rest of the world. Americans don't realize the way that other people look to America, for good or ill, and imitate us; our responsibilities are great. I thought I had to win for these reasons, so that I could correct the things that are going wrong, because I believe in the progress of good, just as President Kennedy did. And I thought that I had to become a Senator for New York, rather than becoming a teacher, so that I could continue, in some way, what he ...

OF His memory haunts you, doesn't it, Senator? The memory of your brother never leaves you, does it, Senator? All these photos of him, everywhere. All this ...

RK No. No, that's not true. He doesn't haunt me, it's not like you say, not at all. I'm not obsessed by him, I don't think of him always, not

even often. There are photographs of him, yes, that's true, but there are also photos of the rest of my family: of Teddy, see? And of my children, see? And my whole family, you see? And I don't want to talk about this. I don't want to get into this subject. I'm sorry. At this point I don't get into that at all. For quite some time now. Quite some time. By now ... I realize that you have to ask me this, that people want to know if I think of him often, if ... But please don't ask me. Let's forget it. Anyway, it doesn't matter. Go on, continue. It's okay.

OF Okay, Senator. But I should say that what I'm about to ask you is no less serious, even if it is less painful. It concerns the possibility that you'll manage to complete, one day, what your brother started: just as the phrase he had engraved on your cigarette case suggests. The possibility that one day you'll run the country. The possibility that you'll become, that you want to become President of the United States. Can we talk about that?

RK Yes.

OF Good. Until today, you've never wanted to talk about it.

RK No.

OF You've always avoided the question as though you were embarrassed, or ashamed. Why?

RK Because I wanted to become a Senator: not President. Because I wanted to concentrate on what interested me in that moment, to work on what interested me in that moment: the Senate. And even now I don't want anything other than to be a Senator. At the moment I'm not working on the Presidency. Today, right now, becoming President doesn't concern me. That issue, that problem, is beyond my immediate plans. Far beyond, in the future. The present is the Senate. The future ... is the future. The future will take care of itself.

OF Of course. You're very young, Senator.

RK Yes.

OF You have a lot of time in front of you.

RK Yes.

OF All the time in the world to become President.

RK Thank you.

OF And when your term is up in 1970, what will you do then?

RK I'll run again for the Senate. There's no doubt in my mind.

OF The Presidential elections will be in 1972. A Senator can run, isn't that right? To be President of the United States?

RK Yes. Of course. Of course a Senator can run for the Presidency. Naturally!

OF Of course, your brother was a Senator. Well, Senator: there are people even in Europe who would like to think that one day, you'll be President of the United States.

RK Thank you. Yes, thank you.

Dalai Lama

Dharamshala, September 1968

I listen to him incredulous, shocked, and all the while I scrutinize him intensely: but even this cannot help me explain what he's saying. Seen like this, he's a young man like many others: his features only slightly Asian, his skin only slightly yellow. Put him in a pair of blue jeans and a T-shirt, and you'd mistake him for a student at Yale, maybe even a hippie yelling anti-Vietnam slogans. He certainly doesn't have the air of a monk. He's wearing a monk's robe, though. It's rust-colored, draped expertly around his tall, lean body. In accordance with tradition, his head is shaved. His face is composed, I would almost say impenetrable. But, behind the frames of his gold glasses, his almond eyes are extremely intelligent and cheerful. He is seated on a wooden chair as though it were a jewel-encrusted throne. At his side is an old, solemn monk, who never speaks and looks at him with veneration. Then there's a young monk, very attentive, who acts as his interpreter and seems very eager to please. I would bet that he behaves toward them with all the authority he exhibited in the palace of Potala. We are in a simple house in Dharamshala, a small town in the Kangra district. These green, cool woods are already part of the Himalayas, just as much as those snowcapped mountains with their sharp peaks. North of us is China, to the East, the Soviet Union. The landscape is similar to Tibet. But we're in India, Tibet is down there. It's beyond the blue glaciers this young man crossed nearly ten years ago, chased by Chinese communists, marked by humiliation and defeat, sick and starving. He who was a living god and a king, a sacred child adored by an entire people who would bow so low before him that their heads touched the ground. He is the last of the Dalai Lamas, the end of a fable that is dying with no hope of rebirth. And I listen to him, incredulous, shocked,

because he's telling me that he'd like to be a mechanic; because his ideas seem to be, well, at least partially, a strange kind of Maoism.

Travel back with me thirty-three years and you'll understand my surprise. In Tibet it's the year of the Water-bird, and the thirteenth Dalai Lama has died. In Lhasa, the capital, a Regent is governing and a weeping crowd is gathered along the sacred walls. How much time will pass before the elders find the new Dalai Lama? He must be a reincarnation of the old one: a child born as the last Dalai Lama died. The High Lamas must search all over the country, visiting every village, every hut. But in order for this search to begin, there must be some clue. A series of miracles must guide them, and the first miracle must be accomplished by the dead man. Dressed in gold and silver, the thirteenth Dalai Lama is seated on his throne one last time. And there he stays, propped up, stiff, for days, with his head hung forward: that is, to the south. But suddenly he's shaken by some kind of shiver, a gust of life, and his head rolls toward the northeast. In the same moment, strange clouds appear in the clear sky, and begin moving northeast. Then a star-shaped mushroom appears on a pillar at a temple to the northeast, and the Regent has a vision. He is meditating near the lake, and an image forms on the water's surface, a monastery to the northeast with a jade and gold roof, next to a house with turquoise roof tiles.

The High Lamas leave, traveling northeast. For months and months they travel, stopping in every village, every hut, and after nearly two years have passed, they discover a monastery with a gold and jade roof. It is the Karma Rolphai Dorje monastery, in the Amdo district, and nearby there is a house with turquoise roof tiles. It's a peasant dwelling. The High Lamas dress as beggars and enter, asking for charity. The farmers, husband, wife, and six children, receive them with kindness. The High Lamas are eating when a child bursts in, about two years old, who says his name is Kondun. The age is right, the High Lamas immediately carry out the exam. They carry with them two identical rosaries, two identical canes, two identical drums. But one of the rosaries, and one of the canes, and one of the drums belong to the old Dalai Lama. Apart from the Lamas, the only one who could recognize the correct objects is the reincarnation of

the Dalai Lama. »Choose,« they tell the child. And the child chooses the correct rosary. The correct cane, the correct drum. Then he exclaims: »You're not beggars. I want to come with you.« The High Lamas throw themselves at his feet, and reveal to the bewildered parents that the search is over: the child they brought into the world is the fourteenth Dalai Lama.

Two years will pass before they are able to bring him to Lhasa. The governor of the province is Chinese, he hates the Tibetans and demands a ransom before he will allow Kondun to leave: the High Lamas have to get the money together. But at the end of the Earth-Hare year, the caravan forms. Three hundred and fifty mules and horses, fifty people. Among these is Kondun's family, who have been taken out of their house with the turquoise roof tiles; the law requires that the parents and siblings of the Dalai Lama live in Lhasa. The journey lasts three months and thirteen days, through valleys and mountains without any paths or roads. The child is carried by the members of the caravan, or on a palanquin. Despite his discomfort, he gives no signs of fatigue or boredom. Sometimes the procession stops near a village, and the crowd rushes toward him, dancing, playing cymbals and flutes, burning rose incense; but even then he doesn't cry or laugh, or behave like a child. He remains solemn, receiving their tributes, as he does when he reaches the gate of Lhasa, where tens of thousands of the faithful are waiting for him. They wait along with members of the National Assembly, the one hundred and seventy-five monks that govern Tibet, the representatives from China, from Bhutan, from Nepal, from Sikkim. He remains solemn when he enters the Potala Palace, when he is transferred to his summer residence in Norbulingka, when they present him at the cathedral. The investiture occurs on the fourteenth day of the Iron-Dragon year, with unbelievable and interminable pomp. For hours and hours the child must remain composed upon his high throne, crushed with the weight of the heavy gold and silver drapery, listening to sacred hymns, prayers, speeches, poetry, accepting tributes of gold, flowers, fruit, watching the sacred dances and the tedious rites. But he never lets a yawn escape, he never makes a mistake.

He is an exceptional child, almost disconcertingly intelligent for his age. And his tutors are as patient as they are strict. At six he is already learning astrology, poetry, composition, and music. At ten he is already studying Sanskrit, dialectics, metaphysics, the art of healing and the psychology of religion. A small part of each day is reserved for rest and playing, but otherwise he stays bent over his books from sunup to sundown. Soon his vision suffers, and it's necessary to have a pair of eyeglasses sent from India. He grows up with those glasses and that wisdom, adored like a God and sacrificed like a prisoner, ignoring everything that happens outside the storybook cage he lives in. More than a palace, Potala is a warehouse of paradoxical riches. It contains all the extravagant gifts from the Mongol and Chinese Emperors, the sumptuous inheritance from the previous thirteen Lamas, and the treasures of the old kings: jewels and rubies big as eggs, sacred parchments inscribed with gold-dust ink, thousand-year-old tapestries, enormous jade statues, precious china, artworks from two thousand B.C. The mausoleums of the dead Dali Lamas are made of thick slabs of gold, nine meters high. The libraries contain all of the documents from Tibetan civilization. The museums have all the weapons from throughout Tibet's military history. To visit everything—hundreds of salons, chapels, rooms, churches—would take years. And, since the child must visit them all, he hardly ever leaves Potala. He only goes to Norbulingka, where he finds the same ostentation. Norbulingka means Jewel Park: little temples, little palaces, gardens tended to the point of exasperation, full of exotic birds, strange flowers, and of boredom that weighs heavier than lead. The boredom of being not only the spiritual leader of Tibet, but also the secular leader: because of this, he must confront the duties of government, the continual threat of invasion by China. China has been invading Tibet for centuries, only to relinquish it with a treaty and invade it all over again.

The wise little boy with glasses had just turned sixteen when the oracles in the convent began to reveal dark prophecies. The capital of the pillar where the miracle mushroom had grown crumbled unexpectedly. A dragon head on one of the main temples began to spout drops of water which were almost certainly tears. Buffaloes

and cows gave birth to terrifying monsters, earthquakes swallowed whole villages. And the astrologers said that the ancient prophecy, according to which »a great power to the North would conquer the land, destroying religion and imposing its hegemony on the whole world« was about to come to pass. A few days later, in October of 1950, Mao Tse-tung's troops attacked the frontier in six separate points, announcing the decision to restore Tibet to the motherland. Defense was, naturally, impossible. The entire army was no more than 8,500 men, including soldiers and officials. They had only 250 mortars, 200 light machine guns, and 50 pieces of rusty artillery. And, even though Tibet had declared its independence in 1912, the act had not been sanctioned before any nation. The country had existed in total isolation for years, its borders were closed to the rest of the world, and its diplomatic relations were nonexistent. At the time of the invasion, only six Westerners lived in Tibet: one missionary, two English radio operators, a Russian and two Austrians who had escaped from an Indian concentration camp. However, while the monks hastened to send part of *the national* treasure to India, gold dust and silver bars, *the wise little boy did something more. Instead of fleeing, he asked England and the United States—two countries he had only ever heard tell of—for help. And when they refused, he turned to the U.N.—an organization no one had told him anything about. The U.N. refused to intervene, and in spring of 1951 the first Chinese detachments marched into Lhasa, bringing with them enormous portraits of Mao Tse-tsung and Chu En Lai. But even then, he did not admit defeat. He sent a delegation to Peking, entered into negotiations with the Chinese generals and, as their prisoner, assumed all the possible responsibilities of a king.*

For nine years he was a good king. He proposed and carried out reforms, shrewdly steering a middle course, even going to China to talk to Mao Tse-tung. He studied Marx and English. He tried, all by himself, at an age when other boys are playing football, to penetrate a world that was, for him, farther away than the moon and Mars. A world where social equality was preached, where people traveled on trains and airplanes, a world where people laughed at the fairy tale he had lived in until the age of sixteen. His freedom grew more

and more limited, he was confined to five rooms in the palace, and he began to hear news of monasteries destroyed, convents looted, Lamas tortured and killed, useless rebellions by peasants armed only with pitchforks. When he looked out of the windows through which he had once admired the luxurious processions, he saw Chinese camps and billboards that accused Buddha of being a reactionary. He was no longer in charge of anything. One day he fell ill and a doctor came to see him; he thanked the doctor with a gift, a piece of jade. But as soon as the doctor left the room, the jade was taken by a Maoist official who claimed that the jade belonged to the Chinese people. Gold statues and vases were melted into slabs and sent to Peking. The sacred furnishings were ripped apart and turned into theater costumes. The thousand-year-old parchments were burned, along with the sacred images, the religious images; there was nothing left of Potala but the walls. This state of catastrophe ushered in March 1959, the Tiger-Water year.

The Dalai Lama is, by now, a young man of twenty-two. He has just earned his degree in metaphysics, defending his thesis to his old tutors in a dismal, quasi-secret ceremony. A messenger arrives and tells him that there is a spectacle in progress at the Chinese camp beyond the river that he is strongly encouraged to attend, without his bodyguards or armed escorts. The Dalai Lama knows what this means. Four Lamas have already received this invitation, and they have not returned. A rumor begins to circulate that his life is in danger, and, with the pretext of protecting him, thirty thousand Tibetans surround the palace, shouting »Tibet for Tibetans!« It is revolution, it is massacre. While the Chinese have automatic weapons, the Tibetans have only sticks and knives. This time it is absolutely necessary for the Dalai Lama to attempt escape. So he promises that he will attend the spectacle beyond the river, but when he leaves that evening he disguises himself as a soldier, he removes his glasses so he won't be recognized, and staggering around in the dark, in his myopia, he leaves the palace behind. Only his family and a few faithful follow him, also in disguise. With them he goes through the gardens, where nothing grows anymore, he passes the mausoleums, stripped of their gold slabs, he leaves the looted museums, goes

over the sacred walls and throws himself into the crowd, among the Chinese soldiers, and he reaches the horses and gallops away in the dark. From village to village, mountain to mountain, glacier to glacier, for weeks, hunted by a Chinese airplane that sometimes flies so low that he has to hide in the bushes or in a cave, until finally he reaches the border with India, where Pandit Nehru has offered him protection. It is here that he discovers that Potala was destroyed during his escape, the city bombed. The luxurious fairy tale that he grew up in has been reduced to ruins and thousands of corpses with sticks and knives in their hands.

How can it be that a man educated in the cults of poetry and superstition now exhibits such a strange understanding for the civilization that destroyed his civilization, and for the technology that destroyed his country? From 1959 to 1969 he remained a recluse in this little villa in the mountains for Dharamshala. He descended from the mountain once to go to Japan, and again to visit Thailand, each time as a guest of honor at vegetarian conventions. He left his home another five or six times to go to New Delhi, to the offices of his exiled government.

In Dharamshala he spends most of his day in prayer, waking up at five in the morning to meditate. He receives very few visitors, Tibetan refugees who live in a nearby village for the most part, who are obviously anti-communist and completely attached to the past. Apart from them, he only sees the other monks and the members of his family: his mother, two sisters, and a brother made the trip with him. He is afraid of being killed, or kidnapped. When you pass through the gates of his retreat you are searched, interrogated, and they take your matches, even though you haven't come to set him on fire. His only meal, which he eats at midday, is a solitary affair. The only breaks to his rigorous monastic routine come from the radio and American magazines: *National Geographic*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. He has no hope of returning to Tibet, he is held prisoner by a past that strangles him mercilessly. In his little universe, everything is more or less as it was before: the same ceremonies, the same traditions, the same obedience to the oracles. And yet, mysteriously, he is a man of our times: modern, liberal, plagued by the same problems we are, the

same needs, the same mistakes. He dreams of skyscrapers and trips to the moon; he compares the melodrama of Tibet to the situation in Czechoslovakia; he discusses Marxism. He is free from every neurosis, every fear, every slavery of thought and taste. What was it that brought about this change? What is it? It certainly wasn't his meeting with Mao Tse-tung, after all the history between them. It certainly wasn't his two trips to the vegetarian conventions. It certainly isn't the American magazines or the radio, especially since his English is quite limited. Was it the mental strain he was put through at Potala, the inhuman study that has opened his brain to every possible choice? Perhaps. But I believe that the real reason is another: that vague something that gathers in the air at each truly historical moment, then flies away like spores on the wind. You never know where a seed carried by the wind will land, it might even fall within the royal palace of a closed society, into the head of a child god, reincarnated.

Let's listen to this hippie dressed like a monk, with the Himalayas in the background. Whether or not you agree with him, he remains an amazing figure. It's morning in autumn, his garden is full of blooming roses, and from the temple a long, low horn sounds, calling the faithful to prayer. His voice, by contrast, is like a bell, and he has a very friendly laugh. He laughs through all his answers as though saying them aloud were useless: what else could he have said? Of course Mao Tse-tung wants to live in a skyscraper, of course he'll call me if he ever comes to New York. When we say goodbye, he'll stop me as I attempt a bow and he'll give me a hearty clap on the shoulders as a salutation. But where on earth would he have seen that? Who taught him? Here is the interview.

ORIANA FALLACI Holiness, if by some miracle or some unforeseen political upset you were allowed to return to Tibet and live there, as it is today, would you consent to govern a communist country?

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA Naturally. What kind of leader would I be if I wanted to impede the course of things? There are those who like to smoke and those who don't: the fact that I don't doesn't mean I am against those who do. Young Tibetans grew up surrounded by

communist ideology, should I deny them because of it? I am not at all worried about Tibet's communism. Communism only becomes malevolent when it serves imperialism, as with Chinese communism. Thus, Tibet's enemy is the Chinese communism that conceals Chinese imperialism. China has always wanted to conquer Tibet. What is happening today between China and Tibet is nothing but the repetition of an event that has occurred throughout history. Thus, my job is not to agitate for anti-communism among Tibetans, but to keep a sense of national identity alive: remind them that they can be communists, but that they must not forget that they are Tibetans, above all, Tibetans.

OF I did not expect you to answer that way, Holiness.

DL It's the only way I can answer. I am a man who belongs to his own time, not some fossil from the past. I'm a man in love with all revolutionary ideals, I've always been in favor of innovation. Chinese communism produces nuclear weapons, and this is a bad thing. It attempts to conquer the world, and this is a bad thing. It does not benefit the masses, and this is a bad thing. However, despite all this bad, it has achieved some results. Even in Tibet. Remember that democracy did not exist in Tibet, or only existed within the monastic system, in that a boy could arrive at important responsibilities coming from any social class. Don't forget that I'm a farmer's son.

OF Holiness, how could you have even been aware of that, since you were, at the time, locked up in Potala?

DL I was aware of it, nonetheless, because I was a wise child and then a wise young man. A Dalai Lama is brought up in the pursuit of wisdom; I found mine very early and used it to see and understand. The temples and salons of Potala were packed with useless treasures, as were the houses of the rich, while my people were exploited by tax collectors. Of course I knew. And I didn't need the Chinese intervention to bring about reforms. Even before the Chinese descended on us, I was carrying out a social revolution. But a good revolution, well-suited for Tibet, for our history and our religion; not a cheap copy of the Chinese revolution. For us, the Chinese have never been the bearers of revolutionary ideals, they have always been conquerors, pure and simple. I began the reforms, the vital ones, when I was sixteen.

And for nine years I fought with the Chinese, trying to explain to them that we wanted to follow our own path, not Peking's. But to them, the word »revolution« was just that—a word. They wanted us to become a colony of China and nothing more. I even explained this to Mao Tse-tung. I think he understood. But his generals were uninterested in the spread of Marxist philosophy. His generals were interested in domination. And it was this domination that provoked the revolt of 1959. It was a popular revolt, not a bourgeois revolt. It was as though a mass of insects suffocating under a blanket escaped from underneath it to sting whoever was holding it down. The world doesn't know this because the world has never really been interested in Tibet as a real place, but rather as some kind of fairyland: its treasures, its processions, its Dalai Lama. The world doesn't realize that, today, if the opportunity arose, communist Tibet would rebel against China. More or less like what is occurring in certain Eastern European countries, like Czechoslovakia.

OF Holiness, what is your position on communism?

DL I find it somewhat interesting, I'd say. I appreciate the sense of guilt inherent in Marxism, the desire to expose injustice. In order for a cut on your hand to heal, your body must first of all be aware of that cut, otherwise, how will you tend it and help it heal? But I must say, I also appreciate many aspects of capitalism. In many countries capitalism has brought about undeniable economic progress and has taken many important steps towards equality—just look at America. And then, competition in the economy has to exist, and in communism this is essentially impossible. The fact is, today it is useless to think in terms of communism and anti-communism, capitalism and anti-capitalism. It would be better to think of a solution that best suits a people in specific economic, historical, and cultural circumstances. There are countries, like America, where I believe that communism would be inapplicable and ineffective.

OF Holiness, what do you think of Mao Tse-tung?

DL When I went to China, after the occupation, I spoke with him several times. He taught me many things. You must understand that, despite my precocious wisdom, I didn't know much about what was happening outside my country. News arrives slowly and rarely in

Lhasa; my tutors only found out about the Second World War after it had already been happening for quite some time. They learned of it from an old Indian newspaper. When I opened my atlas, I hadn't the slightest idea about what life was like in the countries I traced with my finger. For me they were geographical images and nothing more: a leaf-shaped nation, a fish-shaped nation, a dragon-shaped nation and so on. I did not know anything about the ideas that were shaking them, that had shaped them. I only knew right from wrong through Buddhism, which I still believe is the foundation for my reasoning. Speaking with Mao Tse-tung, I was able to compare Buddhism and communism. Now, in my opinion, Buddhism goes further in its ideology than communism. According to both Buddhism and communism, material reality orders everything. But how does material reality come into being? Through divine creation? No, of course not: by man's creation, by man's physical labor. And, on this point, Buddhism and communism identify with one another. But beyond this point, Buddhism goes further. Because Buddhism explains that man creates reality through his mind, and because Buddhism offers a reason for the existence of the mind. This reason is the beginning and the beginning is God. Mao Tse-tung and I discussed this argument at length. The fact is, that when I reached the conclusion I have just laid out for you, we began to quarrel. Because I said: yes you are right, this is all true, all correct, but Man is not God, and there is a God. And he said: no there isn't.

OF I imagine that these were interesting discussions, Holiness. What else can you say about Mao Tse-tung?

DL One never left a meeting with him feeling indifferent. Physically, I wouldn't know how to describe him: he always had worn-down shoes and wore the same uniform as everyone else. He breathed heavily, he was always short of breath; he wasn't healthy. Despite this he was constantly smoking, even when he spoke. One cigarette after another, lighting them end to end. He spoke slowly and quietly, weighing each word. He never said anything foolish. There was something sad in him, and he often behaved strangely. Once he arrived unexpectedly and he told me that Buddhism was a good religion; that though he was a prince, Buddha had done much to improve the lot of the

poor. Then, as suddenly as he had arrived, he left. He was always very affectionate with me. For example, once he told me that religion was the opiate of the masses because it impeded progress. Soon after he understood that he had hurt me, and he clapped me on the shoulders and urged me to take care of myself.

OF You're unable to see him as an enemy, isn't that true, Holiness?

DL Yes. Speaking as a Buddhist, I cannot accept the word enemy. Speaking as a Tibetan ... it's possible that today's enemies are also tomorrow's enemies. I have suffered greatly because of Mao Tse-tung, and my people have suffered even more. But this doesn't mean that they are unable to forget. Mao Tse-tung is neither cunning nor diplomatic. I told him what his generals were doing in Tibet, and he understood. Perhaps he couldn't stop them. Or perhaps he has changed. I am unable to reconcile the Mao Tse-tung I knew with the Mao Tse-tung of today. He must be in the grip of some madness or some infirmity. The cultural revolution, for example. The name is lovely, but there is no substance: it's the dementia of an old man. I cannot see him in this dementia.

OF Holiness, you met other communist leaders in China. Did they influence you as well?

DL No, certainly not. I never liked Chu En Lai, for example. He was too cunning. You could see it in his eyes, always moving and always looking, seeing everything. He is very intelligent, but it is a dangerous intelligence. Khrushchev was a little better. Khrushchev seems like a giant pig. He moves and breathes like a pig. But he's an intelligent pig, polite and kind. I believe that one could become friends with Khrushchev, but not with Chu En Lai. I only ever met one other communist as hateful as he was: Bulganin. It is because of men like him that my trip to China was so difficult. I went to ask for mercy for Tibet, and I stayed a year. In that year I was never able to speak to the people I wished to see. I wanted to talk to the Russians, since I knew that they could help me. But my plans never materialized. Once I was able to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the Russian ambassador, but it was cancelled at the last minute.

OF And what do you think of the Americans, Holiness?

DL I don't know them as well as I know the Russians and the Chinese.

I have met only a few. On an individual basis, they seem honest, polite, and modern. But taken all together, in politics I mean, they seem very conservative. It seems that in politics they apply none of their honesty or modernity. Perhaps, to judge them better, I should go to America. Anyway, I am curious about America. Everywhere you hear people talk about this America, everywhere you read about this America; America is everywhere, even in these mountains where everyone is dressed the same way they were a thousand years ago. America is a mosquito that gets into the folds of your robe, and it stings you, it provokes you until you seek it out. America is the obsession that the world carries with it, it cannot be ignored. But the reasons America intrigues me are not ideological. I mean, as far as profound ideas are concerned, I don't think America has much to offer me. My interests are, well, tangible. I am very interested in American technology, American cars, the visit to the moon. When you think of the moon you don't think of Russia, you think of America. I would give anything to go to the moon. Not for the adventure of walking around on it, but for the sheer pleasure of driving the great ship that takes you up there. I truly love cars. If I could choose a profession I would be a technician—or better, a mechanic. I've always thought this, ever since I was a child.

OF Holiness, that's extraordinary. Do you remember how you started, and why?

DL I think it began with that little car. When I was a child I was sent many gifts, from all over the world. They were mostly precious objects, and didn't interest me. Then one day, that little car arrived. It's the clearest memory I have of my childhood, all the rest is blurry. For example, I remember the ceremonies and the dances I watched from behind a curtain. I remember a vague desire to be with other children, I never saw other children. I remember an unconfessed longing for my mother, I only ever saw my mother briefly, once every two months or so. I remember that I didn't like Potala and that I preferred Norbulingka because there were birds and fish and then there was a garden where they grew giant cabbages and huge radishes. But that little car reigns over all those other memories, victorious. When I first saw it I had no idea what it was, or what it was for. But I

knew that it was beautiful, more beautiful than the cabbages or the huge radishes, and when I was with it I didn't need other children or my mother anymore. It moved on its own. I began to ask myself how it worked, and why. I took it apart and put it back together. From then on, every time I come across something mechanical, I felt the need to take it apart and put it back together again. Mechanical things were like fairy tales to me. They were better: they were my fairy tale.

OF Did you have other fairy tales after that little car?

DL Yes, because people found out that I loved fairy tales and so they began to send me more fairy tales. One day an even more mysterious fairy tale reached me: a little airplane. When you wound it, it flew. I took that one apart too, but I couldn't make it fly again afterwards and I cried. Then a very long fairy tale reached me that even made a sound: an electric train. It came to me in a box with instructions, it had to be put together. I ordered everyone not to touch it; I wanted to put it together myself. I was able to do it, and that was the first train of my life. Many years would pass before I saw a real train. And then, one day, I received a wristwatch. It must have been the only wristwatch in Lhasa. I took that apart too, to see how it worked. Then I put it back together and, believe it or not, it still worked. And then I discovered three real cars in a warehouse in Lhasa. They had been sent as gifts to my predecessor, though I don't think he ever used them. There were two 1927 Baby Austins, one red and one yellow, and then a bright orange 1931 Dodge. They were just sitting there rusting. I found a young Tibetan who had worked as a driver in India, and with his help, I got the Dodge in working order. Then, combining parts from the two Austins, we were able to get one working Austin together. To me, it was much more exciting than a discussion of dialectics. The young man also taught me how to use them, and I can't describe how happy I was when I managed to move a car for the first time. But for me, the most beautiful fairy tale has always been electricity. We had an electrical generator at Norbulingka. It was always breaking, and everyone believed that it was breaking because of bad luck. But it was actually me, I was breaking it so I could fix it. I would have been a great electrician or a great mechanic if destiny had had other plans for me.

OF Do you ever feel regret about that, Holiness? In other words, do you ever feel uneasy or angry that you are a king in exile, a deposed pope, ultimately, just a monk?

DL No, because apart from being a mechanic, I can't imagine any other kind of existence for myself. My life has been, and still is, so determined by a path laid out by others before me, that even if I wanted to, I could not and I would not escape it. Indeed, it's true that I didn't choose this destiny, that it was imposed upon me when I was only two years old. But I feel no anger about this imposition. You see, I have often tried to remember how I felt as a child when I realized that I had been torn from my mother, from my brothers and sisters, and placed upon that cushioned throne to act like an old man. But my memory has not revealed a moment of anger. Maybe it's because my memories only become clear in adolescence. But, when I was an adolescent, any possible childish anger was gone, as I had, by then, been a monk for quite some time. And I couldn't imagine being anything other than a monk. I was, in short, content to be a monk. I am still content, though my mind is not completely pure. Since I have set aside my doubts, and my desires, monastic life does not seem like a sacrifice to me. It imposes limitations, certainly, but in exchange it gives me peace in my spirit that others do not have, and seek futilely. And it takes away many fears, like the fear of death. Men are so terrified of the idea of death. I am not, because I know that death is only the transfer from one body to another. In my last body ...

OF Holiness, do you really believe that you are the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama who came before you?

DL You either believe in reincarnation or you don't. There is no proof of reincarnation, it is an act of faith. I have that faith. It may seem like an anachronism, I know, because I am a modern man and one would think that a modern man should not believe in reincarnation. But I believe it completely, just as I believe in life and death. It is not a mystery to me. Having said this, I will add something that may shock you: I am not at all convinced that I am the reincarnation of the thirteenth Dalai Lama. Or, not necessarily. Perhaps I am the reincarnation of some other Lama, or a farmer. What difference does it make? Isn't it just as well? Do we believe in democracy or don't we?

OF One last question, Holiness. When you are dead, how will they choose your successor? Will it be possible, in today's Tibet, to go looking for the child who was born when you died, the living Buddha?

DL Obviously, it will not be possible. The Chinese have destroyed our temples, exterminated our monks, and outlawed our religion. Even using the rosary is prohibited. The monks who were able to flee are scattered all over India, in Nepal, in Sikkim. And, even if they were to go back, the new generation would not believe any longer. When I die no one will be able to go looking for me in another body. Well, the problem is hardly immediate, given that I'm only thirty-three and have every intention of staying in this body for quite some time. When the problem arises ... patience. It is entirely possible that I will be the last Dalai Lama. Patience. It won't be a tragedy for anyone. You can be sure that the world will not weep. It will not even suffer.

Vo Nguyen Giap

Hanoi, February 1969

ORIANA FALLACI General Giap, in many of your writings you pose the following question: Who, after all, will win the war in Vietnam? So I ask you: Today, here in the first months of 1969, do you think you can say that the Americans have lost the war in Vietnam, that they have been militarily defeated?

VO NGUYEN GIAP They recognize it themselves. But now I'll show you why the Americans have already been defeated—militarily and politically. And to show you their military defeat, I go back to their political defeat, which is at the bottom of everything. The Americans have committed a very grave error in choosing South Vietnam as a battlefield. The reactionaries in Saigon are too weak—even Taylor, McNamara, and Westmoreland knew this. What they didn't know is that, being so weak, they would not know how to profit from American aid. Because what was the goal of American aggression in Vietnam? Clearly, a neo-colony based on a puppet government. But to create a neo-colony you need a stable government, and the government of Saigon is an extremely unstable one. It has no effect on the population, people don't believe in it. So in what paradox do the Americans find themselves? The paradox of not being able to withdraw from South Vietnam even if they want to, because in order to withdraw they must leave behind a stable political situation. That is, a few servants capable of taking their places. Servants yes, but strong ones. Servants yes, but serious ones. The puppet government of Saigon is neither strong nor serious; it's worth nothing even as a servant; it can't stand on its own feet when propped up with tanks. And so how can the Americans leave? And yet they must leave—they can't keep six hundred thousand men in Vietnam for another ten, fifteen years! This then is their political defeat: to achieve nothing

from a political standpoint despite the enormous military apparatus at their disposal.

OF General, this doesn't mean that militarily they've lost the war.

VNG Be patient, don't interrupt me. Of course it means that. If they didn't feel themselves beaten, the White House wouldn't be talking about peace with honor. But let's go back awhile, to the times of Geneva and Eisenhower. How did the Americans begin in Vietnam? With their usual efforts, namely, military and economic aid to puppet governments. Together with the dollar. Because they always believe they can solve anything with the dollar. Even a free and independent government, they thought they could set it up with the dollar; that is with an army of puppets bought with the dollar, with thirty thousand advisers paid in dollars, with the invention of strategic hamlets built on dollars. But the people intervened, and the American plan failed. The strategic hamlets failed, the advisers failed, the army of puppets failed. And the Americans found themselves forced to intervene militarily, as Ambassador Taylor had already recommended.

So the second phase of their aggression began: the special war. They were certain of being able to conclude it by 1965, at the most by 1966—with a hundred and fifty thousand men and eighteen billion dollars. But in 1966 the war was by no means over, and in fact had risen to another two hundred thousand men, and they were talking about the third phase, namely limited war. The famous two-pronged policy of Westmoreland: on one side to win over the population and on the other to exterminate the Liberation forces. But the two prongs didn't take hold and Westmoreland lost the war. As a general he lost it in 1967, when he wanted additional troops sent and made that optimistic report to Washington, announcing that 1968 would be a good year for the war in Vietnam, it would allow Johnson to win re-election. In Washington, Westmoreland was greeted as a hero, but he certainly knew that this was beginning to cost a little too much. Taylor had understood that from the beginning. Come on now! Korea had cost the Americans twenty billion dollars, Vietnam has already cost them more than a hundred billion. Korea cost them more than fifty-four thousand dead, Vietnam has already surpassed this figure ...

OF The Americans say thirty-four thousand dead, General.

VNG Hm ... I'd say at least double. The Americans always give figures lower than the truth: when it suits them, three instead of five. They can't have had only thirty-four thousand dead. And when we've shot down more than thirty-two hundred of their planes! And when they admit that one out of every five of their planes has been shot down! Look: in five years of war they've certainly lost no less than seventy thousand men. And maybe that's too low.

OF General, the Americans also say that you have lost half a million.

VNG The exact number.

OF Exact?

VNG Exact. But to get back to what I was saying, 1968 arrives and in that year the Americans were really certain of winning. Then just look, all of a sudden there was the Tet offensive and the Liberation Front shows that it is able to attack them whenever it wants, wherever it wants. Including the most well-defended cities, including Saigon. And the Americans finally admit that this war is a strategic error. Johnson admits it, McNamara admits it. They recognize that it was the wrong time, the wrong place, that Montgomery was right in saying that the army must be brought onto the Asian continent. The victorious Tet offensive ...

OF General, everyone agrees that the Tet offensive was a great psychological victory. But from a military standpoint don't you think it was a failure?

VNG Failure?

OF I would say so, General.

VNG Tell that to, or rather ask, the Liberation Front.

OF First, I'd like to ask you, General.

VNG You must understand that this is a delicate question, that I cannot express judgments of this kind, that I cannot meddle in the affairs of the Front. It's a delicate thing ... very delicate ... Anyway you surprise me, since the whole world has recognized that, from a military and political standpoint, the Tet offensive ...

OF General, even from a political standpoint it was not a huge victory. The population did not rise up, and after two weeks the Americans regained control. Only in Hue did we see a saga that went on for a month. In Hue, where there were North Vietnamese.

VNG I don't know if the Front foresaw or desired the population to rise up, though I would think that without the help of the population the forces of the Front would not have been able to enter the city. And I won't discuss the Tet offensive, which didn't depend on me, didn't depend on us; it was conducted by the Front. But it's a fact that, after the Tet offensive, the Americans passed from the attack to the defense. And defense is always the beginning of defeat. I say beginning of defeat without contradicting myself. In fact our final victory is still to come and one cannot yet speak of the definite defeat of the Americans. Actually the Americans are still strong, who can deny it? It will still take much effort on our part to beat them completely. The military problem ... now I speak as a soldier ... yes, the Americans are strong, their weapons are strong. But that won't do them any good because the war in Vietnam is not only a military war, and so military strength and military strategy are not enough either to win it or understand it.

OF Yes, General. But ...

VNG Don't interrupt me. The United States, I was saying, is waging war by arithmetical strategy. They ask their computers, make additions and subtractions, extract square roots, and on that they act. But arithmetical strategy doesn't work here—if it did, they would have exterminated us already. With their airplanes, for example. It was no accident that they thought they could subdue us in a few weeks by unloading on us all those billions of explosives. Because, as I've already told you, they figure everything in billions, in dollars. And they underestimate the spirit of a people that knows how to fight for a just cause, to save its homeland from the invader. They can't get it in their heads that the war in Vietnam is not a question of numbers and well-equipped soldiers, that all that doesn't solve the problem. They said that to win it was necessary to have a ratio of twenty-five to one. Then they realized that figure was impossible and reduced it to six to one. Then they came down to three, maintaining that was a dangerous ratio. No, something more is needed than an equation of three to one, six to one, twenty-five to one, and this something is a whole people against them. When a whole people rebels, there's nothing you can do. And there's no wealth in the world that can

liquidate it. This is the reason for our strategy, our tactics, which the Americans can't understand.

OF Since you're so sure that they'll ultimately be defeated, general, when do you think this will happen?

VNG Oh, this isn't a war that you resolve in a few years. In a war against the United States, you need time, time ... The Americans will be defeated in time, by getting tired. And in order to tire them, we have to go on, to last ... for a long time. That's what we've always done. Because, you know, we're a small nation. We're scarcely thirty million, half of Italy, and we were hardly a million at the beginning of the Christian era, when the Mongols came. After conquering Europe and Asia, the Mongols came here. And we, who were scarcely a million, defeated them. They came here three times, the Mongols, and three times we defeated them. We didn't have their means, yet still we resisted and endured and repeated to ourselves: all the people must fight. What was valid in 1200 is still valid in the twentieth century. The problem is the same. We are good soldiers because we are Vietnamese.

OF General, the Vietnamese in the South who are fighting alongside the Americans are also Vietnamese. What do you think of them as soldiers?

VNG They can't be good soldiers. They aren't good soldiers. Because they don't believe in what they're doing and therefore they lack any combat spirit. The Americans know this too, and they're very much better. If the Americans hadn't known that puppet-soldiers are bad soldiers, they would have had no need to bring so many of their troops into Vietnam.

OF General, let's talk about the Paris Conference. Do you think that peace may come from the Paris Conference or from a military victory like the one you had at Dien Bien Phu?

VNG Dien Bien Phu ... Dien Bien Phu ... The fact that we've gone to Paris proves our good intentions. And it can't be said that Paris is useless, since not only ourselves but also the Liberation Front is in Paris. In Paris we must translate to a political level what is happening in Vietnam and ... Madame! Paris, Madame, *vous savez* ... is something for the diplomats.

OF So are you saying, general, that the war will not be resolved in Paris, that it can only be resolved militarily, never diplomatically, that the Dien Bien Phu of the Americans must still come and will come?

VNG Dien Bien Phu, Madame, Dien Bien Phu ... Look, it's not always true that history repeats itself. But this time it will repeat itself. And just as we beat the French militarily, we will beat the Americans militarily. Yes, Madame, their Dien Bien Phu is still to come. And it will come. The Americans will definitely lose the war at the moment when their military strength reaches its height, and the great machine they've put together no longer succeeds in moving. We'll beat them, that is, at the moment when they have the most men, the most weapons, the most hope of winning. Because all that wealth, that strength, will become a millstone around their necks. It's inevitable.

OF Am I mistaken, General, or did you already try a second Dien Bien Phu at Khe San?

VNG Oh, no. Khe San didn't try to be, nor could it have been, a Dien Bien Phu. Khe San wasn't that important to us. Or it was only to the extent that it was important to the Americans—in fact: as long as they stayed in Khe San to defend their prestige, they said Khe San was important. When they abandoned Khe San, they said Khe San had never been important. Besides, don't you think we won at Khe San? I say yes and ... but do you know that journalists are curious? Too curious. And since I'm a journalist too, I'd like to reverse roles and put a couple of questions to you. First questions. Do you agree on the fact that the Americans have lost the war in the North?

OF I'd say yes, General. If by war in the North you mean the bombings, I think the Americans have lost. Since they've achieved nothing substantial and then have had to suspend them.

VNG Second question. Do you agree on the fact that the Americans have lost the war in the South?

OF No, General. They haven't lost it. Or not yet. You haven't really kicked them out. They're still there. And they're staying.

VNG You're mistaken. They're still there, but in what condition? Stranded, paralyzed, in the expectation of new defeats that they try to avoid without knowing how. Defeats that have and will have disastrous consequences for them—from an economic, political, historical

point of view. They're there with their hands tied, locked in their own strength; they can only place their hopes in the Paris peace talks. But even there they're so stubborn, they don't give up their positions.

OF General, you say that the Americans are stubborn in Paris. But the Americans say the same thing about you. So what good are these Paris peace talks?

VNG Madame, *vous savez ...*

OF General, here we do nothing but talk about peace but it seems that nobody really wants it. So how long will these Paris peace talks last?

VNG A long time! Especially if the United States doesn't give up its position. A long time. All the more since we won't give up ours, we're not in a hurry, we have patience. Because while the delegations are discussing, we go on with the war. We love peace but not peace at any price, not peace by compromise. Peace for us can only mean total victory, the total departure of the Americans. Any compromise would be a threat of slavery. And we prefer death to slavery.

OF So then, General, how long will the war go on? How long will this poor people be asked to sacrifice itself, to suffer, and die?

VNG As long as necessary: ten, fifteen, twenty, fifty years. Until we achieve total victory, as our president Ho Chi Minh said. Yes! Even twenty, even fifty years! We're not in a hurry, we're not afraid.

Henry Kissinger

Washington, D.C., November 1972

ORIANA FALLACI I'm wondering what you feel these days, Dr. Kissinger. I'm wondering if you too are disappointed, like ourselves, like most of the world. Are you disappointed, Mr. Kissinger?

HENRY KISSINGER Disappointed? Why? What has happened these days about which I should be disappointed?

OF Something not exactly happy, Dr. Kissinger. Though you had said that peace was »at hand,« and though you had confirmed that an agreement had been reached with the North Vietnamese, peace has not come. The war goes on as before, and worse than before.

HK There will be peace. We have decided to have it and we will. It will come within a few weeks' time or even less; that is, immediately after the resumption of negotiations with the North Vietnamese for the final accord. This is what I said ten days ago and I repeat it. Yes, we will have peace within a reasonably short period of time if Hanoi agrees to another meeting before signing the accord, a meeting to settle the details, and if it accepts this in the same spirit and with the same attitude that it held in October. These »ifs« are the only uncertainty these days. But it is an uncertainty that I don't even want to consider. You're letting yourself succumb to panic, and in these matters there is no need to succumb to panic. Nor even to impatience. The fact is that ... Well, for months we have been conducting these negotiations and you reporters haven't believed us. You've kept saying that they will come to nothing. Then, all of a sudden, you shouted about peace being already here, and now finally you say the negotiations have failed. In saying this, you take our temperature every day, four times a day. But you take it from Hanoi's point of view. And ... mind you, I understand Hanoi's point of view. The North Vietnamese wanted us to sign on October 31, which was reasonable and unreasonable at the same time and ... No, I don't intend to argue about this.

OF But you had committed yourselves to sign on October 31!

HK I say and repeat that they were the ones to insist on this date, and that to avoid an abstract discussion about dates that at the time seemed entirely theoretical, we said that we would make every effort to conclude the negotiations by October 31. But it was always clear, at least to us, that we would not be able to sign an agreement whose details still remained to be clarified. We would not have been able to observe a date simply because, in good faith, we had promised to make every effort to observe it. So at what point are we? At the point where those details remain to be clarified and where a new meeting is indispensable. They say it's not indispensable, that it's not necessary. I say that it is indispensable and that it will take place. It will take place as soon as the North Vietnamese call me to Paris. But it is only November 4, today is November 4, and I can understand that the North Vietnamese don't want to resume negotiations just a few days after the date on which they had asked us to sign. I can understand their postponing things. But I, at least, cannot conceive their rejecting another meeting. Just now when we have covered ninety percent of the ground and are about to reach our goal. No, I'm not disappointed. I will be, certainly, if Hanoi should break the agreement, if Hanoi should refuse to discuss any changes. But I can't believe that, no. I can't even suspect that we've come so far only to fail on a question of prestige, of procedure, of dates, of nuances.

OF And yet it looks as though they've really become rigid, Dr. Kissinger. They've gone back to a hard line, they've made serious, almost insulting accusations against you ...

HK Oh, that means nothing. It's happened before and we never gave it any importance. I would say that the hard line, the serious accusations, even the insults, are part of the normal situation. Nothing has changed essentially. Since Tuesday, October 31, that is ever since we've calmed down here, you reporters keep asking us if the patient is sick. But I don't see any sickness. And I really maintain that things are going to develop more or less as I say. Peace, I repeat, will come within a few weeks after the resumption of negotiations. Not within a few months. Within a few weeks.

OF But when will the negotiations be resumed? That's the point.

HK As soon as Le Duc Tho wishes to see me again. I'm here waiting.

But without feeling anxious, I assure you. For God's sake! Before, two or three weeks used to go by between one meeting and another! I don't see why now we should be upset if a few days go by. The only reason that you're all so nervous is that people are wondering, »But will they resume these talks?« When you were all cynical and didn't believe that anything was happening, you never realized that time was passing. You were too pessimistic in the beginning, then too optimistic after my press conference, and now again you're too pessimistic. You can't get it into your heads that everything is proceeding as I had always thought it would from the moment I said that peace was at hand. It seems to me I then figured on a couple of weeks. But even if it should take more ... That's enough, I don't want to talk any more about Vietnam. I can't allow myself to, at this time. Every word I say becomes news. At the end of November perhaps. Listen, why don't we meet again at the end of November?

OF Because it's more interesting now, Dr. Kissinger. Because Thieu has dared you to speak. Look at this clipping from *The New York Times*. It quotes Thieu as saying: »Ask Kissinger on what points we've divided, what are the points I don't accept.«

HK Let me see it ... Ah! No, I won't answer him. I won't pay any attention to this invitation.

OF He's already given his own answer, Dr. Kissinger. He's already said that the sore issue is the fact that, according to the terms accepted by you, North Vietnamese troops will remain in South Vietnam. Dr. Kissinger, do you think you'll ever succeed in convincing Thieu? Do you think that America will have to come to a separate agreement with Hanoi?

HK Don't ask me that. I have to keep what I said publicly ten days ago ... I cannot, must not consider an hypothesis that I do not think will happen. An hypothesis that should not happen. I can only tell you that we are determined to have this peace, and that in any case we will have it, in the shortest time possible after my next meeting with Le Due Tho. Thieu can say what he likes. That's his own business.

OF Dr. Kissinger, if I were to put a pistol to your head and ask you to choose between having dinner with Thieu and having dinner with Le Duc Tho ... whom would you choose?

HK I cannot answer that question.

OF And if I were to answer by saying that I'd like to think you'd more willingly have dinner with Le Duc Tho?

HK I cannot, I cannot ... I do not wish to answer that question.

OF So can you answer this question: did you like Le Duc Tho?

HK Yes. I found him a man very dedicated to his cause, very serious, very strong, and always polite and courteous. Also sometimes very hard, in fact difficult, to deal with, but this is something I've always respected in him. Yes, I have great respect for Le Duc Tho. Naturally, our relationship has been very professional, but I think ... I think I've noticed a certain niceness that shines through him. It's a fact, for instance, that at times we've even succeeded in making jokes. We said that one day I might go to teach international relations at the University of Hanoi and he would come to Harvard to teach Marxism-Leninism. Well, I would call our relations good.

OF Would you say the same thing for Thieu?

HK I have also had good relations with Thieu. At first ...

OF Exactly, at first. The South Vietnamese have said that you didn't greet each other like the best of friends.

HK What did they say?

OF That you didn't greet each other like good friends, I repeat. Would you care to state the opposite, Dr. Kissinger?

HK Well ... Certainly we had and have our own viewpoints. And not necessarily the same viewpoints. So let's say that we greeted each other as allies, Thieu and I.

OF Dr. Kissinger, that Thieu was a harder nut to crack than anyone thought has now been shown. So as regards Thieu, do you feel that you've done everything you could or do you hope to be able to do something more? In short, do you feel optimistic about the problem of Thieu?

HK Of course I feel optimistic! I still have things to do. A lot to do! I'm not through it yet! We're not through it yet! And I don't feel powerless. I don't feel discouraged. Not at all. I feel ready and confident. Optimistic! If I can't speak of Thieu, if I can't tell you what we're doing at this point in the negotiations, that doesn't mean I'm about to lose faith in being able to arrange things within the time I've said. That's why it's useless for Thieu to ask you reporters to make me

spell out the points on which we disagree. It's so useless that I don't even get upset by such a demand. Furthermore, I'm not the kind of person to be swayed by emotion. Emotions serve no purpose. Less than anything do they serve to achieve peace.

OF But the dying, those about to die, are in a hurry, Dr. Kissinger. In the newspapers this morning there's an awful picture: a very young Vietcong dead two days after October 31. And there was an awful piece of news: twenty-two Americans dead in a helicopter downed by a Vietcong mortar, three days after October 31. And while you advise against haste, the American Defense department is sending fresh arms and ammunition to Thieu. Hanoi is doing the same.

HK That was inevitable. It always happens before a cease-fire. Don't you remember the maneuvers that took place in the Middle East at the moment of the cease-fire? They went on for at least two years. You see, the fact that we're sending more arms to Saigon and that Hanoi is sending more arms to the North Vietnamese stationed in South Vietnam means nothing. Nothing. Nothing. And don't make me talk about Vietnam anymore, please.

OF Don't you even want to talk about the fact that, according to many, the agreement accepted by you and Nixon is practically a sellout to Hanoi?

HK That's absurd! It's absurd to say that President Nixon, a president who in the face of the Soviet Union and Communist China, and on the eve of elections in his own country has assumed an attitude of aid and defense for South Vietnam against what he considered a North Vietnamese invasion ... it's absurd to think that such a president could sell out to Hanoi. And why should he sell out just now? What we have done hasn't been a sellout. It has been to give South Vietnam an opportunity to survive in conditions that, today, are more political than military. Now it's up to the South Vietnamese to win the political contest that's awaiting them. As we've always said. If you compare the accepted agreement with our proposals of May 8, you'll realize that it's almost the same thing. There are no great differences between what we proposed last May and what the draft of the accepted agreement contains. We haven't put in any new clauses, we haven't made other concessions. I absolutely and totally reject

the notion of a »sellout.« But, really that's enough talk now about Vietnam. Let's talk about Machiavelli, about Cicero, anything but about Vietnam.

OF Let's talk about war, Dr. Kissinger. You're not a pacifist, are you?

HK No, I really don't think I am. Even though I respect genuine pacifists, I don't agree with any pacifist, and especially not with halfway pacifists: you know, those who are pacifists on one side and anything but pacifists on the other. The only pacifists that I agree to talk to are those who accept the consequences of nonviolence right to the end. But even with them I'm only willing to speak to tell them that they will be crushed by the will of the stronger and that their pacifism can only lead to horrible suffering. War is not an abstraction, it is something that depends on conditions. The war against Hitler, for example, was necessary. By that I don't mean that war is necessary in itself, that nations have to make war to maintain their virility. I mean that there are existing principles for which nations must be prepared to fight.

OF And what do you have to say about the war in Vietnam, Dr. Kissinger? You've never been against the war in Vietnam, it seems to me.

HK How could I have been? Not even before holding the position I have today ... No, I've never been against the war in Vietnam.

OF But don't you find that Schlesinger is right when he says that the war in Vietnam has succeeded only in proving that half a million Americans with all their technology have been incapable of defeating poorly armed men dressed in black pajamas?

HK That's another question. If it is a question whether the war in Vietnam was necessary, a just war, rather than judgments of that kind depend on the position one takes when the country is already involved in the war and the only thing left is to conceive a way to get out of it. After all, my role, our role, has been to reduce more and more the degree to which America was involved in the war, so as then to end the war. In the final analysis, history will say who did more: those who operated by criticizing and nothing else, or we who tried to reduce the war and then ended it. Yes, the verdict is up to history. When a country is involved in a war, it's not enough to say

it must be ended. It must be ended in accordance with some principle. And this is quite different from saying that it was right to enter that war.

OF But don't you find, Dr. Kissinger, that it's been a useless war?

HK On this I can agree. But let's not forget that the reason why we entered this war was to keep the South from being gobbled up by the North, it was to permit the South to remain the South. Of course, by that I don't mean that this was our only objective ... It was also something more ... But today I'm not in the position to judge whether the war in Vietnam has been just or not. Whether our getting into it was useful or useless. But are we still talking about Vietnam?

OF Yes. And, still speaking of Vietnam, do you think you can say that these negotiations have been and are the most important undertaking of your career and even of your life?

HK They've been the most difficult undertaking. Also often the most painful. But maybe it's not even right to call them the most difficult undertaking. It's more exact to say that they have been the most painful undertaking. Because they have involved me emotionally. You see, to have approached China was an intellectually difficult task, but not emotionally difficult. Peace in Vietnam instead has been an emotionally difficult task. As for calling these negotiations the most important thing I have done ... No, what I wanted to achieve was not only peace in Vietnam, it was three things. This agreement, the *rapprochement* with China, and a new relationship with the Soviet Union. I've always attached great importance to the problem of a new relationship with the Soviet Union. I would say no less than to the *rapprochement* with China and to ending the war in Vietnam.

OF And you've done it. The coup with China has been a success, the coup with Russia has been a success, and the coup of peace in Vietnam almost. So at this point, I ask you, Dr. Kissinger, the same thing I asked the astronauts when they went to the moon: »What next? What will you do after the moon; what else can you do besides your job as an astronaut?«

HK Ah! And what else did the astronauts say?

OF They were confused and said, »We'll see ... I don't know.«

HK Neither do I. I really don't know what I'll do afterward. But, unlike

the astronauts, I'm not confused by it. I have found so many things to do in my life and I am sure that when I leave this post ... Of course, I'll need some time to recuperate, a period of decompression. No one who is in the position I am can just leave it and start something else right away. But, as soon as I've been decompressed, I'm sure to find something that's worth doing. I don't want to think about it now, it could influence my ... my work. We're going through such a revolutionary period that to plan one's own life, nowadays, is an attitude worthy of the nineteenth-century lower middle class.

OF Would you go back to teaching at Harvard?

HK I might. But it's very, very unlikely. There are more interesting things, and if, with all the experience I've had, I didn't find some way of keeping up an interesting life ... it will really be my own fault. Furthermore, I've by no means decided to give up this job. I like it very much, you know.«

OF Of course. Power is always alluring. Dr. Kissinger, to what degree does power fascinate you? Try to be frank.

HK I will. When you have power in your hands and have held it for a long period of time, you end up thinking of it as something that's due you. I'm sure that when I leave this post, I'll feel the lack of power. Still power as an instrument in its own right has no appeal for me. I don't wake up every morning, My God, isn't it extraordinary that I can have an airplane at my disposal, that a car with a chauffeur is waiting for me at the door? Who would ever have said it was possible? No, such thoughts don't interest me. And, if I should happen to have them, they certainly don't become a determining factor. What interests me is what you can do with power. Believe me, you can do wonderful things ... Anyway it wasn't a desire for power that drove me to take this job. If you look at my political past, you'll see that President Nixon couldn't have figured in my plans. I've been against him in a good three elections.

OF I know. You once even stated that Nixon »wasn't fit to be president.« Has this ever made you feel embarrassed with Nixon, Dr. Kissinger?

HK I don't remember the exact words I may have said against Richard Nixon. But I suppose I must have said something more or less like

that since people go on repeating the phrase in quotation marks. Anyway, if I did say it, that's the proof that Nixon wasn't included in my plans for gaining a high government position. And as for feeling embarrassed with him ... I didn't know him at that time. I had toward him the usual attitude of intellectuals? Do you see what I mean? But I was wrong. President Nixon has shown great strength, great ability. Even by calling on me. I had never approached him when he offered me this job. I was astonished by it. After all he knew I had never shown much friendship or sympathy for him. Oh, yes, he showed great courage in calling me.

OF He didn't lose anything by it, Dr. Kissinger. Except the accusation that's made toward you today, that your Nixon's mental wet nurse.

HK That's a totally senseless accusation. Let's not forget that before he knew me, President Nixon had been very active in foreign policy. It had always been his consuming interest.

Even before he was elected, it was obvious that foreign policy was a very important matter for him. He has very clear ideas on the subject. He's a strong man. Furthermore, you don't become president of the United States, you don't get nominated twice as a presidential candidate, you don't survive so long in politics, if you're a weak man. You can think what you like of President Nixon, but one thing is certain: you don't twice become president by being someone else's tool. Such interpretations are romantic and unfair.

OF Are you very fond of him, Dr. Kissinger?

HK I have great respect for him.

OF Dr. Kissinger, people say that you care nothing about Nixon. They say that all you care about is the job and nothing else. They say you would have done it under any president.

HK Instead, I'm not at all sure that I would have been able to do with another president what I've done with him. Such a special relationship, I mean the relationship there is between me and the president, always depends on the style of the two men. In other words, I don't know many leaders, and I've met several, who would have had the courage to send their aide to Peking without saying anything to anybody. I don't know many leaders who would leave to their aide the task of negotiating with the North Vietnamese, while informing only

a tiny group of people about it. Certain things really depend on the type of president; what I've done has been possible because he made it possible for me.

OF And yet, you were also an advisor to other presidents. Even presidents who were Nixon's opponents. I'm speaking of Kennedy, Johnson ...

HK My position toward all presidents has always been to leave to them the job of deciding if they wanted to know my opinion or not. When they asked me for it, I gave it to them, telling them, indiscriminately, what I thought. It never mattered to me what party they belonged to. I answered questions from Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon with the same independence. I gave them the same advice. It's true that it was more difficult with Kennedy. In fact people like to say that I didn't get along with him. Well ... yes, it was mostly my fault. At that time I was much less mature than now. And then I was a part-time adviser; you can't influence the day-by-day policy of a president if you see him only twice a week when others see him seven days a week. I mean ... with Kennedy and Johnson I was never in a position comparable to the one I have now with Nixon.

OF No Machiavellianism, Dr. Kissinger?

HK No, none. Why?

OF Because at certain moments, listening to you, one might wonder not how much you have influenced the president of the United States, but how much Machiavelli has influenced you.

HK In no way at all. There is really very little of Machiavelli that can be accepted or used in the modern world. The only thing I find interesting in Machiavelli is his way of considering the will of the prince. Interesting, but not to the point of influencing me. If you want to know who has influenced me the most, I'll answer with the names of two philosophers: Spinoza and Kant. So it's curious that you choose to associate me with Machiavelli. People rather associate me with the name of Metternich. Which is actually childish. On Metternich I've written only one book, which was to be the beginning of a long series of books on the construction and disintegration of the international order of the nineteenth century. It was a series that was to end with the First World War. That's all. There can be

nothing in common between me and Metternich. He was chancellor and foreign minister in a period when, from the center of Europe, you needed three weeks to go from one continent to another. He was chancellor and foreign minister in a period when wars were conducted by professional soldiers and diplomacy was in the hands of aristocrats. How can you compare that with today's world, a world where there is no homogenous group of leaders, no homogenous internal situation, no homogenous cultural reality?

OF Dr. Kissinger, how do you explain the incredible movie-star status you enjoy, how do you explain the fact that you're almost more famous and popular than a president? Have you a theory on this matter?

HK Yes, but I won't tell you. Because it doesn't match most people's theories. The theory of intelligence, for example. And then intelligence is not all that important in the exercise of power, and often actually doesn't help. In the same way as a head of state, a fellow who does my job doesn't need to be too intelligent. My theory is completely different, but, I repeat, I won't tell you. Why should I as long as I'm still in the middle of my work? Rather, you tell me yours. I'm sure that you too have a theory about the reasons for my popularity.

OF I'm not sure, Dr. Kissinger. I'm looking for one through this interview. And I don't find it. I suppose that at the root of everything there's your success. I mean, like a chess player, you've made two or three good moves. China, first of all. People like a player who checkmates the king.

HK Yes, China has been a very important element in the mechanics of my success. And yet that's not the main point. The main point ... Well, yes, I'll tell you. What do I care? The main point arises from the fact that I've always acted alone. Americans like that immensely. Americans like the cowboy who leads the wagon train by riding alone on his horse, the cowboy who rides all alone into the town, the village, with his horse and nothing else. Maybe even without a pistol, since he doesn't shoot. He acts, that's all, by being in the right place at the right time. In short, a Western.

OF I see. You see yourself as kind of Henry Fonda, unarmed and ready to fight with his fists for honest ideals. Alone, courageous ...

HK Not necessarily courageous. In fact, this cowboy doesn't have to be courageous. All he needs is to be alone, to show others that he rides into the town and does everything by himself. This amazing, romantic character suits me precisely because to be alone has always been part of my style or, if you like, my technique. Together with independence. Oh, that's very important in me and for me. And, finally, conviction. I've always been convinced that I've had to do whatever I've done. And people feel it, and believe in it. And I care about the fact that they believe in me-when you sway or convince somebody, you shouldn't confuse them. Nor can you even simply calculate. Some people think that I carefully plan what are to be the consequences, for the public, of any of my initiatives or efforts. They think this preoccupation is always on my mind. Instead the consequences of what I do, I mean the public's judgment, have never bothered me. I don't ask for popularity, I'm not looking for popularity. On the contrary, if you really want to know, I care nothing about popularity. I'm not at all afraid of losing my public; I can allow myself to say what I think. I'm referring to what's genuine in me. If I were to let myself be disturbed by the reactions of the public, if I were to act solely on the basis of a calculated technique, I would accomplish nothing. Look at actors. The really good ones don't rely only on technique. They perform by following a technique and their own convictions at the same time. Like me, they're genuine. I don't say that all this has to go on forever. In fact, it may evaporate as quickly as it came. Nevertheless for the moment it's there.

OF Are you trying to tell me you're a spontaneous man, Dr. Kissinger? My God, if I leave out Machiavelli, the first character with whom it seems to me natural to associate you would be some cold mathematician, painfully self-controlled. Unless I'm mistaken, you're a very cold man, Dr. Kissinger.

HK In tactics, not in strategy. In fact, I believe more in human relations than in ideas. I use ideas but I need human relations, as I've shown in my work. After all, didn't what happened to me actually happen by chance? Good God, I was a completely unknown professor. How could I have said to myself: Now I'm going to maneuver things so as to become internationally famous? It would have been

pure folly. I wanted to be where things were happening, of course, but I never paid a price for getting there. I've never made concessions. I've always let myself be guided by spontaneous decisions. One might then say it happened because it had to happen. That's what they always say when things have happened. They never say that about things that don't happen—the history of things that didn't happen has never been written. In a certain sense, however, I'm a fatalist. I believe in destiny. I'm convinced, of course, that you have to fight to reach a goal. But I also believe that there are limits to the struggle that a man can put up to reach a goal.

OF One more thing, Dr. Kissinger: but how do you reconcile the tremendous responsibilities that you've assumed with the frivolous reputation you enjoy? How can you get Mao Tse-tung, Chou En-lai, or Le Duc Tho to take you seriously and then let yourself be judged as a carefree Don Juan or simply a playboy? Doesn't it embarrass you?

HK Not at all. Why should it embarrass me when I go to negotiate with Le Duc Tho? When I speak to Le Duc Tho. I know what I have to do with Le Duc Tho, and when I'm with girls, I know what I must do with girls. Besides, Le Duc Tho doesn't at all agree to negotiate with me because I represent an example of moral rectitude. He agrees to negotiate with me because he wants certain things from me in the same way that I want certain things from him. Look, in the case of Le Duc Tho, as in the case of Chou En-lai and Mao Tse-tung, I think that my playboy reputation has been and still is useful because it served and still serves to reassure people. To show them that I'm not a museum piece. Anyway, this frivolous reputation amuses me.

OF And to think I believed it an undeserved reputation, I mean play-acting instead of a reality.

HK Well, it's partly exaggerated, of course. But in part, let's face it, it's true. What counts is not what degree to which it's true, or to what degree I devote myself to women. What counts is to what degree women are part of my life, a central preoccupation. Well, they aren't that at all. For me women are only a diversion, a hobby. Nobody spends too much time with his hobbies. And I spend only a limited time with them you can see by taking a look at my schedule. I'll tell you something else: it's not seldom that I'd rather see my two

children. I see them often, in fact, though not as much as before. As a rule, we spend Christmas together, the important holidays, and several weeks during the summer, and I go to Boston once a month. Just to see them. You surely know that I've been divorced for some years. No, the fact that being divorced doesn't bother me. The fact of not living with my children doesn't give me any guilt complexes. Ever since my marriage was over, and it was not the fault of either of us that it ended, there was no reason not to get divorced. Furthermore, I'm much closer to my children now than when I was their mother's husband. I'm also much happier with them now.

OF Are you against marriage, Dr. Kissinger?

HK No. The dilemma of marriage or no marriage is one that can be resolved as a question of principle. It could happen that I'll get married again ... yes, that could happen. But, you know, when you're a serious person, as, after all, I am, to live with someone else and to survive that living together is very difficult. The relationship between a woman and a fellow like me is inevitably so complex ... One has to be careful. Oh, it's difficult for me to explain these things. I'm not a person who confides in reporters.

OF So I see, Dr. Kissinger. I've never interviewed anyone who evaded questions and precise definitions like you, anyone who defended himself like you from any attempt by others to penetrate to his personality? Are you shy, Dr. Kissinger?

HK Yes. Fairly so. But as compensation I think I'm pretty well balanced. You see, there are those who depict me as a mysterious, tormented character, and those who depict me as an almost cheerful fellow who's always smiling, always laughing. Both these images are incorrect. I'm neither one nor the other. I'm ... I won't tell you what I am. I'll never tell anyone.

Golda Meir

Jerusalem, November 1972

The story of this interview is quite special. It is the story of an interview that was mysteriously stolen and had to be done all over again. I had met Golda Meir twice, for more than three hours, before the theft occurred. I again saw Golda Meir twice, for about two hours, after the theft had occurred. So I think I can say I'm the only journalist to have talked four times and for a good six hours with this fantastic woman whom you can praise or revile as you like but who cannot be denied the adjective fantastic. Am I mistaken? Am I guilty of optimism, or let's even say feminism? Maybe. But while I admit that I have nothing against feminism, I must add that I will never be objective about Golda Meir. I will never succeed in judging her with the disenchantment I would like to impose on myself when I say that a powerful personage is a phenomenon to be analyzed coldly, surgically.

In my opinion, even if one is not at all in agreement with her, with her politics, her ideology, one cannot help but respect her, admire her, even love her. I almost loved her. Above all, she reminds me of my mother, whom she somewhat resembles. My mother too has the same gray curly hair, that tired and wrinkled face, that heavy body supported on swollen, unsteady, leaden legs. My mother too has that sweet and energetic look about her, the look of a housewife obsessed with cleanliness. They are a breed of women, you see, that has gone out of style and whose wealth consists in a disarming simplicity, an irritating modesty, a wisdom that comes from having toiled all their lives in the pain, discomfort, and trouble that leave no time for the superfluous.

Golda Meir is also something else, something more. For example: for years it was she who could have lighted or extinguished the fuse

of a world conflict. For years she was the most authoritative representative of a doctrine that many people condemn and whose tenets I reject: Zionism. But this we know. And I'm not interested in telling what we know about Golda Meir. I'm interested in telling what we don't know. So here is the story of this interview. Or rather my story with Golda Meir, at that time prime minister.

My first meeting took place at the beginning of October, in her Jerusalem residence. It was a Monday, and she had dressed herself in black, as my mother does when she's expecting visitors. She had also powdered her nose, as my mother does when she's expecting visitors. Seated in the drawing room, with a cup of coffee and a pack of cigarettes, she seemed concerned only to make me feel at ease and to minimize her authority. I had sent her my book on Vietnam and a bouquet of roses. The roses were in a vase and the book in her hands. Before I could ask any questions, she began to discuss the way in which I had viewed the war, and so it was not difficult to get her to speak about her war: of terrorism, of the Palestinians, of the occupied territories, of the conditions that she would put to Sadat and Hussein should she come to negotiate with the Arabs. Her voice was warm and vibrant, her expression smiling and jovial. She charmed me at once, without effort. Her conquest was complete when, an hour and a quarter later, she said she would see me again.

The second meeting took place three days later, in her prime ministerial office. Two highly interesting hours. Abandoning political questions, on which I followed her at times with reservations, in the second meeting she talked exclusively about herself: about her childhood, her family, her trials as a woman, her friends. Pietro Nenni, for instance, for whom she feels boundless admiration and a touching affection. At the moment of saying goodbye, we ourselves had become friends. She even gave me a photograph for my mother, with the most flattering dedication in the world. She begged me to come back and visit her soon. »But without that thing there, eh? Only for a chat between ourselves over a cup of tea!« That thing there was the tape recorder, on which I had taken down every sentence, every reply. Her aides seemed astonished; it was the first time she had spoken with such candor in front of that-thing there. One of

them asked me to send him a copy of the tapes to give to a kibbutz that is preserving documents on Golda Meir.

The tapes. As I said, for my work nothing is more precious than tapes. There are no stenographic records, memories, notes that can take the place of a person's live voice. The tapes were two mini-cassettes of ninety minutes each, plus a third of five or six minutes. Of the three, only the first had been transcribed. So I put them in my purse with the care reserved for a jewel, and left next day, arriving in Rome about eight-thirty in the evening. At nine-thirty I checked into a hotel. A famously good hotel. And here, as soon as I was in my room, I took the three mini-cassettes out of my purse and put them in an envelope. Then I put the envelope on the desk, placing on top of it a pair of glasses, a valuable compact, and other objects, and left the room. I locked the door, of course, gave the key to the desk clerk, and went out. For about fifteen minutes: time to go across the street and eat a sandwich.

When I came back, the key had disappeared. And when I went upstairs, the door to my room was open. Only the door. Everything else was in order. My suitcases were locked, the valuable compact and other objects were still where I had left them—at first glance it seemed that nothing had been touched. And it took a couple of seconds for me to realize that the envelope was empty, that Golda's tapes were gone. Even my tape recorder, which contained another tape with a few sentences, was missing. They had taken it out of a traveling bag, ignoring a jewel box, and then had carefully rearranged the contents of the bag. Finally they had taken two necklaces that I had left on the table. To throw us off the track, the police said.

The police came immediately and stayed until dawn. Even the political division came, represented by sad and unpleasant young men who take no interest in ordinary thefts but only in more delicate matters. Even the scientific division came, with the cameras and instruments that are used to find clues in murder cases. But they found only my fingerprints: the thieves had operated with kid gloves, in every sense. Then the sad and unpleasant young men concluded that it was a political theft, as I myself already knew. What I couldn't understand was why it had been done and by whom. By an Arab

looking for information? By some personal enemy of Golda's? By a jealous journalist? Everything had been done with precision, speed, lucidity—a la James Bond. And surely I had been followed; nobody knew I would arrive in Rome that day, at that hour, in that hotel. What about the key? Why had the key disappeared from its pigeonhole?

The next day something strange happened. A woman with two airline bags appeared at the hotel and asked to see the police. She had found the bags in the bushes of the Villa Borghese and wanted to turn them over to the police. What did the bags contain? Some twenty mini-cassette tapes like mine. She was seized at once and taken to the police station. Here, one by one, the tapes were played. All that was on them were popular songs. A warning? A threat? A hoax? The woman was unable to say why she had gone to look for the police in that particular hotel.

To get back to Golda. Golda learned of the theft the next evening, when she was at home with friends and was telling about our interview: »The day before yesterday I had an experience; I enjoyed being interviewed by ...« She was interrupted by one of her aides, who handed her my telegram. »Everything stolen repeat everything stop try to see me again please.« She read it, they told me, put her hand to her breast, and for several minutes didn't say a word. Then she raised two distressed, determined eyes, and said with careful enunciation, »Obviously somebody doesn't want this interview to be published. So we'll have to do it over. Find me a couple of hours for a new appointment.« This is just what she said, they assure me, and I can't believe that any other government leader would have reacted in this way. I'm sure that any other, in her place, would have given a shrug. »So much the worse for her. I already gave her more than three hours. Let her write what she can remember, manage the best she can.« The fact is that Golda, before being a statesman, is one of that breed of women that has gone out of style. The only condition she made was that we wait a month, and the new appointment was set for Thursday, November 14. And so it happened. Certainly, returning to her that day, I didn't imagine I would discover how much I could love her in spite of all. But, to explain such a serious statement, I must tell what moved me still more.

Golda lives alone. At night there is not even a dog to watch over her sleep in case she feels ill; there is her bodyguard on duty at the entrance to her villa and that's all. During the day, to help her around the house, she has only a girl who comes in to make the bed, dust, and do the ironing. If she invites you to dinner, for example, Golda herself does the cooking, and after cooking, she cleans up: so that tomorrow the girl doesn't find everything dirty. Well, the evening before my appointment, she had guests to dinner and they stayed until two in the morning, leaving a shambles of dirty dishes, dirty glasses, overflowing ashtrays, disorder. So that tomorrow the girl wouldn't find everything dirty, at two in the morning Golda began washing dishes and glasses, sweeping, and tidying, and she did not get to bed before three-thirty. At seven, she got up, as always, to read the papers and listen to the news on the radio. At eight she conferred with certain generals. At nine she conferred with certain ministers. At ten ... she felt ill. At the age of seventy-four, three and a half hours of sleep are not enough.

When I heard about it, I was ashamed to come in. I kept saying, »Let's put off the appointment, it doesn't matter, I swear it doesn't matter!« But she wanted to keep her engagement: »Yes, poor thing, she came all this way and it's the second time she's come and they stole her tapes.« After resting for twenty minutes on the divan in her office, she appeared behind her desk, pale, worn out, and very sweet. I wasn't to worry about the delay; she would give me as much time as I needed. And the interview was resumed—like the time before, better than the time before. In October she had been unable to speak of her husband, of what had been the tragedy of her life. This time she did even this, and since to speak of it is so painful for her, when she found that she couldn't go on, she reassured me: »Don't worry, we'll finish tomorrow!«

Then she gave me a fourth appointment, the splendid hour in which we spoke of old age, youth, and death. God, how alluring she looked when she talked of these things! Many maintain that Golda is ugly and rejoice in doing cruel caricatures of her. I answer: Certainly beauty is an opinion, but to me Golda seems like a beautiful old woman. Many maintain that Golda is masculine and enjoy

spreading vulgar jokes about her. I answer: Certainly femininity is an opinion, but to me Golda seems a woman in every way. That gentle modesty, for instance. That almost incredible candor when you remember how crafty and clever she can be when she swims among the whirlpools of politics. That torment in conveying the anguish of a woman for whom childbearing is not enough. That tenderness in evoking the testimony of her children and grandchildren. That involuntary flirting. The last time I saw her she was wearing a sky-blue pleated blouse with a pearl necklace. Stroking it with her short, pink-manicured nails, she seemed to be asking, »So do I look all right?« And I thought, a pity she's in power, a pity she's on the side of those who command. In a woman like this, power is an error in taste.

I won't repeat that she was born in Kiev in 1898, with the name of Golda Mabovitz, that she grew up in America, in Milwaukee, where she married Morris Meyerson in 1917, that in 1918 she emigrated with him to Palestine, that the surname Meir was urged on her by David Ben-Gurion because it sounded more Hebrew, that her success began after she had served as ambassador to Moscow in the times of Stalin, that she smokes at least sixty cigarettes a day, that she keeps going mainly on coffee, that her working day lasts eighteen hours, that as prime minister she earns the miserable sum of about four hundred dollars a month. I'm not about to look for the secret of her legend. The interview that follows explains it with all her good and her flaws. I composed it following the chronology of the meetings.

Naturally the police never got to the core of the mystery surrounding the theft of those tapes. Or, if they did get to the core of it, they took care not to inform me. But a clue that soon became more than a clue offered itself. And it's worth the trouble to relate it, if only to give another idea of those in power.

At about the same time as my interview with Golda Meir, I had asked for one with Muammar al-Qaddafi. And he, through a high official of the Libyan Ministry of Information, had let me know that he would grant it. But all of a sudden, a few days after the theft of the tapes, he sent for the correspondent of a rival weekly of *L'Europeo*. The correspondent rushed off to Tripoli and, by some coincidence, Qaddafi regaled him with sentences that sounded like answers to

what Mrs. Meir had told me. The poor journalist, needless to say, was ignorant of this detail. But I, needless to say, realized it at once. And I raised a more than legitimate question: How was it possible for Mr. Qaddafi to answer something that had never been published and that no one, other than myself, knew? Had Mr. Qaddafi listened to my tapes? Had he actually received them from someone who had stolen them from me? And immediately my mind recalled an forgotten detail. The day after the theft I had played amateur detective and gone on the sly to rummage in the trash collected on the floor of the hotel where the crime had taken place. Here, and though they swore in the hotel that no Arab had gone up for days, I had discovered a piece of paper written in Arabic. I had given it, along with my statement, to the political division of the police.

That's all. And, of course, I might be mistaken. Of course, the thief might well have been some American tourist or some Frenchman. Qaddafi never granted me the promised interview. He never called me to Tripoli to dispel the shameful suspicion that I still feel justified in nourishing.

About Golda, well, she isn't involved any more in that error of taste called power. She is no longer prime minister. In a sudden, somehow brutal way, history took her off the job and sent her home. But home was the kibbutz where she had been longing to live and, I bet, that brutality was the nicest gift she could dream of. Nobody will ever convince me that she is not much happier now, far from power, than she ever was when I met her. After all, she deserves to end her days as she always dreamed. You will understand it from her own words.

GOLDA MEIR Good morning, dear, good morning. I was just looking at your book on the war. And I was asking myself if women really react differently to war than men. I'd say no. In these last years and during the war of attrition, I've so often found myself having to make certain decisions: for instance, to send our soldiers to places from where they wouldn't come back, or commit them to operations that would cost the lives of who knows how many human beings on both

sides. And I suffered ... I suffered. But I gave those orders as a man would have given them. And now that I think of it, I'm not at all sure that I suffered any more than a man would have. Among my male colleagues I have seen some oppressed by a darker sadness than mine. Oh, not that mine was little! But it didn't influence, no, it didn't influence my decisions War is an immense stupidity. I'm sure that someday all wars will end. I'm sure that someday children in school will study the history of the men who made war as you study an absurdity. They'll be astonished, they'll be shocked, just as today we're shocked by cannibalism. Even cannibalism was accepted for a long time as a normal thing. And yet today, at least physically, it's not practiced any more.

ORIANA FALLACI Mrs. Meir, I'm glad you were the first to bring up this subject. Because it's just the one with which I meant to begin. Mrs. Meir, when will there be peace in the Middle East? Will we be able to see this peace in our lifetimes?

GM You will, I think. Maybe ... I certainly won't. I think the war in the Middle East will go on for many, many years. And I'll tell you why. Because of the indifference with which the Arab leaders send their people off to die, because of the low estimate in which they hold human life, because of the inability of the Arab people to rebel and say enough.

Do you remember when Khrushchev denounced Stalin's crimes during the Twentieth Communist Congress? A voice was raised at the back of the hall, saying, »And where were you, Comrade Khrushchev?« Khrushchev scrutinized the faces before him, found no one, and said, »Who spoke up?« No one answered. »Who spoke up?« Khrushchev asked again. And again no one answered. Then Khrushchev exclaimed, »Comrade, I was where you are now.« Well, the Arab people are just where Khrushchev was, where the man was who reproached him without having the courage to show his face.

We can only arrive at peace with the Arabs through an evolution on their part that includes democracy. But wherever I turn my eyes to look, I don't see a shadow of democracy. I see only dictatorial regimes. And a dictator doesn't have to account to his people for a peace he doesn't make. He doesn't even have to account for the dead.

Who's ever found out how many Egyptian soldiers died in the last two wars? Only the mothers, sisters, wives, relatives who didn't see them come back. Their leaders aren't even concerned to know where they're buried, if they're buried. While we ...

OF While you?

GM Look at these five volumes. They contain the photograph and biography of every man and woman soldier who died in the war. For us, every single death is a tragedy. We don't like to make war, even when we win. After the last one, there was no joy in our streets. No dancing, no songs, no festivities. And you should have seen our soldiers coming back victorious. Each one was a picture of sadness. Not only because they had seen their brothers die, but because they had had to kill their enemies. Many locked themselves in their rooms and wouldn't speak. Or when they opened their mouths, it was to repeat like a refrain: »I had to shoot. I killed.« Just the opposite of the Arabs. After the war we offered the Egyptians an exchange of prisoners. Seventy of theirs for ten of ours. They answered, »But yours are officers, ours are fellahin! It's impossible.« Fellahin, peasants. I'm afraid ...

OF Are you afraid that war between Israel and the Arabs may break out again?

GM Yes. It's possible, yes. Because, you see, many say that the Arabs are ready to sign an agreement with us. But, in these dictatorial regimes, who is to say that such an agreement would be worth anything? Let's suppose that Sadat signs and is then assassinated. Or simply eliminated. Who's to say that his successor will respect the agreement signed by Sadat? Was the truce that all the Arab countries had signed with us respected? Despite that truce, there was never peace on our borders and today we're still waiting for them to attack us.

OF But there's talk of an agreement today, Mrs. Meir. Even Sadat is talking about it. Isn't it easier to negotiate with Sadat than it was to negotiate with Nasser?

GM Not at all. It's exactly the same. For the simple reason that Sadat doesn't want to negotiate with us. I'm more than ready to negotiate with him. I've been saying it for years: »Let's sit down at a table and see if we can arrange things, Sadat.« He flatly refuses. He's not a bit

ready to sit down at a table with me. He goes on talking about the difference between an agreement and a treaty. He says he's ready for an agreement, but not a peace treaty. Because a peace treaty would mean recognition of Israel, diplomatic relations with Israel. See what I mean? Sadat doesn't mean definite talks that would put an end to the war, but a kind of cease-fire. And then he refuses to negotiate with us directly. He wants to negotiate through intermediaries. We can't talk to each other through intermediaries! It's senseless, useless! In 1949 too, in Rhodes, after the War of Independence, we signed an agreement with the Egyptians, Jordanians, Syrians, and Lebanese. But it was through an intermediary, through Dr. Bunche, who on behalf of the United Nations met first with one group, then with another Great results.

OF And the fact that Hussein is talking about peace—that isn't a good sign either?

GM I've said nice things about Hussein lately. I congratulated him for having talked about peace in public. I'll go further and say I believe Hussein. I'm sure that by now he's realized how futile it would be for him to embark on another war. Hussein has understood that he made a terrible mistake in 1967, when he went to war with us without considering the message Eshkol had sent him: »Stay out of the war and nothing will happen to you.« He's understood that it was a tragic piece of foolishness to listen to Nasser and his lies about bombing Tel Aviv. So now he wants peace. But he wants it on his conditions. He claims the left bank of the Jordan, that is the West Bank, he claims Jerusalem, he invokes the United Nations Resolution We once accepted a United Nations resolution. It was when we were asked to divide Jerusalem. It was a deep wound in our hearts, but still we accepted. And we all know the consequences. Were we maybe the ones to attack the Jordanian army? No, it was the Jordanian army that entered Jerusalem! The Arabs are really strange people: they lose wars and then expect to gain by it. After all, did we or didn't we win the Six Day War? Do we or don't we have the right to set our conditions? Since when in history does the one who attacks and loses have the right to dictate terms to the winner? They do nothing but tell us: restore this, restore that, give up this, give up that ...

OF Will you ever give up Jerusalem, Mrs. Meir?

GM No. Never. No. Jerusalem no. Jerusalem never. Inadmissible. Jerusalem is out of the question. We won't even agree to discuss Jerusalem.

OF Would you give up the West Bank of the Jordan?

GM On this point there are differences of opinion in Israel. So it's possible that we'd be ready to negotiate about the West Bank. Let me make myself clearer. I believe the majority of Israelis would never ask the Knesset to give up the West Bank completely. However, if we should come to negotiate with Hussein, the majority of Israelis would be ready to hand back part of the West Bank. I said part—let that be clear. And for the moment the government hasn't decided either yes or no. Nor have I. Why should we quarrel among ourselves before the head of an Arab state says he's ready to sit down at a table with us? Personally, I think that if Hussein should decide to negotiate with us, we might give him back a part of the West Bank. Either after a decision by the government or parliament, or after a referendum. We could certainly hold a referendum on this matter.

OF And Gaza? Would you give up Gaza, Mrs. Meir?

GM I say that Gaza must, should be part of Israel. Yes, that's my opinion. Our opinion, in fact. However, to start negotiating, I don't ask Hussein or Sadat to agree with me on any point. I say, »My opinion, our opinion, is that Gaza should remain part of Israel. I know you think otherwise. All right, let's sit down at a table and start negotiating.« Do I make myself clear? It's by no means indispensable to find ourselves in agreement before the negotiations: we hold negotiations precisely in order to reach an agreement. When I state that Jerusalem will never be divided, that Jerusalem will remain in Israel, I don't mean that Hussein or Sadat shouldn't mention Jerusalem. I don't even mean that they shouldn't mention Gaza. They can bring up anything they like at the time of negotiations.

OF And the Golan Heights?

GM It's more or less the same idea. The Syrians would like us to come down from the Golan Heights so that they can shoot down at us as they did before. Needless to say, we have no intention of doing so,

we'll never come down from the plateau. Nevertheless, we're ready to negotiate with the Syrians too. On our conditions. And our conditions consist in defining a border between Syria and Israel that stabilizes our presence up there. In other words, the Syrians today find themselves exactly where the border ought to be. On this I don't think we'll yield. Because only if they stay where they are today can they be kept from shooting down at us as they did for nineteen years.

OF And the Sinai?

GM We've never said that we wanted the whole Sinai or most of the Sinai. We don't want the whole Sinai. We want control of Sharm El Sheikh and part of the desert, let's say a strip of desert, connecting Israel with Sharm El Sheikh. Is that clear? Must I repeat it? We don't want most of the Sinai. Maybe we don't even want half of the Sinai. Because it's not important to us to be sitting along the Suez Canal. We're the first to realize that the Suez Canal is too important to the Egyptians, that to them it even represents a question of prestige. We also know that the Suez Canal isn't necessary for our defense. We're ready to give it up as of today. But we won't give up Sharm El Sheikh and a strip of desert connecting us with Sharm El Sheikh. Because we want our ships to be able to enter and leave Sharm El Sheikh. Because we don't want to find ourselves again in the conditions we found ourselves in the other time, when we gave up Sharm El Sheikh. Because we don't want to take the risk of waking up again some morning with the Sinai full of Egyptian troops. On these terms, and only on these terms, are we ready to negotiate with the Egyptians. To me they seem very reasonable terms.

OF And so it's obvious that you'll never go back to your old borders.

GM Never. And when I say never, it's not because we mean to annex new territory. It's because we mean to ensure our defense, our survival. If there's any possibility of reaching the peace you spoke of in the beginning, this is the only way. There'd never be peace if the Syrians were to return to the Golan Heights, if the Egyptians were to take back the whole Sinai, if we were to re-establish our 1967 borders with Hussein. In 1967, the distance to Natanya and the sea was barely ten miles, fifteen kilometers. If we give Hussein the possibility of covering those fifteen kilometers, Israel risks being cut in two

and ... They accuse us of being expansionists, but, believe me, we're not interested in expanding. We're only interested in new borders. And look, these Arabs want to go back to the 1967 borders. If those borders were the right ones, why did they destroy them?

OF Mrs. Meir, so far we've been talking about agreements, negotiations, treaties. But since the 1967 cease-fire, the war in the Middle East has taken on a new face: the face of terror, of terrorism. What do you think of this war and the men who are conducting it? Of Arafat, for instance, of Habash, of the Black September leaders?

GM I simply think they're not men. I don't even consider them human beings, and the worst thing you can say of a man is that he's not a human being. It's like saying he's an animal, isn't it? But how can you call what they're doing »a war«? Don't you remember what Habash said when he had a bus full of Israeli children blown up? »It's best to kill the Israelis while they're still children.« Come on, what they're doing isn't a war. It's not even a revolutionary movement because a movement that only wants to kill can't be called revolutionary.

Look, at the beginning of the century in Russia, in the revolutionary movement that rose up to overthrow the czar, there was one party that considered terror the only means of struggle. One day a man from this party was sent with a bomb to a street corner where the carriage of one of the czar's high officials was supposed to pass. The carriage went by at the expected time. But the official was not alone, he was accompanied by his wife and children. So what did this true revolutionary do? He didn't throw the bomb. He let it go off in his hand and was blown to pieces. Look, we too had our terrorist groups during the War of Independence: the Stern, the Irgun. And I was opposed to them, I was always opposed to them. But neither of them ever covered itself with such infamy as the Arabs have done with us. Neither of them ever put bombs in supermarkets or dynamite in school buses. Neither of them ever provoked tragedies like Munich or Lod airport.

OF And how can one fight such terrorism, Mrs. Meir? Do you really think it helps to bomb Lebanese villages?

GM To a certain extent, yes. Of course. Because the fedayeen are in those villages. The Lebanese themselves say, »Certain areas are

Al Fatah territory.« So certain areas should be cleaned up. It's the Lebanese who should think of cleaning them up. The Lebanese say they can't do anything. Well, that's what Hussein used to say at the time when the fedayeen were encamped in Jordan. Even our American friends said it: »It's not that Hussein doesn't want to get rid of them! It's that he doesn't have enough strength to get rid of them.« But in September 1970, when Amman was in danger and his palace was in danger and he himself found himself in danger, Hussein realized that he could do something. And he liquidated them. If the Lebanese go on doing nothing, we'll respond, »Very well. We realize your difficulties. You can't do anything. But we can. And just to show you, we'll bomb those areas that shelter the fedayeen.«

Maybe more than any other Arab country, Lebanon is offering hospitality to the terrorists. The Japanese who carried out the Lod massacre came from Lebanon. The girls who tried to hijack the Sabena plane in Tel Aviv had been trained in Lebanon. Are we supposed to sit here with our hands folded, praying and murmuring, »Let's hope that nothing happens«? Praying doesn't help. What helps is to counterattack. With all possible means, including means that we don't necessarily like. Certainly we'd rather fight them in the open. But since that's not possible ...

OF Mrs. Meir, would you be ready to talk with Arafat or Habash?

GM Never! Not with them! Never! What is there to discuss with people who haven't even the courage to risk their own skins and consign the bombs to someone else? Like those two Arabs in Rome, for example. The ones who handed the record player with a bomb to the two stupid English girls. Listen, we want to arrive at peace with the Arab states, with responsible governments of the Arab states, whatever their regime, since their regime isn't our concern. But to people like Habash, Arafat, Black September, we have nothing to say. The people to talk to are others.

OF Do you mean us Europeans, Mrs. Meir?

GM Exactly. The Europeans, and not only the Europeans, must decide to stop this business that you call war. Up to now there's been too much tolerance on your part. A tolerance, let me say, that has its roots in unextinguished anti-Semitism. But anti-Semitism is never

exhausted in the suffering of just Jews. History has shown that anti-Semitism in the world has always brought on disaster for everyone. It begins by tormenting the Jews and ends by tormenting anybody. To give you a trite example, there was that first airplane that was hijacked. It was an El Al plane, remember? They hijacked it to Algeria. Well, some people said it was too bad, others were happy about it, and no pilot dreamed of declaring, »From now on I don't fly to Algeria.« If he had said this, if they had said it, this nightmare of air piracy wouldn't exist today. Instead no one reacted, and today air piracy is a custom of our times. Any madman can hijack a plane to indulge his madness, any criminal can hijack a plane to extort money. You don't need political reasons.

But let's get back to Europe and the fact that terrorism has its headquarters in Europe. In every European capital there are offices of so-called liberation movements, and you know very well it's not a matter of harmless offices. But you do nothing against them. You'll be sorry. Thanks to your inertia and your indulgence, terror will be multiplied and you'll pay the price of it too. Haven't the Germans already done so?

OF Yes, you were very hard on the Germans after they released the three Arabs.

GM Oh, you must try to understand what the Munich tragedy meant to us! The very fact that it happened in Germany ... I mean, post-war Germany is not Nazi Germany. I know Willy Brandt; I always meet him at socialist conferences; he was once here too, when he was mayor of Berlin, and I'm well aware that he fought the Nazis. Not for a moment did I think that he was glad to release those Arabs. But Germany .. . You see, I've never been able to set foot in Germany. I go to Austria and can't bring myself to enter Germany For us Jews, relations with Germany are such a conflict between mind and heart Don't make me say such things. I'm prime minister, I have certain responsibilities ... Look, let me conclude by saying that my harsh judgment couldn't be helped. The statements made by the Germans were like adding insult to injury. After all it was a matter of Arabs who had participated in the killing of eleven unarmed Israelis and who now will try to kill others.

OF Mrs. Meir, do you know what many people think? That Arab terrorism exists and will always exist as long as there are Palestinian refugees.

GM That's not so, because terrorism has become a kind of international evil—a sickness that strikes people who have nothing to do with Palestinian refugees. Take the example of the Japanese who carried out the Lod massacre. Are the Israelis occupying any Japanese territory? As for the refugees, listen: wherever a war breaks out there are refugees. Palestinian refugees aren't the only ones in the world; there are Pakistani, Hindu, Turkish, German ones. For heaven's sake, there were millions of German refugees along the Polish border that's now inside Poland. And yet Germany assumed the responsibility for these people, who were its own people. And the Sudeten Germans? Nobody thinks the Sudeten Germans should go back to Czechoslovakia—they themselves know they'll never go back. In the ten years I attended United Nations meetings, I never heard anyone talk about the Sudeten Germans who were thrown out of Czechoslovakia. Why does everyone get so emotional about the Palestinians and no one else?

OF But the case of the Palestinians is different, Mrs. Meir, because ...

GM It certainly is. Do you know why? Because when there's a war and people run away, they usually run away to countries with a different language and religion. The Palestinians instead fled to countries where their own language was spoken and their own religion observed. They fled to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan—where nobody ever did anything to help them. As for Egypt, the Egyptians who took Gaza didn't even allow the Palestinians to work and kept them in poverty so as to use them as a weapon against us. That's always been the policy of the Arab countries: to use the refugees as a weapon against us. Hammarskjöld had proposed a development plan for the Middle East, and this plan provided first of all for the resettlement of the Palestinian refugees. But the Arab countries said no.

OF Mrs. Meir, don't you at least feel a little sorry for them?

GM Of course I do. But pity is not responsibility, and the responsibility for the Palestinians isn't ours, it's the Arabs'. We in Israel have absorbed about 1,400,000 Arab Jews: from Iraq, from Yemen,

from Egypt, from Syria, from North African countries like Morocco. People who when they got here were full of diseases and didn't know how to do anything. Among the seventy thousand Jews who came here from Yemen, for example, there wasn't a single doctor or a single nurse, and almost all of them had tuberculosis. And still we took them, and built hospitals for them, and took care of them, we educated them, put them in clean houses, and turned them into farmers, doctors, engineers, teachers ... Among the 150,000 Jews who came here from Iraq, there was only a very small group of intellectuals, and yet today their children go to the university. Of course, we have problems with them—all that glitters is not gold—but the fact remains that we accepted and helped them. The Arabs, on the other hand, never do anything for their own people. They make use of them and that's all.

OF Mrs. Meir, what if Israel let the Palestinian refugees come back here?

GM Impossible. For twenty years they've been fed on hatred for us; they can't come back among us. Their children weren't born here, they were born in the camps, and the only thing they know is that they must kill Israelis, destroy Israel. We found arithmetic books in the Gaza schools that put problems like this: »You have five Israelis. You kill three of them. How many Israelis are left to be killed?« When you teach such things to children of seven or eight, there's no more hope. Oh, it would be a great misfortune if there were no other solution for them but to return here! But there is a solution. It was demonstrated by the Jordanians when they gave them citizenship and called on them to build a country called Jordan. Yes, what Abdullah and Hussein did was much better than what the Egyptians did. But did you know that in the good old days in Jordan, Palestinians were holding office as prime minister and foreign minister? Did you know that after the partition of 1922 Jordan had only three hundred thousand Bedouins and that Palestinian refugees were in the majority? Why didn't they accept Jordan as their country, why ... ?

OF Because they don't recognize themselves as Jordanians, Mrs. Meir. Because they say they are Palestinians and that their home is in Palestine, not Jordan.

GM Then we have to understand what we mean by the word Palestine. We must remember that when England assumed the mandate over Palestine, Palestine was the land included between the Mediterranean and the borders of Iraq. This Palestine covered both banks of the Jordan, and was even governed by the same high commissioner. Then in 1922 Churchill partitioned it, and the territory west of the Jordan became Cisjordania, and the territory east of the Jordan became Transjordania. Two names for the same people. Abdullah, Hussein's grandfather, had Transjordania and later he also took over Cisjordania, but, I repeat, it was still the same people. The same Palestine. Before liquidating Israel, Arafat should liquidate Hussein. But Arafat is so ignorant. He doesn't even know that, at the end of the First World War, what now is Israel wasn't called Palestine: it was called Southern Syria. And then ... after all! If we must talk about refugees, I'll remind you that for centuries the Jews were refugees par excellence! Dispersed in countries where their language wasn't spoken, their religion not observed, their customs not recognized ... Russia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Germany, France, Italy, England, Arabia, Africa ... Shut up in ghettos, persecuted, exterminated. And yet they survived, and they never stopped being a people, and they came together again to found a nation ...

OF But that's just what the Palestinians want, Mrs. Meir: to form a nation. It's just for this reason that some people say they should have their state on the West Bank

GM Look, I've already explained that to east and west of the Jordan you find the same people. I've already explained that once they were called Palestinians and later were called Jordanians. If they now want to call themselves Palestinians or Jordanians, I couldn't care less. It's none of my business. But it is my business that they don't set up another Arab state between Israel and what is now called Jordan. In the stretch of land between the Mediterranean and the borders of Iraq, there's room for only two countries; one Arab and one Jewish. If we sign a peace treaty with Hussein and define our borders with Jordan, whatever happens on the other side of the border won't concern Israel. The Palestinians can come to any arrangement they like with Hussein; they can call that state what they like, give it

any regime they like. The important thing is that a third Arab state doesn't emerge between us and Jordan. We don't want it. We can't allow it. Because it would come to be used as a dagger against us.

OF Mrs. Meir, I'd like to take up another subject. And here it is. When one has a dream, this dream feeds on utopia. And when the dream is realized, one discovers that ... utopia is utopia. Are you satisfied with what Israel is today?

GM I'm a frank woman. I'll answer you frankly. As a socialist, no. I can't say that Israel is what I dreamed. As a Jewish socialist who has always laid great stress on the Jewish component in her socialism, well, Israel is more than what I dreamed. Now I'll explain. For me, the realization of Zionism is part of socialism. I know that other socialists won't agree with me, but that's how I think of it. I'm not objective about this, and I think there are a couple of gross injustices in the world: the one oppressing black Africans and the one oppressing Jews. And besides I think these two injustices can only be corrected by socialist principles. To see justice for the Jewish people has been the purpose of my life and ... to cut it short, forty or fifty years ago, I had no hopes at all that the Jews would have a sovereign state. We do have one now, so it doesn't seem to me right to worry too much about its faults and defects. We have a soil where we can put our feet, where we can realize our ideals of socialism that before were just hanging in the air. That's already a lot. Of course, if I were really to examine my thoughts ...

OF What is it you don't like in Israel? What is it that's disappointed you?

GM Oh ... I think that none of us dreamers realized in the beginning what difficulties would come up. For example, we hadn't foreseen the problem of bringing together Jews who had grown up in such different countries and remained divided from each other for so many centuries. Jews have come here from all over the world, as we wanted, yes. But each group had its own language, its own culture, and to integrate it with other groups has been much more difficult than it seemed in theory. It's not easy to create an homogenous nation with people so different There was bound to be a clash. And it gave me disappointment and grief. Also ... you'll think me foolish, naive, but

I thought that in a Jewish state there wouldn't be the evils that afflict other societies. Theft, murder, prostitution ... I thought so because we had started out well. Fifteen years ago in Israel there were almost no thefts, and there were no murders, there was no prostitution. Now instead we have everything, everything And it's something that breaks your heart; it hurts more than to discover that you still haven't created a more just, a more equal society.

OF Mrs. Meir, but do you still believe in socialism as you did forty years ago?

GM Essentially, yes. That's still the basic idea... . But to be honest, one must look at things realistically. One must admit that there's a big difference between socialist ideology and socialism as put to a practical test. All socialist parties that have come to form governments and assumed the responsibilities for a country have had to stoop to compromise. Not only that, ever since socialists have been in power in individual countries, international socialism has declined. It was one thing to be an international socialist when I was a girl, that is when no socialist party was in power, and quite another now. The dream I had, the dream of a just world united in socialism, has gone to the devil. National interests have prevailed over international interests, and the Swedish socialists have shown themselves to be first of all Swedes, the English socialists first of all Englishmen, the Jewish socialists first of all Jews This I began to understand during the war in Spain. In a lot of countries there were socialists in power. But they didn't lift a finger for the Spanish socialists.

OF But what socialism are we talking about, Mrs. Meir? I mean, do you agree with Nenni when he says that he's come to prefer Swedish socialism?

GM Of course! Because, you see, you can have all the dreams you like, but when you're dreaming, you're not awake. And when you wake up, you realize that your dream has very little in common with reality. To be free, to be able to say what you think, that's so necessary Soviet Russia isn't poor, it isn't illiterate, and yet there the people don't dare speak. And privilege still exists At the United Nations I never saw any difference between the foreign ministers of socialist countries and the foreign ministers of reactionary countries. A

year ago, by abstaining from voting, they even let a resolution pass calling us war criminals. And I told my socialist colleagues when I met them at the Vienna Conference: »Your country abstained from voting. So that makes me a war criminal, eh?« But you were speaking of Pietro Nenni ... Nenni is something else. Nenni's a separate chapter in the history of socialism. Nenni's one of the best individuals existing in the world today. Because he's so honest, there's such rectitude in him, such humanity, such courage of his convictions! I admire him like no one else. I'm proud to be able to call him a friend. And ... of course I think the same as he does about socialism!: Mrs. Meir, do you know what I've been thinking, listening to you? I've been wondering if so much sadness hasn't made you cynical, or at least disillusioned.

GM Oh, no! Me, I'm not at all cynical! I've lost my illusions, that's all. For example, forty or fifty years ago, I thought that a socialist was always an honest person, incapable of telling lies. Now I know instead that a socialist is a human being like anyone else, capable of lying like anyone else, and behaving dishonestly like anyone else. That's sad, of course, but it's not enough to make you lose your faith in man! Not enough to conclude: man is fundamentally bad. No, no! Look, when I meet someone, I always think that this is an honest person and I go on thinking so until I have proof to the contrary. If later I do have proof to the contrary, I still don't say that that person is bad. I say that he or she has behaved badly with me. After all, I'm not suspicious. I never expect the worst from people. And ... I don't know if I'd call myself an optimist. At my age, optimism is too much of a luxury. But, look, in my long life I've seen so much evil, that's true. In return, I've also seen so much good. So very much And if in my memory I go over the many individuals I've known, believe me, there are very few I can judge in a completely negative way. But are you religious, Mrs. Meir?

OF No! Oh, no! I never have been. Not even when I was a little girl. No, this attitude of mine doesn't come from a religious faith. It comes from my instinctive faith in men, from my stubborn love for humanity. Religion ... You know, my family was traditional but not religious. Only my grandfather was religious, but with him you

go very far back in time, you go back to the days when we lived in Russia. In America, you see ... we spoke Hebrew among ourselves, we observed the holidays, but we went to temple very seldom. I only went for the New Year, to go with my mother and find her a place to sit. The only time I've followed the prayers in a synagogue was in Moscow. And you know what I say? If I'd stayed in Russia, I might have become religious. Maybe. Why?

GM Because in Russia the synagogue is the only place where Jews can express themselves. Listen to what I did when I was sent to Moscow in 1948 by my government, as head of the diplomatic mission. Before leaving I gathered all the people who were going with me and said, »Take all your prayer books, prayer shawls, yarmulkes, everything. I'm sure we'll meet Jews only in the synagogue.« Well, that's just how it happened. Of course, the first Saturday no one knew I'd go to the synagogue and I found hardly two hundred people there. Or a little more. But for Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, they came in thousands. I stayed in the synagogue from morning to night, and at the moment when the rabbi intoned the last sentence of the prayer of atonement, the one that says »*Leshana habaa b'Yerusha-laym*, next year in Jerusalem,« the whole synagogue seemed to tremble. And I, who am an emotional woman, prayed. Really. You understand, it wasn't like being in Buenos Aires or New York and saying, »Next year in Jerusalem.« From Buenos Aires, New York, you take a plane and you go. There in Moscow, the invocation took on a special meaning. And while praying, I said, »God, make it really happen! If not next year, in a few years.« Does God exist and did he listen to me? It's really happening.

OF Mrs. Meir, don't you feel some sentimental tie with Russia?

GM No, none. You know, many of my friends who left Russia as adults say that they feel attached to that country, to its scenery, its literature, its music. But I didn't get time to appreciate those things. I was too little when I left Russia; I was only eight, and of Russia I only have bad memories. No, from Russia I didn't take with me even a single moment of joy—all my memories up to the age of eight are tragic memories. The nightmare of pogroms, the brutality of the Cossacks charging down on young socialists, fear, shrieking—that's

the luggage I packed in Russia and carried to the United States. Do you know what's the first memory in my life? My father nailing up the door and windows to keep the Cossacks from breaking into our house and killing us. Oh, that sound of the hammer pounding nails into the wooden planks! Oh, the sound of horses' hoofs when the Cossacks are advancing along our street!

OF How old were you, Mrs. Meir?

GM Five or six. But I remember everything so vividly. We lived in Kiev, and the day my father left Kiev to go to the United States ... We were very poor, we didn't even have enough to eat, and he thought of going to America for a year or two, saving a little money and coming back. In the early 1900s, to the Jews America was a kind of bank where you went to pick up the dollars scattered on the sidewalks and came back with your pockets full. So my father left Kiev, but Kiev was a city forbidden to Jews who didn't have a job, for example a job like my father's, he being a craftsman, and once he had left, we had to leave too.

And we went to Pinsk, I, my mother, my two sisters. That was in 1903. We stayed in Pinsk until 1905, when the brutality of the czarist regime reached its height. The Constitution of 1905, in fact, was a dirty lie—a trick to gather the socialists together and arrest them more easily. And my elder sister, who was nine years older than I, belonged to the socialist movement. Her political activities kept her out late at night, and it used to drive my mother crazy because our house was next to a police station where they brought the young socialists they'd arrested and ... They beat them to death and every night you heard such cries! My mother always thought she could recognize my sister's voice. »It's she! It's she!« Oh, we were so happy when my father wrote us to join him in America because in America things were good!

OF You're very attached to America, aren't you?

GM Yes, and not only because I grew up in America, because in America I went to school, and lived there until I was almost twenty. Because ... well, because in America I lost my terror of Pinsk, of Kiev. How can I explain the difference for me between America and Russia? Look, when we arrived, I was a little more than eight years

old, my elder sister was seventeen, and my younger one four and a half. My father was working and belonged to the union. He was very proud of his union, and two months later, on Labor Day, he said to my mother, »Today there's a parade. If you all come to the corner of such and such a street, you'll see me marching with my union!« My mother took us along, and while we were there waiting for the parade, along came the mounted police to clear a path for the marchers—do you see? But my little four-and-a-half-year-old sister couldn't know that, and when she saw the police on horseback, she began to tremble and then to cry, »The Cossacks! The Cossacks!« We had to take her away, without giving my father the satisfaction of seeing him marching with his union, and she stayed in bed for days with a high fever, repeating: »The Cossacks! The Cossacks!« So, look, the America I knew is a place where men on horseback protect a parade of workers, the Russia I knew is a place where men on horseback massacre Jews and young socialists.

OF That's not exactly how it is, Mrs. Meir, but anyway ...

GM Oh, listen! America is a great country. It has many faults, many social inequalities, and it's a tragedy that the Negro problem wasn't resolved fifty or a hundred years ago, but it's still a great country, a country full of opportunity, of freedom! Does it seem to you nothing to be able to say what you like, to write what you like, even against the government, the Establishment? Maybe I'm not objective, but for America I feel such gratitude! I'm fond of America, okay? Okay. We've finally come to the figure of Golda Meir. So shall we talk about the woman Ben-Gurion called »the ablest man in my cabinet«?

GM That's one of the legends that's grown up around me. It's also a legend I've always found irritating, though men use it as a great compliment. Is it? I wouldn't say so. Because what does it really mean? That it's better to be a man than a woman, a principle on which I don't agree at all. So here's what I'd like to say to those who make me such a compliment: And what if Ben-Gurion had said, »The men in my cabinet are as able as a woman«? Men always feel so superior! I'll never forget what happened at a congress of my party in New York in the 1930s. I made a speech, and in the audience there was a writer friend of mine. An honest person, a man of great culture and refinement. When it was over, he came up to me and exclaimed,

»Congratulations! You've made a wonderful speech! And to think you're only a woman!« That's just what he said, in such a spontaneous, instinctive way. It's a good thing I have a sense of humor

OF The Women's Liberation Movement will like that, Mrs. Meir.

GM Do you mean those crazy worsen who burn their bras and go around all disheveled and hate men? They're crazy. Crazy. But how can one accept such crazy women who think it's a misfortune to get pregnant and a disaster to bring children into the world? And when it's the greatest privilege we women have over men! Feminism Listen, I got into politics at the time of the First World War, when I was sixteen or seventeen, and I've never belonged to a women's organization. When I joined the Zionist labor movement, I found only two other women—ninety percent of my comrades were men. I've lived and worked among men all my life, and yet to me the fact of being a woman has never, never I say, been an obstacle. It's never made me uncomfortable or given me an inferiority complex. Men have always been good to me.

OF Are you saying you prefer them to women?

GM No, I'm saying that I've never suffered on account of men because I was a woman. I'm saying that men have never given me special treatment but neither have they put obstacles in my way. Of course I've been lucky, of course not all women have had the same experience, but be that as it may, my personal case doesn't prove that those crazy women are right. There's only one point on which I agree with them: to be successful, a woman has to be much more capable than a man. Whether she dedicates herself to a profession or dedicates herself to politics. There aren't many women in our parliament, something that bothers me a lot. And these few women, let me assure you, are by no means less capable than men. In fact, they're often much more capable. So it's ridiculous that toward women there still exist so many reservations, so many injustices, that when a list is being drawn up for the elections, for example, only men's names get chosen. But is it all the fault of men? Wouldn't it be, at least partly, the fault of women too?

OF Mrs. Meir, you've just said that to be successful a woman has to be much more capable than a man. Doesn't that perhaps mean it's more difficult to be a woman than a man?

GM Yes, of course. More difficult, more tiring, more painful. But not necessarily through the fault of men—for biological reasons, I'd say. After all, it's the woman who gives birth. It's the woman who raises the children. And when a woman doesn't want only to give birth, to raise children ... when a woman also wants to work, to be somebody ... well, it's hard. Hard, hard. I know it from personal experience. You're at your job and you think of the children you've left at home. You're at home and you think of the work you're not doing. Such a struggle breaks out in you, your heart goes to pieces. Unless you live in a kibbutz, where life is organized in such a way that you can both work and have children. Outside the kibbutz, it's all running around, trying to be in two places at once, getting upset, and ... well, all this can't help but be reflected on the structure of the family. Especially if your husband is not a social animal like yourself and feels uncomfortable with an active wife, a wife for whom it's not enough to be only a wife There has to be a clash. And the clash may even break up the marriage. As happened to me. Yes, I've paid for being what I am. I've paid a lot.

OF In what sense, Mrs. Meir?

GM In the sense of ... pain. Because, you see, I know that my children, when they were little, suffered a lot on my account. I left them alone so often. ... I was never with them when I should have been and would have liked to be. Oh, I remember how happy they were, my children, every time I didn't go to work because of a headache. They jumped and laughed and sang, »Mamma's staying home! Mamma has a headache!« I have a great sense of guilt toward Sarah and Menahem, even today when they're adults and have children of their own. And still ... still I have to be honest and ask myself, Golda, deep in your heart do you really regret the fact that you behaved as you did with them? No. Not deep in my heart. Because through suffering I gave them a life that's more interesting, less banal than the ordinary. I mean, they didn't grow up in a narrow family environment. They met important people, they heard serious discussions, they took part in big things. And if you talk to them, they'll tell you the same thing. They'll tell you: »Yes, Mamma neglected us too much, she made us suffer by her absence, her politics, by not paying attention to us, but

we can't bear her a grudge because, being the way she was, she gave us so much more than any other mother!«

If you knew how proud I felt the day that ... In 1948, the time when we were fighting the British, I was writing the handbills that the boys and girls in the movement pasted on the walls at night. My daughter didn't know I was the one who was writing those handbills, and one day she said to me, »Mamma, I'll be back late tonight. And maybe I won't come back.« »Why?« I asked, alarmed. »I can't tell you, Mamma.« Then she went out with a package under her arm. Nobody could know better than I what was in that package, and putting up handbills at night was very dangerous. I stayed up till dawn waiting for Sarah, cursing myself in the fear that something had happened to her. But at the same time I was so proud of her!

OF Mrs. Meir, that sense of guilt that you feel toward your children, did you also feel it toward your husband?

GM Let's not talk about that ... I don't want to talk about it ... I never talk about it ... Well, all right, let's try. You see, my husband was an extraordinarily nice person. Educated, kind, good. Everything about him was good. But he was also a person who was only interested in his family, his home, his music, his books. He was aware of social problems, of course, but when it came to his home and the unity of his family, they lost whatever interest they had for him. I was too different from him. I had always been. Domestic bliss wasn't enough for me, I had to be doing what I was doing! To give it up would have seemed to me an act of cowardice, of dishonesty with myself. I would have become set in my discontent, in sadness

I met my husband when I was just fifteen. We got married very soon, and from him I learned all the beautiful things like music and poetry. But I wasn't bom to be satisfied with music and poetry, and ... He wanted me to stay home and forget about politics. Instead I was always out, always in politics and ... Of course I have a sense of guilt toward him too I made him suffer so much, him too He came to Israel because I wanted to come to Israel. He came to the kibbutz because I wanted to be on a kibbutz. He took up a way of life that didn't suit him because it was the kind of life that I couldn't do without It was a tragedy. A great tragedy. Because, as I say, he

was a wonderful person and with a different woman he could have been very happy.

OF Didn't you ever make an effort to adapt yourself to him, to please him?

GM For him I made the biggest sacrifice of my life: I left the kibbutz. You see, there was nothing I loved so much as the kibbutz. I liked everything about the kibbutz: the manual work, the comradeship, the discomforts. Ours was in the valley of Jezreel, and in the beginning it had nothing to offer but swamps and sand, but soon it became a garden full of orange trees, fruits, and just to look at it gave me such joy that I could have spent my whole life there. Instead he couldn't stand it, neither psychologically nor physically. He couldn't stand eating at the communal table with the rest of us. He couldn't stand the hard work. He couldn't stand the climate and the feeling of being part of a community. He was too individualistic, too introverted, too delicate. He got sick and ... we had to leave, go back to the city, to Tel Aviv. It was a feeling of pain that still goes through me like a needle. It was really a tragedy for me, but I put up with it, thinking that in the city the family would be more tranquil and more united. But it wasn't like that. And in 1938 we separated. Then in 1951 he died.

OF Wasn't he proud of you, at least in the last years?

GM I don't know ... I don't think so. I don't know what he thought in the last years, and besides he was so withdrawn that nobody would have been able to guess it. Anyway his tragedy didn't come from the fact of not understanding me—he understood me very well. It came from the fact that he did understand me, and at the same time realized he couldn't change me. In short, he knew I had no choice, that I had to be what I was. But he didn't approve, that's it. And who knows if he wasn't right.

OF But you never thought of getting a divorce, Mrs. Meir, you never thought of getting married again when he died?

GM Oh, no! Never! Such an idea never entered my head, never! I've always gone on thinking of myself as married to him! After the separation we still saw each other. Sometimes he came to see me in my office Maybe you haven't understood one important thing: even though we were so different and incapable of living together, there

was always love between us. Ours was a great love; it lasted from the day we met till the day he died. And a love like that can't be replaced.

OF Mrs. Meir, is it true you're very modest? How should I say it ... very puritanical, very concerned with morality?

GM Look, as I said before, I've always lived among men. And never, never has a man allowed himself to tell a dirty joke in my presence, to say anything disrespectful or proposition me. Do you know why? Because I've always said that if I'm given a glass of water, that water must be clean. Otherwise I don't drink it. That's the way I am; I like things to be clean. A dear friend of mine once said to me, »Golda, don't be so rigid. There are no moral or immoral things. There are only beautiful or ugly things.« I suppose he was right. What's more, I suppose that the same thing can be beautiful and ugly. Because to some it looks beautiful and to others ugly. However ... I don't know how to explain Maybe this way: love is always beautiful, but the act of love with a prostitute is ugly.

OF They say too that you're very hard, inflexible ...

GM I, hard? No. There are a few points, in politics, on which they might think me hard. In fact, I'm not one to compromise and I say so adamantly. I believe in Israel, I don't yield when it comes to Israel—period. Yes, in that sense the word inflexible applies to me. But otherwise, I mean in private life, with people, with human problems ... it's foolish to say I'm hard. I'm the most sensitive creature that you'll ever meet. It's no accident that many accuse me of making political decisions on the basis of my feelings instead of my brain. Well, what if I do? I don't see anything bad in that, quite the contrary. I've always felt sorry for people who are afraid of their feelings, of their emotions, and who hide what they feel and can't cry wholeheartedly. Because anyone who can't cry wholeheartedly can't laugh wholeheartedly either.

OF Do you sometimes really cry?

GM Do I! And how! And yet if you were to ask me, »Tell me, Golda, have you had more laughter or tears in your life?« I'd answer, »I think I've laughed more than I've cried.« Aside from my family dramas, my life has been so lucky. I've known such fine people, I've had the friendship of such interesting people—especially in the fifty years

I've spent in Israel. I've always moved within a circle of intellectual giants; I've always been appreciated and loved. And what else can you ask of fortune? I'd really be ungrateful if I didn't know how to laugh.

OF Not bad for a woman who's considered the symbol of Israel.

GM I, a symbol?! Some symbol! Are you maybe pulling my leg? You didn't know the great men who were really the symbol of Israel, the men who founded Israel and by whom it was influenced. Ben-Gurion is the only one of them left, and I swear to you on my children and grandchildren that I've never put myself in the same category as a Ben-Gurion or a Katznelson. I'm not crazy! I've done what I've done, that's true. But I can't say that if I hadn't done what I've done, Israel would have been any different.

OF Then why do they say that you're the only one who can hold the country together?

GM Nonsense! Now I'll tell you something that'll convince you. When Eshkol died in 1969, they conducted a poll to find out how much popularity his possible successors had. And you know how many people came out for me? One percent. Maybe one and a half percent. All right, there was a crisis in my party and even as foreign minister I'd felt the effects of it—but still one, one and a half percent! And a woman so unpopular up until three years ago should today be the one holding the country together? Believe me, the country holds together by itself; it doesn't need a prime minister named Golda Meir. If the young people were to say, »Enough fighting, enough war, let's surrender,« no Golda Meir could do anything about it. If in the kibbutzim of Beth Shean, they had said, »Enough of living under the rockets of the fedayeen, enough sleeping in shelters, let's go away,« no Golda Meir would have been able to do anything about it. What's more, it was by accident that Golda Meir got to lead the country. Eshkol was dead, someone had to take his place, and the party thought I might replace him because I was acceptable to all factions and ... that's all. In fact, I didn't even want to accept. I had got out of governmental politics, I was tired. You can ask my children and grandchildren.

OF Mrs. Meir, don't try to tell me that you're not aware of your success!

GM Of course I am! I don't suffer from delusions of grandeur, but neither am I troubled by an inferiority complex. When I deny being a symbol and holding the country together, I'm not saying I'm a failure! I may not always have been perfect but I don't see that I've failed in my career, either as labor minister, or foreign minister, or party secretary, or head of the government. Indeed I must admit that, in my opinion, women can be good government leaders, good heads of state. Oh, Lord, maybe I would have functioned just as well if I'd been a man I don't know, I can't prove it, I've never been a man ... But I think that women, more than men, possess a capacity that helps in doing this job. It's that of going right to the essence of things, of taking the bull by the horns. Women are more practical, more realistic. They don't dissipate themselves in mystifications like men, who always beat around the bush trying to get to the heart of the matter.

OF And yet you sometimes speak as though you didn't like yourself. Do you like yourself, Mrs. Meir?

GM What person with any sense likes himself? I know myself too well to like myself. I know all too well that I'm not what I'd like to be. And to give you an idea what I'd like to be, I'll tell you who I like: my daughter. Sarah is so good, so intelligent, so intellectually honest! When she believes in something, she goes all the way. When she thinks something, she says it without mincing words. And she never gives in to others, to the majority. I really can't say the same for myself. When you're doing the job I'm doing, you always have to stoop to compromises, you can never let yourself remain one hundred percent faithful to your ideas. Of course, there's a limit to compromise, and I can't say I always stoop to them. However, I stoop enough. And that's bad. That's another reason why I can't wait to retire.

OF Will you really retire?

GM I give you my word. Listen, in May next year I'll be seventy-five. I'm old. I'm exhausted. My health is essentially good, my heart functions, but I can't go on with this madness forever. If you only knew how many times I say to myself: To hell with everything, to hell with everybody, I've done my share, now let the others do theirs, enough, enough, enough! There are days when I'd like to pack up and leave without telling anyone. If I've stayed this long, if for the moment I'm

still here, it's out of duty and nothing else. I can't just throw everything out the window! Yes, many don't believe that I'll leave. Well, they'd better believe it, I'll even give you the date: October 1973. In October of '73 there'll be elections. Once they're over, goodbye!

OF I don't believe it. And everyone says you'll change your mind because you aren't able to sit still and do nothing.

GM Look, there's another thing that people don't know about me. By nature, I'm a lazy woman. I'm not one of those people who has to fill up every minute or else get sick. I like to be with nothing to do, even just sitting in an armchair, or wasting time with little things I enjoy. Cleaning the house, ironing, cooking a meal ... I'm an excellent cook, an excellent housewife. My mother used to say, »But why do you want to study? You're such a good housewife!« And then I like to sleep. Oh, I like it so much! I like to be with people, to talk about this and that—to hell with serious talk, political talk! I like to go to the theater. I like to go to the movies, without my bodyguard underfoot. How did it happen that whenever I want to see a him, they even send the Israeli army reserves along with me? This is a life? It's been years that I haven't been able to do what I like, to sleep, to talk about trivial things, to sit with my hands folded. I'm always tied to this piece of paper that lists what I have to do, what I have to say, half hour by half hour.

Ah! And then there's my family. I don't want my grandchildren to say, »Grandma behaved badly with her children and neglected them, and later she behaved badly with us and neglected us.« I'm a grandmother. I don't have many more years to live. And I intend to spend those years with my grandchildren. I also intend to spend them with my books. I have shelves full of books that I've never read. At two in the morning when I go to bed, I take one of them in my hand and try to read it, but after two minutes—pff!—I fall asleep and the book drops. Finally I want to go to Sarah's kibbutz when I like. For a week, a month, not rush there Friday evening to rush back on Saturday evening. I should be the master of the clock, not the clock the master of me.

OF So you're not afraid of old age.

GM No, it's never frightened me. When I know I can change things, I become as active as a cyclone. And almost always I succeed in

changing them. But when I know I can't do anything, I resign myself. I'll never forget the first time I flew in an airplane—in 1929, from Los Angeles to Seattle. For my work, eh, not for fun! It was a little plane and the moment it took off, I thought: How crazy! Why did I do it? But right after that I calmed down—what good would it do to get frightened? Another time I flew from New York to Chicago with a friend of mine, and we got caught in an awful storm. The plane was bouncing and swaying, and my friend cried like a baby. So I said to him, »Stop it, why are you crying, what good does it do?« My dear, old age is like an airplane flying in a storm. Once you're in it, there's nothing you can do. You can't stop a plane, you can't stop a storm, you can't stop time. So you might as well take it easy, with wisdom.

OF Is it this wisdom that sometimes makes you severe with young people?

GM Listen, you'd have to be crazy not to realize that the younger generations think differently and that that's the way it should be. It would really be dreary if every generation was a copy of the previous one; the world wouldn't go forward any more. I accept the fact with joy that young people are different from me. What I condemn in them is their presumption in saying, »Everything you've done is wrong so we'll redo it all from the beginning.« Well, if they were to do it all over again better, I wouldn't even mind, but in many cases they're no better than us old people and can even be worse. The calendar isn't the standard for good and evil! I know selfish and reactionary young people and generous and progressive old ones. And then there's another thing I condemn in young people: their mania for copying whatever comes from outside. Their fashions irritate me. Why that music that isn't music and is only good to give you a headache? Why that long hair, those short skirts? I hate fashions, and I've always hated them. Fashion is an imposition, a lack of freedom. Somebody in Paris decides for some reason that women should wear miniskirts, and here they all are in miniskirts: long legs, short legs, skinny legs, fat legs, ugly legs... . Never mind as long as they're young. When they're fifty, I really get mad. Have you seen those old men who grow a bunch of little curls on the back of their necks?

OF The fact is, Mrs. Meir, that yours was a heroic generation, while the one of today ...

GM So is the one of today. Like my children's generation. When I see men of forty-five or fifty who've been fighting the war for twenty, thirty years ... But you know what I say? Even the young people of today are a heroic generation. At least in Israel. When I think that at eighteen they've already been soldiers, and that to be a soldier here doesn't just mean training and that's all ... I feel my heart bursting. When I go among high-school students and think that a whim of Sadat's could tear them away from their desks, I get a lump in my throat. For the moment I often get impatient with them. I argue with them. But after five minutes I say to myself, Golda, in a month they could be at the front. Don't be impatient with them. So let them be conceited, arrogant. So let them wear miniskirts, long hair. Last week I was at a kibbutz in the north. In the office they were shocked, they said, »To make such a trip! So tiring! You're crazy!« But you know why I went? Because the granddaughter of one of my old comrades was getting married. And in the Six Day War he had lost two grandsons.

OF Mrs. Meir, have you ever killed anyone?

GM No ... I've learned to shoot, of course, but I've never happened to kill anyone. I don't say it as consolation—there's no difference between killing and making decisions by which you send others to kill. It's exactly the same thing. And maybe it's worse.

OF Mrs. Meir, how do you look on death?

GM I can tell you right away: my only fear is to live too long. You know, old age is not a sin and not a joy—there are plenty of disagreeable things about old age. Not to be able to run up and down the stairs, not to be able to jump And yet you get used to some things without difficulty. It's just a matter of physical troubles, and physical troubles aren't degrading. What is degrading is to lose your mental lucidity, to become senile. Senility ... I've known people who died too soon, and that hurt me. I've known people who died too late, and that hurt me just as much. Listen, for me, to witness the decay of a fine intelligence is an insult. I don't want that insult to happen to me. I want to die with my mind clear. Yes, my only fear is to live too long.

Yasir Arafat

Amman, March 1972

ORIANA FALLACI Abu Ammar, people talk of you so much but almost nothing is known about you and ...

YASIR ARAFAT The only thing to say about me is that I'm a humble Palestinian fighter. I became one in 1947, along with the rest of my family. Yes, that was the year when my conscience was awakened and I understood what a barbarous invasion had taken place in my country. There had never been one like it in the history of the world.

OF How old were you, Abu Ammar? I ask because there's some controversy about your age.

YA No personal questions.

OF Abu Ammar, I'm only asking how old you are. You're not a woman. You can tell me.

YA I said, no personal questions.

OF Abu Ammar, if you don't want to tell your age, why do you always expose yourself to the attention of the world and let the world look on you as the head of the Palestinian resistance?

YA But I'm not the head of it! I don't want to be! Really, I swear it. I'm just a member of the Central Committee, one of many, and to be precise the one who has ordered to be the spokesman. That is to report what others decide. It's a great misunderstanding to consider me the head—the Palestinian resistance doesn't have a head. We try in fact to apply concept of collective leadership and obviously the matter presents difficulties, but we insist on it since we believe it's indispensable not to entrust the responsibility and prestige to one man alone. It's a modern concept and helps not to do wrong to the masses who are fighting, to our brothers who are dying. If I should die, your curiosity will be exhausted—you'll know everything about me. Until that moment, no.

OF I wouldn't say your comrades couldn't afford to let you die, Abu Ammar. And, to judge by your bodyguard, I'd say they think you're much more useful if you stay alive.

YA No. Probably instead I'd be much more useful dead than alive. Ah, yes, my death would do much to help the cause, as an incentive. Let me even add that I have many probabilities of dying—it could happen tonight, tomorrow. If I die, it's not a tragedy—someone else will go around in the world to represent Al Fatah, someone else will direct the battles ... I'm more than ready to die. I don't care about my safety as much as you think.

OF I understand. On the other hand, you cross the lines into Israel once in a while yourself, don't you, Abu Ammar? The Israelis are convinced that you've entered Israel twice, and just escaped being ambushed. And they add that anyone who succeeds in doing this must be very clever.

YA What you call Israel is my home. So I was not in Israel but in my home, with every right to go to my home. Yes, I've been there, but much more often than only twice. I go there continually, I go when I like. Of course, to exercise this right is fairly difficult—their machine guns are always ready. But, it's less difficult than they think; it depends on circumstances, on the points chosen. You have to be shrewd about it, they're right about that. It's no accident that we call these trips »trips of the fox.« But you can go ahead and inform them that our boys, the fedayeen, make these trips daily. And not always to attack the enemy. We accustom them to crossing the lines so they'll know their own land, and learn to move about there with ease. Often we get as far, because I've done it, as the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Desert. We even carry weapons there. The Gaza fighters don't receive their arms by sea, they receive them from us, from here.

OF Abu Ammar, how long will all this go on? How long will you be able to resist?

YA We don't even go in for such calculations. We're only at the beginning of this war. We're only now beginning to prepare ourselves for what will be a very long war. Certainly a war destined to be prolonged for generations. Nor are we the first generation to fight. The world doesn't know or forgets that in the 1920s our fathers were already

fighting the Zionist invader. They were weak then, because too much time alone against adversaries who were too strong and who were supported by the English, by the Americans, by the imperialists of the earth. But we are strong—since January 1965, that is, since the day that Al Fatah was born, we're a very dangerous adversary for Israel. The fedayeen are acquiring experience, they're stepping up their attacks and improving their guerilla tactics; their numbers are improving at a tremendous rate. You ask how long we'll be able to resist—that's the wrong question. You should ask how long the Israelis will be able to resist, For we'll never stop until we've returned to our home and destroyed Israel. The unity of the Arab world will make this possible.

OF Abu Ammar, you always invoke the unity of the Arab world. But you know very well that not all the Arab states are ready to go to war for Palestine and that, for those already at war, a peaceful agreement is possible, and can even be expected. Even Nasser said so. If such an agreement should take place, as Russia too expects, what will you do?

YA We won't expect it. Never! We will continue to make war on Israel by ourselves until we get Palestine back. The end of Israel is the goal of our struggle, and it allows for neither compromise nor mediation. The issues of this struggle, whether our friends like it or not, will always remain fixed by the principles that we enumerated in 1965 with the creation of Al Fatah. First: revolutionary violence is the only system for liberating the land of our fathers; second: the purpose of this violence is to liquidate Zionism in all its political, economic and military forms, and to drive it out of Palestine forever; third: our revolutionary action must be independent of any control by party or state; fourth: this action will be of long duration. We know the intentions of certain Arab leaders: to resolve the conflict with a peaceful agreement. When this happens, we will oppose it.

OF Conclusion: you don't at all want the peace that everyone is hoping for.

YA No! We don't want peace. We want war, victory. Peace for us means the destruction of Israel and nothing else. What you call peace is peace for Israel and the imperialists. For us it is injustice and shame. We will fight until victory. Decades if necessary, generations.

OF Let's be practical, Abu Ammar. Almost all the fedayeen bases are in Jordan, others are in Lebanon. Lebanon has little wish to light a war, and Jordan would very much like to get out of it. Let's suppose that these two countries, having decided on a peaceful agreement, decide to prevent your attacks on Israel. In other words, they prevent the guerillas from being guerillas. It's already happened and will happen again. In the face of this, what do you do? Do you also declare war on Jordan and Lebanon?

YA We can't fight on the basis of »ifs.« It's the right of any Arab state to decide what it wants, including a peaceful agreement with Israel; it's our right to want to return home without compromise. Among the Arab states, some are unconditionally with us. Others not. But the risk of remaining alone in fighting Israel is a risk that we've foreseen. It's enough to think of the insults they hurled at us from the beginning; we have been so maltreated that by now we don't pay any attention to maltreatment. Our very formation, I mean, is a miracle. The candle that was lighted in 1965 burned in the blackest darkness. But now we are many candles, and we illuminate the whole Arab nation. And beyond the Arab nation.

OF That's a very poetic and very diplomatic answer, but it's not the answer to what I asked you, Abu Ammar. I asked you: If Jordan doesn't really want you any more, do you declare war on Jordan?

YA I'm a soldier and a military leader. As such I must keep my secrets. I won't be the one to reveal our future battlefields to you. If I did, Al Fatah would court-martial me. So draw your own conclusions from what I said before. I told you we'll continue our march for the liberation of Palestine to the end, whether the countries in which we find ourselves like it or not. Even now we are in Palestine.

OF We're in Jordan, Abu Ammar. And, I ask you: But what does Palestine mean? Even Palestine's national identity has been lost with time, and its geographical borders have also been lost. The Turks were here, before the British Mandate and Israel. So what are the geographical borders of Palestine?

YA We don't bring up the question of borders. We don't speak of borders in our constitution because those who set up borders were the Western colonists who invaded us after the Turks. From an Arab

point of view, one doesn't speak of borders; Palestine is a small dot in the great Arabic ocean. And our nation is the Arab one, it is a nation spreading from the Atlantic to the Red Sea and beyond. What we want, ever since the catastrophe exploded in 1947, is to free our land and reconstruct the democratic Palestinian state.

OF But when you talk of a state, you have to say too within what geographical limits this state is formed or will be formed! Abu Ammar, I ask you again: what are the geographical borders of Palestine?

YA As an indication, we may decide that the borders of Palestine are the ones established at the time of the British Mandate. If we take the Anglo-French agreement of 1918, Palestine means the territory that runs from Naqurah in the north to Aqaba in the south, and then from the Mediterranean coast that includes the Gaza Strip to the Jordan River and the Negev Desert.

OF I see. But this also includes a good piece of land that today is part of Jordan, I mean the whole region west of the Jordan. Cisjordania.

YA Yes. But I repeat that borders have no importance. Arab unity is important, that's all.

OF Borders have importance if they touch or overlap the territory of a country that already exists, like Jordan.

YA What you call Cisjordania is Palestine.

OF Abu Ammar, how is it possible to talk of Arab unity if from now on such problems come up with certain Arab countries? Not only that, but even you Palestinians are not in agreement. There is even a great division between you of Al Fatah and the other movements. For example, with the Popular Front.

YA Every revolution has its private problems. In the Algerian revolution there was also more than one movement, and for all I know, even in Europe during the resistance to the Nazis. In Vietnam itself there exist several movements; the Vietcong are simply the overwhelming majority, like we of Al Fatah. Be we of Al Fatah include ninety-seven percent of the fighters and are the ones who conduct the struggle inside the occupied territory. It was no accident that Moshe Dayan, when he decided to destroy the village of El Heul and mined 218 houses as a punitive measure, said, »We must make it clear who controls this village, we or Al Fatah.« He mentioned Al Fatah, not the

Popular Front. The Popular Front ... In February 1969 the Popular Front split into five parts, and four of them have already joined Al Fatah. Therefore, we're slowly being united. And if George Habash, the leader of the Popular Front, is not with us today, he soon will be. We've already asked him to join us; there's basically no difference in objectives between us and the Popular Front.

OF The Popular Front is Communist. You say you're not set up that way.

YA There are fighters among us representing all ideas; you must have met them. Therefore among us there is also room for the Popular Front. Only certain methods of struggle distinguish us from the Popular Front. In fact we of Al Fatah have never hijacked an airplane, and we have never planted bombs or caused shooting in other countries. We prefer to conduct a purely military struggle. That doesn't mean, however, that we too don't have recourse to sabotage—inside the Palestine that you call Israel. For instance, it's almost always we who set off bombs in Tel Aviv, in Jerusalem, in Eilat.

OF That involves civilians, however. It's not a purely military struggle.

YA It is! Because, civilians or military, they're all equally guilty of wanting to destroy our people. Sixteen thousand Palestinians have been arrested for helping our commandos, eight thousand houses of Palestinians have been destroyed, without counting the tortures that our brothers undergo in their prisons, and napalm bombings of the unarmed population. We carry out certain operations, called sabotage, to show them that we're capable of keeping them in check by the same methods. This inevitably hits civilians, but civilians are the first accomplices of the gang that rules Israel. Because if the civilians don't approve of the methods of the gang in power, they have only to show it. We know very well that many don't approve. Those, for example, who lived in Palestine before the Jewish immigration, and even some of those who immigrated with the precise intention of robbing us of our land. Because they came here innocently, with the hope of forgetting their ancient sufferings. They had been promised Paradise, here on earth, and they came to take over Paradise. Too late they discovered that instead it was hell. Do you know how many of them now want to escape from Israel? You should see the emigration

applications that pile up at the Canadian embassy in Tel Aviv, or the United States embassy. Thousands.

OF Abu Ammar, you never answer me directly. But this time you must do so. What do you think of Moshe Dayan?

YA That's a very embarrassing question. How can I answer? Let's say this: I hope that one day he'll be tried as a war criminal, whether he's really a brilliant leader or whether the title of brilliant leader is something he's bestowed on himself.

OF Abu Ammar, I seem to have read somewhere that the Israelis respect you more than you respect them. Question: Are you capable of respecting your enemies?

YA As fighters, and even as strategists ... sometimes yes. One must admit that some of their war tactics are intelligent and can be respected. But as persons, no, because they always behave like barbarians; there's never a drop of humanity in them. People often talk of their victories; I have my own ideas about their victory of 1967 and the one in 1956. The one in 1956 shouldn't even be called a victory; that year they only queued up after the British and French aggressors. And they won with the help of the Americans. As for their 1967 victory, they owe it to the help of the Americans. Money comes in lavish and uncontrolled donations from the Americans to Israel. And besides money, they also get lavish shipments of the most powerful weapons, the most advanced technology. The best the Israelis possess comes from outside-this story of the wonders that they have achieved in our country ought to be re-examined with a greater sense of reality. We know very well what the wealth of Palestine is and is not; you don't more than just so much out of our land; you don't create gardens out of the desert. Therefore the major part of what they possess comes from outside. And from the technology with which the imperialists supply them.

OF Let's be honest, Abu Ammar. They've put and are putting technology to good use. And as soldiers, they come off well.

YA They have never won by their positive aspects; they've always won through the negative aspects of the Arabs.

OF That too is part of the game of war, Abu Ammar. Besides, they've also won because they're brave soldiers.

YA No! No! No! No, they're not! In hand-to-hand combat, face-to-face, they're not even soldiers. They're too afraid of dying, they show no courage. That's what happened in the battle of Karameh and that's what happened the other day in the battle of El Sahr. Crossing the lines, they came down on Wada Fifa with forty tanks, on Wada Abati with ten tanks, on Khirbet el Disseh with ten tanks and twenty jeeps with 106-caliber machine guns. They preceded the advance with a heavy artillery bombardment and after ten hours sent in their planes, which bombed the whole area indiscriminately, and then helicopters to fire missiles against our positions. Their objective was to reach the valley of El Nmeiri. They never reached it; after a twenty-five-hour battle, we drove them back across the lines. Do you know why? Because we used more courage than they did. We surrounded them, we attacked them in the rear with our rifles, with our bazookas—face to face, without fear of dying. It's always the same story with the Israelis. They're good at attacking with planes because they know we have no planes, with tanks because they know we have no tanks, but when they run into face-to-face resistance, they don't risk any more. They run away. And what good is a soldier who takes no risks, who runs away?

OF Abu Ammar, what do you say of the operations carried out by their commandos? For example, when their commandos go to Egypt to dismantle a radar station and carry it away? You need a little courage for something like that.

YA No, you don't. Because they always look for very weak, very easy objectives. Those are their tactics, which, I repeat, are always intelligent but never courageous in that they consist of employing enormous forces in an undertaking of whose success they're one hundred percent sure. They never move unless they're certain that everything will go well, and if you take them by surprise, they never fully commit themselves. Every time they've attacked the fedayeen in strength, the Israelis have been defeated. Their commandos don't get by us.

OF Maybe not by you, but they do get by the Egyptians.

YA What they're doing in Egypt is not a military action, it's a psychological war. Egypt is still their strongest enemy, and so they're trying

to demoralize it and undermine it through a psychological war incited by the Zionist press with the help of the international press. Their game consists in propagandizing an action by exaggerating it. Everybody falls for it because they possess a powerful press agency. We have no press agency, nobody knows what our commandos are doing, our victories go unnoticed because we have no wire service to transmit the news to newspapers that anyway wouldn't publish it. So no one knows, for example, that the same day as the Israelis were stealing the radar station from the Egyptians, we entered an Israeli base and carried off five large rockets.

OF I wasn't talking about you, I was talking about the Egyptians.

YA There's no difference between Palestinians and Egyptians. Both are part of the Arab nation.

OF That's a very generous remark on your part, Abu Ammar. Especially considering that your family was actually expropriated by the Egyptians.

YA My family was expropriated by Farouk, not by Nasser. I know the Egyptians well because I went to the university in Egypt, and I fought with the Egyptian army in 1951, 1952, and 1956. They're brave soldiers and my brothers.

OF Let's get back to the Israelis, Abu Ammar. You say that with you they always suffer huge losses. How many Israelis do you think you've killed up to this date?

YA I can't give you an exact figure, but the Israelis have confessed to having lost, in the war against the fedayeen, a percentage of men that is higher than that of the Americans in Vietnam—in proportion, of course, to the population of the two countries. And it's indicative that, after the 1967 war, their traffic deaths increased ten times. In short, after a battle or a skirmish with us, it comes out that a lot of Israelis have died in automobile accidents. This observation has been made by the Israeli newspapers themselves, because we know that the Israeli generals never admit to losing me at the front. But I can tell you that, going by the American statistics, in the battle of Karamah they lost 1,247 men between dead and wounded.

OF And do you pay an equally heavy price?

YA Losses to us don't count, we don't care if we die. Anyway, from

1965 to today, we have had slightly over nine hundred dead. But you must also consider the six thousand civilians dead in air raids and our brothers who die in prison under torture.

OF Nine hundred dead can be many or few, depending on the number of combatants. How many fedayeen are there altogether?

YA To tell you that figure, I would have to ask permission from the Military Council, and I don't think they would give it to me. But I can tell you that at Karameh we were only 392 against 15,000 Israelis.

OF Fifteen thousand? Abu Ammar, maybe you mean 1,500.

YA No! No! No! I said 15,000, 15,000! Including, of course, the soldiers employed with the heavy artillery, the tanks, the planes, the helicopters, and the parachutists. As troops alone, they had four companies and two brigades. What we say is never believed by you Westerners, you listen to them and that's all, you believe them and that's all, you report what they say and that's all!

OF Abu Ammar, you're an unfair man. I am here and I'm listening to you. And after this interview I'll report word for word what you've told me.

YA You Europeans are always for them. Maybe some of you are beginning to understand us—it's in the air, one can sense it. But essentially you're still for them.

OF This is your war, Abu Ammar, not ours. And in this war of yours we are only spectators. But even as spectators you can't ask us to be against the Jews and you shouldn't be surprised if in Europe the Jews are often loved. We've seen them persecuted, we've persecuted them. We don't want it to happen again.

YA Sure, you have to pay your debts to them. And you want to pay them with our blood, our land, rather than with your blood, your land. You go on ignoring the fact that we have nothing against the Jews, we have it against the Israelis. The Jews will be welcome in the democratic Palestinian state. We'll offer them the choice of staying in Palestine when the moment arrives.

OF But, Abu Ammar, the Israelis are Jews. Not all Jews can identify themselves with Israel, but Israel can't help identifying itself with the Jews. And you can't ask the Jews of Israel to go wandering around the world once more and thereby end up in extermination camps. That's unreasonable.

YA So you want to send us wandering around the world.

OF No. We don't want to send anybody. You least of all.

YA But wandering around is what we're doing now. And if you're so anxious to give a homeland to the Jews, give them yours—you have a lot of land in Europe, in America. Don't presume to give them ours. We've lived on this land for centuries and centuries; we won't give it up to pay your debts. You're committing an error even from a human point of view. How is it possible that the Europeans don't recognize it even while being such civilized people, so advanced, and perhaps more advanced than any other continent? And yet, you too have fought wars of liberation, just think of your Risorgimento. Therefore your error is on purpose. You can't claim ignorance about Palestine because you know Palestine well. You sent us your Crusades, and it's a country right under your nose. It's not Amazonia. I believe that someday your conscience will awaken. But until that day it's better that we don't see each other.

OF Is that the reason, Abu Ammar, that you always wear dark glasses?

YA No. I wear them so as not to let people know whether I'm asleep or awake. But, between ourselves, I'm always awake behind my glasses. I sleep only when I take them off, and I sleep very little. I had said, no personal questions.

OF Only one, Abu Ammar. You aren't married, and there are said to be no women in your life. Do you want to be like Ho Chi Minh, or is the idea of living with a woman at your side repugnant to you?

YA Ho Chi Minh ... No, let's say that I've never found the right woman. And now there's no more time. I've married a woman called Palestine.

Muammar el-Qaddafi.

Libya, 1979

If irrationality and violence and deception were not the primary ingredients of that soupy mess we call History, and if we didn't already know that the crazies and the brutes and the scoundrels are almost always the authors of our destiny, then we might be shocked to learn that there is another lie hiding in the word »revolution«: the huge majority of so-called revolutions are really nothing more than very dull coup d'états. Nothing more than a power grab made by a small band of uniformed thieves who move furtively in the dark like nighttime burglars. Or, worse: if intelligence and culture and talent had not nearly always been strangers to those who conquer or steal power, if we didn't know that those who command and decide are almost always the obtuse, the ignorant, and the foolish, then we might be indignant to note that those uniformed thieves are predictably ignorant adventurers, devoid of any intellect or virtue. Robbing a bank presents more problems and unforeseen difficulties than stealing power in a coup d'état does. This explains why bank robberies are relatively rare, while coup d'états are relatively common: three quarters of the existing regimes on the planet are the result of a coup d'état.

This was the first thing I had to remember as I approached the presumptuous impostor who was competing with Khomeini in the attempt to lead a new crusade against the West. The schemers who hope to execute a coup need very few abilities, and meager abilities at that. They need to be military men with a rank higher than sergeant, they need to be able to take advantage of the weakness and naivete of others, to betray the trust or faith of others; they need to be able to kill their adversaries in their sleep. The rest is easy. For example, they don't need the kind of charisma true revolutionary

leaders rely on, because they act without the support of the people who don't know anything and don't need to know anything. They don't need the hard work and the bravery that are required for a normal robbery, because they rely on a pre-existing, well-oiled machine, ready to start up as soon as they flip the switch: the military. They don't need the imagination or organizational capabilities that normal crimes require, because the technique of a coup d'état never changes. All they need to do is gather a group of ambitious officials, to psychologically prepare the men those officials control, to keep the secret and to execute a surprise attack in the middle of the night or the first light of day. As far as the real action is concerned, the plan is rather boring, and can even be found in manuals that detail how to realize a coup d'état in the same nonchalant tone used in car or computer manuals. At a predetermined hour everyone leaves the barracks and simultaneously attacks, occupying the key places of power: the government buildings, the police headquarters, the post offices, the radio, the television, the newspapers. Then, everyone who might oppose the coup is arrested or killed, the borders are closed and a curfew is instituted, so that no one can escape or ask for help. The true cowardice of the coup d'état, and the coup that calls itself revolution, lies here. I'll clarify: not only are true revolutions subversions of power brought about by at least a portion of the people, but true revolutions have a sense of wartime fair play about them. I kill you and you kill me. In a coup that calls itself revolution, just like in any other coup, all the killing is one-sided, executed by the uniformed thieves who move in the dark like nighttime burglars.

Indeed, it's worth asking why soldiers trained to fight, and to shoot only those who shoot back, never refuse to follow the orders of the small band that has decided to carry out a coup. Don't they realize that they're killing helpless people, the same fellow citizens they were supposed to defend against the external enemy? Aren't they ashamed to be acting like cowards, to win without risking anything? Even if we assume that at the beginning they are unaware of what they are doing because no one has explained it to them, or because they've been brainwashed, it's still likely that, in the moment they descend on the key places of power and shoot and arrest their fellow

citizens, maybe even their friends and relatives, they understand that they are not fighting an invader. Of course they understand. But they don't care. Or, if they do care, they don't even dare consider refusal or mutiny. They follow orders, plain and simple; blind and absolute obedience is the only concept they know. This obedience has been cultivated for months, for years, for centuries, until it overpowers every impulse for initiative or criticism or heresy. Sir, yessir. Right away, sir. And, of course, those who refused would be brought before firing squads, squads also made up of obedient soldiers, so disciplined that they shoot their own comrades instead of the enemy. They take aim carefully, trying for the heart and the head, and when they are ordered to fire they fire. They shoot him in the heart and the head, they kill him: their comrade. As far as I know, there has never been a soldier who has refused to take part in a firing squad, who has refused to shoot a comrade. The same is true during a coup d'état. This is why the soldiers who bring about the coup are thieves in the service of thieves, traitors in the service of traitors, cowards in the service of cowards: a coup is the least revolutionary thing in the world.

Nonetheless, when a coup d'état succeeds, its leaders read a proclamation that never fails to include the word »revolution.« Following the same plan as all the others before them, the coupists head for the radio, and in the name of the People or the Fatherland or God, or maybe all three, they inform everyone that the bad regime has been overturned, that the good guys are in power, that the revolution will bring law and order, justice and freedom, equality and progress, and lots of other lovely things. It doesn't even matter if they neglect to say what revolution has just happened, that they don't even know the meaning of this word, this word that no one can quite define and that is used arbitrarily, like the word »love«: I love my mother, I love ice cream, I love peace, I love this windbreaker. In the proclamation, when they say »revolution,« they mean what most people mean when they say »love.« Something noble and sacred, a symbol of goodness, a guarantee of happiness that will carry all of us into an extraordinary future that has already begun. This is probably the same reason that they never abandon the words »counterrevolution«

and »counterrevolutionary.« These are the terms used to refer to the victims who have been arrested and killed—and often tortured prior to being arrested and killed—the heroes who refused to recognize that scrounging victory.

Since the dawn of time, the world has never heard a usurper say: I don't give a damn about the People and the Fatherland and God, I stole this throne for my own dirty interests and my own vanity. And since the time of Bonaparte, the world has never seen a coupist who presents himself as a reactionary, who speaks out against the sacred rights of man. He is always a generous father, disinterested, an idealist who acts for law and order, justice and freedom, equality and progress: revolution. Even Mussolini called his March on Rome a revolution, while in reality it was nothing more than a coup. Even Papadopoulos, when he toppled democracy in Greece, called his crime revolution. Even Pinochet, when he overthrew Allende's regime, called that butchery revolution. Even Idi Amin, and Bokassa, and the group of twelve officials who took Libya in 1969 without even spraining an ankle or breaking a nail. Their coup d'état followed the same plan I have outlined above, and it was born of the same cynical cowardice, the same lack of imagination. Why trouble yourself with awakening a people, educating them, encouraging them to undertake the revolution like a caterpillar who becomes a butterfly? These are boring tasks, slow and dangerous: not only do you risk losing your skin over them, they require a lot of time and hard work. And just using the military was so easy, especially in Libya, an inert country that had never really been a country, where people had run around doing as they liked for centuries, a desolate stretch of sand that the U.N. had declared a country only thirteen years earlier. On that vast stretch of sand, as big as Europe, there were no more than two million inhabitants, one or two cities, a few villages teetering on the edges of prehistory, a couple of ports, and the oil wells tended by foreigners. Leading all this was a mild and distracted old king, the octogenarian King Idris who hated ruling and threatened daily to remove himself from power. It was no surprise that everyone wanted to carry out a coup against him: his greedy relatives, corrupt courtiers, and high-ranking military. There was such an abundance of coups on

the horizons that no one made a secret of it: if you went looking to form alliances for your coup you'd hear, »No thanks, but I'm working on my own,« in response. The key to success lay in starting a second before the others, and there was no need to try for originality.

The twelve officials who ultimately succeeded had copied another coup word for word: the coup that the Iraqi military had used to take power in Baghdad in 1956. Three armored battalions left the barracks for a supposed night training exercise. There was no Bastille to storm, no Winter Palace. There were hardly any political prisoners, and King Idris was in Turkey visiting some hot springs with his wife Fatima, his daughter Salima, and his retinue. Once he got over the surprise, he went to Athens and released a statement, saying that, in the future, he would very much like to be able to return to his homeland as a tourist, nothing more. And so, those twelve officials read their lie-filled proclamation undisturbed. »People of Libya, your Armed Forces have interpreted your free will, we have responded to your incessant appeals, we have listened to your exhortations, we have fulfilled your dearest hopes. Your Armed Forces have taken it upon themselves to overthrow the reactionary and corrupt regime whose stench suffocated us, and whose sight horrified us. From this moment forward, Libya is a free and sovereign republic, embarking on a journey of liberty, union, and social justice, guaranteeing the right to equality, etc.« Naturally, they called themselves the Revolutionary Committee. Naturally, in the name of the Revolution, they arrested and killed and confiscated and requisitioned and abolished political parties, unions, and free association. Finally, they condemned to death the timid little old man who, from his exile, kept saying that he really would have liked to come back for a visit, as a tourist.

But how was Muammar Qaddafi able to snatch control of the so-called revolution, how had he become its prophet and Messiah? This was a question that troubled me as I planned my approach. It was the same question that had tormented me every time I found myself before a presumptuous impostor, an idiot dressed like a dictator, a prophet, a Messiah: How on earth had this cretin done it? He can't even speak, he doesn't even inspire fear. He's just any old guy, with

neither brains nor charisma. And furthermore, he's comical. How had he done it, my God, how? Then I remembered what Pietro Nenni told me the day he narrated the fable of the Emperor's New Clothes, the story of a child looking at Hitler and Mussolini.

Once, when I was a child, I saw Hitler and Mussolini. It was in Florence, the summer that Hitler came to Italy, and I was able to see them thanks to an aunt of mine who had married a fascist. She was scolded by the whole family for this sin, above all by my father, who barely acknowledged her. My mother was the only one who showed her any compassion; my mother believed that being married to a fascist wasn't a sin as much as it was a misfortune, like cancer. Is it right to mistreat someone with cancer? My mother's indulgence sometimes led her to loan me out to my aunt, to alleviate the suffering she felt because of her childless state. My aunt frequently came to pick me up and took me to places that were as unbearable as they were inappropriate for children.

»Where are we going, auntie?«

»To hear a concert of chamber music.«

»Where are we going, auntie?«

»To bring chrysanthemums to my father-in-law's grave.«

We never went to get ice cream or take a ride on the merry-go-round, and no one ever suggested to her that I might enjoy those activities more. The important thing was that she was never to talk to me about Hitler or Mussolini. At home, the names of the two dictators were only ever said alongside terrible insults, condemnations that gave me gooseflesh. That summer I had been severely reprimanded when I had said »Duce.«

»Duce of whom? Of what? Who taught you that word?«

»My teacher.«

»Your teacher is a fascist and that word is a bad word, do you understand? Don't you ever say it again.«

That afternoon, my aunt hadn't brought me to a concert or to the cemetery. Instead, we were in a roped-off piazza that we could only enter with tickets. I was enchanted by the novelty. »Auntie, why are we here?«

»To see something.«

»What?«

»Something.«

I don't remember much about the event aside from the boiling heat of the sun, the noise of the excited crowd, the pigeons who flapped among the flags, and the black bow that my aunt pulled from her purse and pinned in my hair.

»Why is it black, auntie?«

»Because your uncle says that black shows respect for the Führer and the Duce!«

I remember the horrible fear that flooded me when I heard that phrase, when I understood that »something« meant Hitler and Mussolini. What would happen if my parents found out that I had committed the sin of coming to see them? And even if they didn't find out, what kind of sickness would I catch from seeing them? A sickness of the eyes, surely. My fear was soon aggravated by an overwhelming desire to cry over the abuses I was suffering: the black bow, the sin I was being forced to commit, the blindness that would soon mutilate me. As I fought back tears I decided that the only way to save myself was by closing my eyes when the two passed by. This would have prevented me from becoming blind, and I wouldn't have to lie if I was forced to explain: »I didn't look at them.«

Why did I need to, anyway? I knew their faces. I always saw Mussolini at school, where he hung under the crucifix, his photo next to the king's. He was a swollen kind of guy with an unpleasant face, an angry mouth and a helmet on his head. I saw Hitler at the movies and in the papers. He was a haughty type with some funny toothbrush whiskers, and he had a kind of lizard tail of greasy hair pointing toward his left temple. Both of them made me very uneasy, and when I thought of how important they were, I began to doubt that my parents were right about them: they seemed like two exceptional, extraordinary people, one of a kind. This was the portrait my teacher gave of them.

However, when the crowd exploded in an ecstatic yell and my aunt shrieked, »They're coming, they're coming!« all my good intentions went out the window and I gave into temptation. The desire to look at them became so acute, so irresistible, that instead of closing

my eyes I opened them wide. I saw them, and I didn't go blind. But I didn't see what my parents had always described, nor did I see what my teacher had insisted on. I saw two men like many others, one fat and one thin, who didn't look anything like their photographs. The fat one had a kindly smile, and kept his hands on his hips like a plump washerwoman; instead of a helmet, he was wearing a pretty little hat with a white flower on it. The feather gave it a coy effect, like so many other ladies' hats. It made him seem so funny, so harmless, that I wanted to ask him to come play with me so I could ask him what the feather was for: did he use it to gauge the wind, to chase flies? The thin one had a drawn little face that inspired neither affection nor disdain, and his toothbrush moustache seemed like a Band-Aid plastered under his nose to cover up a scratch. He didn't frighten me the way adults with whiskers often did, like the ice-cream man, who had such an immense and severe pair with such long points that I was often terrified as I tried to choose between vanilla and chocolate, pistachio and zabaglione. The ice-cream man would bellow: »Come on, let's hear it, what do you want? Do you want to keep me here all night?« I would shake all over and choose a flavor randomly. Hitler's moustache never would have pushed me to such extremes. He had a gentle air about him, with that little Band-Aid under his nose. I would have very much liked to have him be my ice-cream man. He never would have bellowed, I was sure of it. He would have waited patiently while I decided between vanilla and chocolate, pistachio and zabaglione, and he might even have agreed to mix them all together in one cone: a courtesy that my ice-cream man never extended. Indeed, I couldn't understand why my mother insisted that he was a good man, an anarchist: anarchists, she said, were always good and kind. But above all, as I stood in that piazza and listened to the crazed mob shouting Duce-Duce and Führer-Führer, I didn't understand why my father had such a grudge against Mussolini and Hitler, why he accused them of every crime or catastrophe, why he called them monsters, criminals, assassins. I didn't even understand why my teacher was so taken with them, why she found them exceptional, extraordinary, one of a kind, different from us. Had there been some kind of misunderstanding? Maybe it wasn't

them? I turned to my aunt: »Is it really them, auntie?« My aunt said yes, and thirty-five years later I told Nenni this story while we ate in his villa in Formia. He agreed with me and told me that I had lived out Andersen's fable. The Emperor's New Clothes.

»But I can't stop thinking about it, Nenni. Because now that I remember it, now that I'm filtering it through the innocence of a child, I see again what I saw that day: a plump washerwoman with a feather in his hat and a kind ice-cream man with a Band-Aid under his nose.«

»Of course,« said Nenni. »Of course.«

»There was nothing different about them, not in the way my parents said, and not in the way my teacher said.«

»Of course,« said Nenni. »Of course.«

»They were two men like any others, harmless, even. If it weren't for the white feather and the Band-Aid, they could have disappeared into the crowd without anyone noticing them or turning to look at them.«

»Of course,« said Nenni. »Of course.« And he added: »In Hitler's case I'll take your word for it, since I never saw him up close. As for Mussolini, I know you're right from experience. We were friends before he became the Duce, and I swear to you that nothing in him marked him as a potential dictator. He didn't even seem like a charismatic leader. He was a young man like anybody else: a little fanatical, maybe, but full of neuroses and weaknesses. He was afraid of the dark, he never wanted to walk home alone at night, and he was always trying to find someone who would accompany him to his front door. If someone had said to me, then, that Mussolini would become the Duce, I would have laughed.«

»But why did he? Why was he able to?«

»Because anyone can become a dictator,« said Nenni. »You could, if you wanted to. So could I.«

I looked at his papery mummy's face, his tired body bundled up in funny pants that came up over his stomach like Chariot's, and he was so sweet and so civilized that I couldn't believe him.

»No, Nenni! Not you.«

»Yes, I could. Really. Because a dictator is never predestined as such. A dictator invents himself. He just needs to want it, I'll say it

again, or someone has to need him. And I'll add: he doesn't even have to be very intelligent or charming. Usually, the stupider he is, the better. Very intelligent people rarely want to become dictators. Charming people have better things to do.«

»But Alexander the Great was a dictator, and I don't think he was an idiot. And what about Genghis Khan, Julius Caesar, Oliver Cromwell?«

»Different times, different cases. Back then the world was small, the mechanisms that make today's media machine possible didn't exist, a leader had to be deserving of that name. He had to come to power through his merits, he had to have virtue. In the modern world, this isn't the case. I'm talking about the modern dictator, the one who imposes himself or is imposed upon the masses through the media machine. He is the one who invents himself.«

»But if he is chosen instead of another, if he wants it badly enough to succeed, he has to have something. Something different, Nenni, and something else besides.«

»Do you mean charisma?« Nenni smiled. »Even charisma invents itself. Or, at least, it can be created. I'm eighty years old, and in my age and my wisdom I am telling you that ever since Napoleon, there have only been self-invented charismatic leaders. And, of course, a charismatic leader doesn't even need real charisma.«

Our conversation ended here, and I still don't believe that Nenni was right when he said that charisma can be invented, created. Charisma is like intelligence, or talent: you either have it or you don't. However, I couldn't agree with him more on the point that a charismatic leader doesn't need real charisma. When he said that the modern dictator is self-invented, that the charismatic leader is self-constructed, his words were sacrosanct. It is undoubtedly true for those dictators who emerge from coup d'états. And this is what happened with Muammar el-Qaddafi.

It was ultimately in these two memories—Nenni speaking to me and shaking his papery mummy's head, and my shocked childhood discovery of the naked Emperor—which gave me the answer I had so

long been seeking about Qaddafi's rise to power. Once I had found this answer, understanding him wasn't that difficult. All I had to do was remember a bitter truth, valid in every climate and in every culture: heroes are few and far between, and the heroes that stand up to a coup d'état are even scarcer. The large majority are paralyzed by fear, shocked by the uncertainty of the future, and only want to know who they should begin to love and respect and obey. They want a leader, basically, a king to replace the deposed king, a king who will fulfill their shameful and eternal need for a king. Are dictators not kings? Are Presidents of the Republics not kings? The only difference between them and the kings who wear a crown and hold a scepter is the question of heredity and the length of their reign. If they have been elected with a vote, they reign for their term; if they impose themselves with violence, they reign until death by illness or tyrannicide; neither of them may place their sons or nephews on the throne. But the pomp that surrounds them is the same, the arrogance with which they command is the same, the haughtiness they exhibit, the obsequiousness they inspire, and the privileges, and the flattery, and the bowing and scraping from all the imbeciles who can't exist without a king and who cut off kingly heads only to try to stick them back on again. Since it's impossible to reattach a head, they live in regret for what they have destroyed and they have no peace until the dead king is replaced with a live one, whoever it may be, whatever he wants to be called: Führer, Guardian of the Revolution, Caudillo, Imam, Supreme Leader, Mr. President, Monsieur Le President. The history of the world confirms this, and one of the oldest lies in the world is the lie of the republic. Only Tito attempted to overcome it, by dying, he who was more king than a king. And anyway, the king is dead: long live the king. The Republic needs a king. The people want a king. There will be a king, whether or not he calls himself king. If there isn't one, he creates himself. He constitutes himself.

And it's at this point that the uniformed thieves come out into the open to declare themselves and appoint themselves saviors; in short, to make themselves kings. Or, at this point, the uniformed thieves decide among themselves who will assume the role of savior, who will be the king. In both cases, the procedure is the same:

basically, the same process that movie producers use to launch the career of a talentless dancer or actor. There are photographs, articles, television interviews, increasingly long and frequent film roles, in bigger and more expensive films, an incessant publicity which makes the public used to that name, that face, and they fall in love with it to such a degree that they grant the title of diva that the producer created with their bad faith and cynicism. Most divas are insignificant creatures: if you met them on a train or in the street without knowing who they were, you wouldn't even look twice. But when their names and their faces become famous, they stop being insignificant creatures and become exceptional beings: an overly large and crooked nose becomes interesting and then seductive and then fascinating. The speech impediment or the limp becomes unusual, and then delightful, and then irresistible. The homely little actress and the clumsy dancer are transformed into beautiful artists, extremely talented, extraordinary personalities: don't you want to know their life stories? Usually their lives are stories without stories, but it doesn't matter, because even the past can invent itself, even the present can be constructed, and it can always be suggested that the past is mysterious and the present is cloaked in privacy. Success is power, and power fills any void, cancels out any emptiness. Yes: to become the savior of the homeland, the prophet of the revolution, the king of the republic who chased out the king, the leader of the uniformed thieves who simply followed the playbook and imitated the screenplay to create a void. On September 1, 1969, no one knew that they existed. A rumor was beginning to circulate that the coupists were twelve young men devoted to Mohammed and Nasser, hostile to capitalism and communism, ready to negotiate with the East and the West, with the United States and the Soviet Union. At the end of the month the news began to spread, along with the gold and incense and myrrh of the Magi—in other words, journalists—that the king was born. Hallelujah, the messiah had arrived. The twelve apostles had elected their Jesus Christ. His name was Moammer el Kozzafi, no, Muammer el Kazzafi, no, Omar Kazafi, no, Omar Maomer el Qadazi, no, Muammer el Khadfi, el-Gheddafi, Qaddafi: a twenty-seven-year-old colonel who had already been demoted to Captain

for lack of discipline, and who, now that he had recovered the rank of Colonel, nobly rejected further promotions. What an extraordinary story he had. He was a Bedouin born under a tent of the proud tribe of the Kozzafi or Qazzafi or Kazafi. or Khadazi or Ghadafi or Qaddafi or Ghedaffi. or however the hell you spelled it. In this tent he grew up alongside several goats, a camel, a father, a mother, three sisters, and the Quran. He was sent to elementary school in a nearby village at the age of eleven, and in four years he learned how to read and write. At fifteen, he might not have been able to defend a dissertation, but he had started middle school and, listening to the radio, he discovered Nasser, along with the glorious times in which Arabs had gone around conquering Sicily, Italy and Spain to drive out the infidels. And so, along with ten of his peers and a clever guy a few years older named Jalloud, he founded a revolutionary cell with the understanding that a coup d'état would be necessary if they wished to take power. To this end, he convinced his friends to enter the military and to become officials. I mean, why else would they have done it? He was tall and thin, handsome as an actor, religious as a mystic or an aesthete, and had never surrendered to carnal sins in all the years he spent preparing for the coup. No alcohol, no fun, no women. And, miracle of miracles: he was a virgin. Even when the military had sent him, at age twenty-four, to take a six-month training course in England, he had not given up his virginity. And this was 1966: Mary Quant had just introduced miniskirts, and London was a lair of temptation that not even Saint Francis would have been able to resist.

There's only one real difference between launching the career of an actor and launching the career of a charismatic leader. While the former can ornament himself with scandals and oddities, the latter must exalt his own purity and moral rigor. The former must demonstrate a real hunger for success, while the latter must hide it. He approaches the public like a little slut on the prowl: giving and then taking away, smiling and then turning her back. The biographical portrait is the first phase in this seduction, the first brick in the construction of the myth. After the portrait come the speeches from balconies, the banquets, more and more opportunities to flirt with the public, to allow the public to admire the leader up close, to

convince themselves that he is not a mirage: indeed, he's even more intelligent, more farsighted, more courageous, more capable. Then comes the period of reluctance, when he tries to make us believe that he is sacrificing himself for the good of the people and that he is certainly not trying to become a king. He doesn't want to, he wouldn't like it, his modesty forbids it. Meanwhile, however, his future subjects are bombarded with his inimitable and irreplaceable presence, his voice enters homes and tents in the desert, his image overwhelms the streets, barracks, offices, classrooms, and any place that has a wall where a portrait of the savior can be hung, any place that has an outlet to plug in a television so that children, the elderly, and the infirm can watch. In the past, adventurers who had set their sights on becoming dictators needed triumphal arches, newspapers, foolish or sellout intellectuals. Today, all they need is some photographs, a cameraman, and a transistor. This is especially true in countries where the people cannot read or write. In Libya in 1969, ninety-five percent of the population was illiterate, newspapers barely existed, and intellectuals were a superfluous minority. There was nothing and no one to oppose themselves to the image of the blemish-free, handsome knight, no one to explain that the legend of his monkish virginity was somewhat polluted by rumors of his love for Jalloud, no one to note that he had no right to precede Khomeini in the campaign against homosexuals. Of course, the moment the revolution was completed, he had married the daughter of one of the monarchy's high officials, so the affair was wrapped up nicely.

Naturally, a matinee idol needs much more time to reach glory, and once he has it, he hurts no one but himself. A dictator needs only a few months, and as soon as he has glory, everyone is in trouble. In less than a year he had already liquidated all his apostles but two, and of course his beloved Jalloud. He had arrested two thirds of the Revolutionary Counsel, the school friends who had helped him take power. He had appointed himself the spiritual, political, military, and religious leader. Everything depended on him, even the observance of the Quran: the hours of prayer, the fasting at Ramadan, the ban on alcohol, the corporal punishments. And, of course, the state of the economy, the fabulous riches of the oil wells, the foreign policy based

on hatred of Israel, the hostility toward the West, the nostalgia for the good old days when Muslims conquered Sicily, Italy, and Spain to crush the infidel dogs. Now that Nasser was dead, he was the self-appointed guide for the Muslim world, and he began busting the balls of neighboring countries, especially Egypt, with his demands and his arrogance: he even commandeered an Egyptian submarine in an attempt to sink the cruise liner Queen Elizabeth II, which was bringing 2,000 Jewish pilgrims to Haifa. He entered the Olympus of world leaders and treated them like old friends, blackmailed them with methods coarse and refined, offering the friendship or enmity of a country that had, due to its strategic position, always been coveted by many, and now more than ever by the Russians and the Americans. Like a prostitute who goes to bed with the highest bidder, he got into bed with all of them: talking like an anticapitalist with some and an anticommunist with others, buying heavy weapons from some and small arms from others. And of course, he also bought weapons from the Italians, from the Pakistanis, the English, the Swedes, from whoever was selling them, and he never haggled. For him, money was as precious as sand. He had an almost sexual passion for weapons: he would have sold his own mother to have an atomic bomb, and when he couldn't find anyone willing to sell him one he sent Jalloud to Zhou Enlai, who wisely sent him packing. Even so, Libya hummed with tanks, cannons, fighter planes, helicopters, all technological jewels that no Libyan knew how to use or what they were for. Libya throbbed with machine guns, rifles with silencers, rocket launchers, bazookas, explosives, horrible devices that could have been plastic knick-knacks, for all the people knew what they were.

But soon it became clear. They were there to bring terror to the West, or wherever he wanted terror brought. They were there for attacks, kidnappings, massacres, contract homicides, they were there to sow seeds of uncertainty and discord and fear outside the country's borders. With the pretext of helping his Palestinian brothers he outfitted and financed and agitated terrorism of all kinds and colors. In the training camps that he had opened in Sirti, the art of killing was taught like art restoration is in Florence, or classical opera is in Milan. Anyone could study murder in that bloody

Sorbonne: Italian Red Brigades, German Baader Meinhof, Filipino Muslims, Japanese kamikazes, Palestinian Fedayeen. The instructors were Russian, Czechoslovakian, Bulgarian, Cuban, American. Some of the Americans had been green berets in Vietnam, and had amused themselves with Vietcong corpses by cutting off both head and penis and then stuffing the penis in the decapitated head's mouth. There were also mercenaries wanted by the FBI like Edwin Wilson and Frank Terpil, and Carlos, the Einstein of worldwide crime. It was George Habash, the crazy leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who introduced Carlos to Qaddafi. He was so impressed that he gave Carlos a fixed salary, a villa by the sea, and an expense account worth a million pounds sterling. The money in this account funded, among other things, taking Yamani and the other Ministers of Oil hostage in Vienna at the OPEC conference. From 1970 on, there was no massacre, attack, or political kidnapping that didn't bear the Colonel's signature, or wasn't funded by him. The killings at the airports in Fiumicino, Athens, Lodz, and Zurich; the massacre at the Munich Olympics, and at the Agricultural Bank in Milan, just to name a few. The ease with which he navigated diametrically opposed ideologies and interest made him a true maestro of the double and sometimes triple cross. The arms trafficking in Tripoli was as dizzying as the traffic of spies who came and went, knowing everything, and helped the colonel instead of exposing him. Wasn't it the Italian and American secret services who warned him that Omar el-Meheishi, one of the apostles he had kicked out in an early purge, was attempting to overthrow him with the Libyan military in 1976? As a result of that piece of espionage, weren't twenty-three officials condemned to death and shot for their part in that conspiracy?

He needed heavy arms to realize his neo-Mussolinian dreams of Mediterranean expansion and to torment the neighboring countries that could hold their own against him. Primarily Egypt, where Sadat had become openly hostile; then Tunisia where Bourguiba had no respect for him; not to mention Morocco, where King Hassan was less than grateful for the string of coups that Qaddafi funded in attempts to kill him. Finally, Qaddafi had his sights set on Chad,

which he wanted to invade in order to annex a nice slice of territory. But he also wanted to stick his nose into the business of far-away countries like Uganda: during the war with Tanzania, Qaddafi sent a five-hundred-man task force to help Amin. And never mind that all it took was a few squirts of insecticide to drive them out of their tanks, never mind that the cannibal Idi Amin had lost ignobly to the Tanzanians. Sub-Saharan Africa seemed like an Empire waiting to be conquered, a colony to convert in another reverse crusade. He wanted to bring it back to the fold of Islam, to annex countries that Mohammed had never even heard of. He provoked coup d'états and revolts in Niger, Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Cameroon, Ghana, Upper Volta, and Nigeria. As if this wasn't enough, he held the leaders of these minorities in Tripoli and held them hostage with the pretext of offering hospitality. From Niger, he held Ayatollah Mohat Musa; from Mali, he held Ayatollah Medina Sunbuni; from Senegal, he held Ayatollah Khalifa Musa. And who knew if he was holding Imam Musa al-Sadr, leader of the Lebanese Shiites, in the same way; all we knew was that the Imam's disappearance greatly troubled Libya's relations with Iran. He claimed that he wanted to re-establish the diplomatic relations that had been suspended under the Shah, but he really wanted to create an alliance with Khomeini, an alliance similar to the Pact of Steel that Mussolini had formed with Hitler in 1940. He tried many times to get into Qom to see Khomeini, but each time he was sent away, and he had actually been forbidden from setting foot in Tehran. The reason for this refusal was the disappearance of Imam Musa al-Sadr, who Khomeini loved so deeply that he had given him his favorite niece as a wife.

Yes, the story of Musa al-Sadr, also known as the Blue-eyed Imam for his periwinkle eyes, was quite a tale. It's a tale that ably demonstrates the madness of that soupy mess they call History, the chaos I found myself in. Here goes. In August of 1978, Musa al-Sadr went to Tripoli to meet with Qaddafi and disappeared into thin air. Had he been arrested, kidnapped, killed? Some said that their meeting had ended in an argument over the plan they were hatching: to transform Lebanon into an Islamic stronghold by organizing the Lebanese Shiites into a guerilla movement that would cleanse the country

of Westerners, as well as Christians who were sympathetic to the West and to the Zionists. Some said that the fight had broke out over Musa al-Sadr's drug plantation near Beirut, which trafficked its crops through Libya, giving a cut of the profits to Qaddafi; Qaddafi found his cut too low, Sadr thought it was too high. In any case, Musa al-Sadr had not come back to his hotel, and no one had ever seen him again, alive or dead. Yet another story maintained that the fight had never taken place, and neither had the meeting. Apparently, Khadafy was offended by the old scoundrel, who went around begging for money and never accepted any advice, and had ordered him detained upon arrival, held for a few days in the barracks. But, by some tragic error, instead of bringing him to meditate on his attitude in the brig, they put him up against a wall and shot him. There were other versions of this story which were less believable but at the same time couldn't be discounted, which said that meeting or no meeting, fight or no fight, Musa al-Sadr had not been shot. Rather, he was in some remote corner of the desert, held hostage like the many Ayatollahs from Sub-Saharan Africa, in order to force his followers in Beirut to follow Qaddafi's orders, as well as to negotiate his release with Khomeini in exchange for the long-desired Pact of Steel which would allow for the successful leadership of the Lebanese Shiite rebellion. Whatever the truth was, all these rumors held the Colonel responsible, and he fruitlessly defended himself, saying that Musa al-Sadr had come to Tripoli but had left aboard an Italian airliner, disembarked in Rome, and there had been assassinated by Zionist agents. No one believed him. After his secret service and police had carried out their investigations, the Italian government proved that the Lebanese Imam had never disembarked in Italy, and indeed, he had never boarded a plane headed to Rome. The Iranian government confirmed this version of events.

I knew this well, since I had asked Bazargan a very pointed question on the subject: »Is it true that diplomatic relations between Iran and Libya have not been restored due to the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr in Tripoli?» With a sharp voice, Bazargan had replied: »It's true. The disappearance of Imam Musa al-Sadr is a very important factor in our lack of diplomatic relations with Libya, and the Italian

government is correct when it maintains that Musa al-Sadr never landed in Italy. I believe them. In fact, we have asked Qaddafi to accept a committee of inquiry to search for Musa al-Sadr in Libya, and we will not re-open our embassy in that country, nor will we allow that country to open an embassy in Iran, until our request has been satisfied.« When I told him that the son of Ayatollah Montazeri, Sheik Montazeri, had just gone to Tripoli and had been photographed with Qaddafi and Arafat, declaring that Musa al-Sadr had, in fact, been killed by Zionist agents in Europe, Bazargan completely lost his composure. His face pale, and his white beard vibrating with scorn, he slammed his hand against the table and declared: »Sheik Montazeri is an abnormal man who needs to be under a psychiatrist's care, and anything he says or does reflects only on him!«

Sheik Montazeri was undoubtedly abnormal. In the chaos of Iran, only the murderer Khalkhali could compete with him in perfidy and idiocy. Moreover, the two even looked alike: the same deformed midget's physique, the same repugnant face, the same squirming, hooting laughter. To understand how much Sheik Montazeri needed a psychiatrist, one only needed to consider that he dressed like a mullah, though he wasn't one, and that he believed he was entitled to get on airplanes without a passport or a ticket. »These are imperialist and capitalist rules!« he would shout, aiming his revolver at whoever reminded him that a ticket was indeed necessary, as was his passport, if he planned on travelling abroad. Then: »I will shoot you in the name of the revolution! Long live the revolution!« He would shoot blindly, causing scenes of panic and desperation, because like it or not, his father was an important man, some said the rival and perhaps the heir to Khomeini. Having an important father during a revolution is as useful as having an important father in a conservative regime.

However, Bazargan's assertion that Montazeri's behavior reflected only on him wasn't entirely true. It was thanks to him that Qaddafi had found a way to begin building an alliance with Iran. Sheik Montazeri hadn't merely gone to Tripoli to chastise him for the disappearance of al-Sadr, but to bring him and Arafat a Middle East action plan. It would mean sending 1,000 Iranian kamikazes to

Beirut, who would have used suicide attacks by land, air and sea to destroy the Zionist enemy and all her Western and philo-Western allies. Montazeri promised that the 1,000 kamikazes were ready and waiting, and that they would establish themselves in Palestinian camps, or among the Shiites. There were also a few women among them, who knew how to hide explosives under their chadors.

Arafat didn't like the plan: he already had enough troubles in Lebanon without worrying about 1,000 kamikazes under orders from a nut. He declined the offer, and paid for his refusal with the forced removal of the PLO from Libya. He allowed the photo op out of simple courtesy. Qaddafi was enthusiastic, however, and had promised not only to finance the undertaking, supplying the necessary explosives, but had also taken it upon himself to add 200 Libyans from his Islamic Brigades. News of this arrived when Sheik Montazeri returned and assembled half of his 1,000 kamikazes, bringing them to the airport to send them off to Beirut, with no tickets or passports, but armed to the teeth with guns and bazookas. Obviously, chaos ensued. Bazargan forbid them to leave and sent squadrons of Pasdaran to stop them, and the Lebanese government declared that it would not allow a single Iranian plane to land in Beirut. Sheik Montazeri called a press conference, and feverishly howled that his 1,000 would go to Lebanon anyway, passing through Syria and installing themselves in the Bekaa valley. Qaddafi would take care of the rest. How everyone laughed when they heard those words. I laughed too. There was not a single person in Tehran who took his Garibaldian proposals seriously. And what a shame. Two and a half years later, in July of 1982, the 1,000 kamikazes actually arrived, alongside 200 Libyans. They had actually passed through Syria, and they had actually installed themselves in the Bekaa valley, and they certainly hadn't been sent there by an abnormal man who needed a psychiatrist: they had been sent by someone who knew his own mind. They left the Bekaa valley in suicide convoys that went on to massacre American and French UN troops. After this massacre, nearly every uprising or attack that tormented the dying Beirut was planned by them, and executed by the Shiites who proudly marched under the portrait of Khomeini, and often under the portrait of Musa

al-Sadr. Even more frequently, they marched under one portrait of Musa al-Sadr, flanked by two of Khomeini.

But I couldn't have known this, no one could have known this, as my plane touched down in Tripoli and I prepared myself to confront the Colonel. I had a feeling my analysis was missing something. What?

»I'm sorry, there are no porters in Libya,« said the young man who greeted me at the airport. His name was Albuquer Juma, and he was wrapped in a pathetic brown barracan, his bare feet in decrepit sandals. He was a functionary of the regime, and had been appointed as my escort.

»And why are there no porters?«

»Because porters do slave labor and the revolution has abolished them.«

»I understand. Could you fetch me a luggage cart?«

»I don't see any, I don't think there are any.«

»The could you please help me?«

»I can't, my back hurts.«

»So does mine, unfortunately.«

Cursing, I lifted my suitcase, and dragged it along under the watchful eyes of the Colonel, who smiled in his uniform out of the many photographs I encountered. I didn't ask if the Colonel had to carry his own suitcase. Nor did I ask who carried the suitcases for the elderly, the lame, and the pregnant women who had the misfortune of arriving at the Tripoli airport. But this idea of slave labor interested me, and as soon as we were in the car and headed into the city, I tried to find out more.

»What are the other jobs that have been abolished because they are slave labor?«

»Shoeshines,« replied Juma with ill-concealed pride. »The shoeshines have also been abolished.«

»And what about the street cleaners? Have they been abolished?«

»No, not the street cleaners.«

»What about the waiters, the maids, the manual laborers, the proletariat in general?«

»No, but very few Libyans are street cleaners, or waiters, or maids, or manual laborers, or proletarians. Almost no one. This is a truly socialist country.«

In any case, I thought, this must be a country where one of the biggest problems facing humanity had been solved: that of humiliating or exhausting labor. In the United States—in other words, in the society that has managed to substitute most physical servitude with technology—porters still existed. And shoeshines. And waiters, and maids, and manual laborers, and proletarians in general, even if they didn't consider themselves such, and were likely to break your nose if you told them that they were doing slave labor. The same was true in the Soviet Union and in other Communist countries where people were proud to be part of the proletariat. The only time I had any doubts about this pride was when the Russians launched Sputnik and a satirical newspaper in Moscow published a cartoon of a female street cleaner sweeping Red Square and scowling at the moon. She was saying: »Now I'll have to sweep that too.« Well, if this wasn't the state of affairs in Libya, I had to admit that the Colonel had done something right.

I congratulated Juma. »Wow!«

»I'm amazed that you're amazed,« replied Juma. »Haven't you read the Green Book? Don't you know the foundations of Islamic socialism? No one here suffers from hunger as they do in the West.«

I hadn't yet read the Green Book. After the traumas inflicted on me by the Blue Book, I hadn't had the strength. I had put it in my suitcase, intending to read it while in Libya. But it would be better if Juma didn't know that.

»And who said that we suffer from hunger in the West?«

»I have been to Italy, and I learned Italian at the University for foreigners in Urbino. I have also been to Paris.«

»And you saw people dying of hunger in Urbino and Paris?«

»Not dying, exactly, no, but I never saw the kind of well-being we enjoy in Libya in either Urbino or Paris. Just look!« he exclaimed, letting go of the steering wheel and spreading his arms wide.

I looked, but I didn't understand what I was looking at. It was almost ten at night and we were going down a dark street, where the only things visible were the palm trees.

»There are no hovels in Libya,« he continued. »Everyone has a house or an apartment, and they own their own homes. Everyone has a car and two or three televisions and a transistor radio apiece. Everyone has a bank account.«

»You're wealthy,« I allowed. My impatience to discover this land of plenty was growing. Tripoli would surely be a stupendous city, its streets paved with gold and skyscrapers more beautiful than anything in New York, swarming with satisfied people who, having been freed from the yoke of servitude, were now able to dedicate themselves to art, to science, and intellectual pursuits. It was no wonder that the Colonel wanted to bring his revolution to the four corners of the world and to bust everyone's balls with his coup d'états, his terrorist attacks, his kidnappings, and his murders. He wasn't an imperialist, he was just generous!

»Wealth has nothing to do with it. What counts is the distribution of wealth,« Juma countered, argumentative. »You must understand that everything is free here: food is practically free since it costs so little. Schools are free, and universities, and hospitals—equality is absolute. In our hospitals, for example, no one is treated like a second or third-class citizen. Whoever gets sick has a private room, and if they need to see a specialist abroad, the state pays for a luxury room in a luxury clinic. The state cares for the citizen here: didn't you learn this from the Green Book? The state even pays each citizen a lifetime salary, regardless of the job he performs. In capitalist countries this isn't the case. Not even in communist countries!«

»Well, no,« I admitted. The business of abolished professions began troubling me again. If everyone was living so well, protected from the cradle to the grave, who was doing all the humiliating and exhausting labor? Who was sweeping the streets, or serving in restaurants, who was cleaning buildings and homes, unloading on the docks, burying bodies, I mean really, who was pumping all that oil? Maybe, thanks to their oil and their opulence, they had invented amazing robots, like the kind that science fiction novels describe, the kind of robust and intelligent humanoids who take care of every human need. Maybe they just had to press a button to see their beds remade and their crops harvested.

»I'm very curious to see the city,« I concluded.

»We're almost there,« replied Juma, and soon we were in the center of the city. To put it mildly, it was a squalid little town that wouldn't have seemed out of place in the poorest regions of Southern Italy: here and there were ugly blocks of flats, thrown up by crooks without conscience or taste, some old buildings from the time of Umberto I, some old colonial villas left behind by the Italians, and then little huts covered with lime, just like in Qom. There were hardly any electric lights, even fewer cars, and no stupendous skyscrapers, no streets paved with gold. Indeed, the further we got from the center, there was no paving on the roads at all, and the beaten earth was full of the deepest holes I'd ever seen on a country road.

»Here is the Libya Palace,« said Juma, narrowly avoiding a pothole and stopping in front of a hideous hotel on the sea. We hoisted my bag from the car and immediately an obsequious servant took it from my hands. But it wasn't a plastic humanoid, it was a human being with a tattered jacket that made me want to cry just looking at it.

»Are you Libyan?« I asked him incredulously.

»Egyptian,« he responded.

We entered the lobby, where another poor soul was polishing the tiles.

»Are you Libyan?« I asked him, perplexed.

»Pakistani,« he answered.

I went up to the room that Juma had reserved for me. It was a vast apartment, he had clearly wanted to impress me. Immediately, a maid with a sad expression came to offer her services.

»Are you Libyan?« I asked her, a little hopefully this time.

»Tunisian,« she answered.

The waiter who brought me my coffee was from Turkey.

As I would discover in the next few days, it was absolutely true that Libyans didn't debase themselves by working as porters, street cleaners, maids, waiters, manual laborers, or proletarians in general. They were all bureaucrats or military men or businessmen or students or idlers. Humiliating or exhausting labor, which they found to be vulgar and unseemly, was always done by Egyptians or Pakistanis

or Tunisians or Algerians or Turks or Sudanese or other Africans, as well as some people from Eastern and Western Europe. Never by a Libyan. On construction sites, on the docks, and in the oil wells, almost all of the workers were foreign. About 700,000 foreigners serving a population of 2,500,000.

They were well-paid, but they were exiled to the margins of society and condemned to an existence that contained no comforts, no rights, no fun, no pleasure, including the pleasure of drinking a beer or going to bed with a woman. They were lambs to the slaughter, nothing more. This was the discovery that the Great Revolutionary had made. Like Evita Peron, or the head of a mafia family intent on protecting his >family,< he corrupted his people with free apartments and houses, luxury clinics, cars, color televisions, and transistor radios. He took away their pride in their work by supplying them with servants who weren't even allowed to get drunk or kiss a girl. The revolution reinterpreted as charity, as the replacement of slaves with other slaves.

»How is everything?« asked Juma, following me into the apartment. He was anxious to confirm that things were going as the Colonel had planned, and anxious to get in a little more praise before the interview tomorrow.

»Great, thank you.«

»The maid was solicitous?«

»Very solicitous, thank you.«

»Did they bring you your coffee?«

»They brought it, thank you.«

»In the refrigerator you will find some orange juice, other fruit juice, some Pepsi, as well as natural and sparkling mineral waters. Take whatever you like.«

»Thank you.«

»There is no alcohol, however. In Libya it is forbidden.«

»I know, thank you.«

»There is, however, a television,« he said, motioning to the set, which snapped on to reveal the color image of the Colonel with his beret and his jacket, which was groaning under the weight of medals, honorifics, and ribbons: it was the same image that I had seen

as I dragged my suitcase through the airport. He soon disappeared, however, replaced by a crowd of frenzied people who were raising their fists and shouting »Qad-da-fi! Qad-da-fi! Qad-da-fi!«

»What is it, Juma? A rally?«

»No, it's a simple homage, which is played in the intervals between programs.«

»Why?«

»Because the people wish it! Because he deserves it! He is truly a great man, do you understand? And he is so kind, so intelligent. He's a thinker. You'll see tomorrow, if you haven't already grasped it from the Green Book.«

»When will I see him?«

»The time still needs to be arranged, but it will definitely be in the evening. Possibly at night.«

»At night?«

»Yes, he often receives visitors at night. He has so many obligations during the day, he can't spare any time on things which do not regard affairs of state. Especially right now, with all that's happening in Iran. He's always on the telephone to Tehran.«

»I thought that there were no diplomatic relations between Libya and Iran.«

»They have just been re-established. He greatly admires the Iranian revolution. He has a great deal of respect for Khomeini.«

On the television screen, the crowd of frenzied people had dissolved into another image of the Colonel, this time on a horse and wearing a white burnous with gold embroidery, like the handsome knight from the Bedouin legend who mounts his steed to award the good and punish the bad. Then the image faded, and was once again replaced by the frantic crowd who raised their fists and chanted »Qad-da-fi! Qad-da-fi! Qad-da-fi!«

»I won't have to wear a chador, will I?«

»Oh no! Women do not wear the chador here, as you may have noticed. Women here are not even required to cover their heads. They enjoy such equality with men that they even perform military service.«

»Really?«

»Of course. From the age of fourteen to eighteen, just like men. Conscription lasts for five years for both sexes. When they complete their service, they can pursue military careers just as men can: all they need do is make sure they don't marry before the age of twenty-five.« He raised his finger, jokingly, to scold me. »I'm afraid that tomorrow you won't be able to throw your chador in anyone's face.«

»Excuse me?«

»Everyone knows that you were mean to Khomeini, that you threw your chador in his face.«

»Who told you this nonsense?«

»I read it in the papers. So did Qaddafi.«

»If he had read anything like that, I doubt I would be here.«

»On the contrary. That is part of the reason you are here. He adores a challenge. And he's confident you'll like him better than you liked Khomeini. Everyone likes him, men and women, but especially women. Many of the women who interview him end up falling in love with him ...«

»Don't tell me this!«

»I'm telling you! And I'm sure you'll fall in love with him too. But I should warn you to re-read the Green Book. You won't be able to have a good interview if you don't know it well.«

With that, he said goodnight, leaving me in front of the screen where the screaming crowd had faded away, this time replaced by a video of the Colonel in athletic clothing: a blue jumpsuit and white sneakers. Dressed like this, he was playing soccer against an entire team, who were unable to score a goal and helplessly dribbled, attacked, defended. Every time he touched the ball, he scored a goal. And then the screaming doubled in intensity, Qad-da-fi, Qad-da-fi, Qad-da-fi.

I turned off the television. I had seen and heard enough today, especially given the latest news that relations with Iran had been re-established after the taking of the American hostages. I needed to rest now, to get a good night's sleep so that I'd be in shape tomorrow, ready to show Juma that falling in love with his boss was impossible. But the fact that I had not read the Green Book worried me so much that it kept me awake. Suddenly, I began to have doubts

and suspicions that led me to believe that the secret I was looking for could be found in those pages. The charismatic leader's journey doesn't end with his triumph as a despot. It expands and stabilizes when he presents himself as a great thinker, revealing his formula for happiness to the world, the ideology that led him to win the revolution and bring about Heaven on Earth. This formula, this ideology, is almost always expressed in a Blue Book or a Red Book or a Green Book, or a yellow or a purple one, the bright covers hiding the secret of his psyche.

Ignoring the book would be like trying to play soccer without a ball. I needed to get it out of my suitcase. I needed to poke around inside it and find what I hadn't been able to find up until now. Anyway, it wouldn't take long: instead of a real book, it was more like two little pamphlets, with the same dimensions as a pack of cigarettes. The meager text was diluted into regular columns which reduced to content of each page to about eighty words. The first would have been no longer than thirty typed pages, the second no longer than twenty. Only the title was threatening: *The Political Basis of the Third Universal Theory* and *The Social Basis of the Third Universal Theory*. Then there was the green of the cover: the color of Islam and a shade he was quite passionate about, they told me.

I summoned my courage. I began to read *The Political Basis of the Third Universal Theory*. Well, it certainly had nothing in common with Khomeini's Blue Book. It didn't talk about the ins and outs of sheep seduction, or child rape, or what kinds of food were acceptable to vomit up, and it didn't even touch on the guidelines of anal relationships between male relatives. Democracy, it said, was a dictatorship. This is because political struggle in democracy is resolved by the victory of a candidate or a party that obtains the majority of votes: this means that the minority is governed by the majority, or rather, that the majority abuses the minority. The parliamentary system is an imposture. It was alright for sultans and tribal leaders, when people needed to be represented. In the age of the masses and republics, it was scandalous to have the people represented by a parliament, because a parliament is made up of politicians, and not the people. The people needed to topple parliaments with revolutions.

Elections were absurd, as were referendums. They only allowed the people to choose one politician or another, or vote yes or no, nothing more. But now, thanks to God in his infinite wisdom, we had the Green Book, which told all the peoples of the Earth the solution to every problem: direct democracy, with no parliaments, and no politicians, no electoral procedures, no referendums, power to the people, who didn't need to be represented by anyone. In order to illustrate this miracle—which had never been imagined by anyone, throughout the history of political thought, not even by those silly people who called themselves philosophers, from Aristotle to Kant to Marx to Croce—the Colonel used a little drawing in the shape of a pyramid. At the base of the pyramid was a green stripe labeled »People.« Above the green stripe were five rectangles, labeled »Basic Popular Congress.« Above the five rectangles, there were fourteen lines that ended in five little circles, five little squares, and five arrows pointed to the top of the pyramid, where there was another green stripe labeled General People's Congress. This Congress expressed the overcoming of communism and capitalism with Islamic socialism, which guaranteed everyone a home, a car, three televisions and so on, and had only just started down a glorious road which would lead to the abolishment of legal and administrative procedures, the profit principle, and the use of money. Since, at that point, man would finally be free to dedicate all his time to Allah, it was almost unnecessary to add that the Third Universal Theory would spread all over the world, since man is everywhere equal.

Whatever I was looking for clearly wasn't here. The first book had only showed me that the Colonel was an idiot, and I already knew that. Maybe I would find the secret of his psyche in the second book? I picked up *The Social Basis of the Third Universal Theory*, which dealt almost entirely with women, and could be more or less summed up in a chapter that began like this: »It is an undisputed fact that men and women are human beings. Women eat like men, love and hate like men, and can even think like men. Finally, women live and die like men. Like men, therefore, women need lodging and clothing and means of transportation. So, why do men and women exist? Why did Allah not create a world populated solely by men or

solely by women? There must be a reason. This reason is found in the difference between men and women: the fact that men are of the male sex and women are of the female sex!«

Seriously: the chapter opened with these words. And it continued: »According to gynecologists, women menstruate and are weakened by their menstruation every month. Sometimes they do not menstruate: if they do not menstruate, they are pregnant. If they are pregnant, they are weakened by the pregnancy for nearly a year. Men, however, do not menstruate. Men are not subject to any weaknesses and do not even have to breastfeed. From this we may deduce that men and women are not equal, that they cannot be equal, and that their roles in society must be different. The role of women is to have children. If women did not have children, the human race would cease to exist. If a woman does not want to have children, she has no choice but to kill herself. But women have another role: breastfeeding children and raising them, just as a hen raises her chicks. If a woman refuses to breastfeed and raise children, she has no choice but to kill herself.«

No, really. That's what it said. And furthermore: »Today there exists a conspiracy that is attempting to nurse children artificially and to put them in preschools. Separating children from their mothers and placing them in kindergartens is a crime because it transforms children into a product like farm-raised chickens. Even chickens, like all the members of the animal kingdom, need their mothers. Raising chickens on farms is thus a crime against nature. The meat of chickens raised on poultry farms is no longer natural meat: it becomes a kind of synthetic meat which no longer has any flavor and is much less nutritious than meat from chickens who live out in the open, under the protection of their mothers. The meat of wild birds, for example, is more flavorful and more nutritious than the meat of chickens raised on poultry farms because wild birds grow up free, alongside their mothers.«

Despite the Colonel's friendship with Idi Amin and Bokassa, I wasn't entirely sure if really he meant that children were supposed to grow up nurtured by their mothers so that their meat would be more flavorful and nutritious; if, in other words, children were supposed to be eaten like chickens and other fowl. It was even less clear why

Libyan women were obliged to do years of military service, if their purpose in life was either giving birth or killing themselves. Anyway, what I was looking for wasn't here, either. The second book had only proven that the Colonel was an imbecile. The secret to his psyche was hiding somewhere else, I just knew it. If I wanted to discover it, I had no other recourse but the interview.

When Juma arrived the next day he told me that I was lucky: the great meeting would take place at six in the evening. His feet were like two blocks of mud and his pants were caked with filth up to the knees. It had rained the night before, and since the Colonel had never seen fit to build sewers in the past ten years, the road outside the hotel had simply ceased to exist. In its place was a torrent of slime that pulled dirt and all kinds of other rubbish along with it: human waste, broken sandals, bloody diapers, rotten cabbage leaves, and even some non-disgusting items like chairs and bicycles. In order to cross it and enter the Libya Palace, one had to find the spot where that oozing disaster collected in kind of pond, and whoever tried to pick their way through it ended up like poor Juma. I sent him to take a shower and then I listened to his advice.

I should insist on an interpreter: even though Qaddafi knew all Western languages, especially English, his patriotism kept him from speaking in any language other than Arabic. I shouldn't waste any time asking him personal questions, which were beneath him. It was already well known that he had divorced his first wife, the mother of his first child, and had remarried a nurse who had given him five more children. I shouldn't forget that I was Italian. It might be true that Libya had commercial and industrial relations with Italy, that the Colonel even owned part of Fiat, but it was also true that he had a score to settle with Italy. We had been wicked in the past. We had invaded Libya, and killed, and massacred, and exploited in thousands of different ways. If there were no sewers on the streets of Libya, it was because the Italians had never built any. Yes, it was their fault that everything was wet and filthy.

He took his leave and said he would return at five to take me to

the interview, and God willing, the horrible stream would have dried up. Of this three pieces of advice, the most interesting was undoubtedly the one which blamed me for the lack of sewers. If the Colonel had suggested it, I had to deduce that he was less idiotic than I had thought. It's not easy for an Italian to visit countries like Libya and Ethiopia with a clear conscience, because it's not easy to forget what Italians did in Libya and Ethiopia. And, while we can reassure ourselves in Ethiopia by placing all the blame on Mussolini, we have no such luxury in Libya. Benito wasn't the first to set foot here. Rather, it was the good democratic people of Giolitti's government: men of culture, scientists, missionaries, and liberals who considered themselves progressive and enlightened. Men who nonetheless prattled on about the »fourth shore« and »historic destiny« and »vital space.« While Pascoli composed twaddle about »the great proletariat who awake to discover their greatness,« and the left applauded, they also send 35,000 soldiers into Tripoli and Benghazi. Then colonizers swooped down like vultures on the poverty-stricken populations, stealing their fertile land, their livestock and their water, and preventing them from moving forward. Mussolini had only perfected and expanded the strategy of robbery, adding other base acts along the way, which we still feel ashamed about generations later. This history unmasks the lie that Italians are good people, kind and eager to please. We need only remember that concentration camps were invented by General Badoglio, who deported 80,000 Libyans to Cyrenaica. Three-quarters of them died of thirst and illness. We need only recall the ferocity of General Graziani and his troops, all the villages they burned with people still inside, the people they hung, the mass executions they carried out. The shootings performed by Italo Balbo's aviators, who then wrote about their exploits: »None of us wanted to come down after the shooting, we were having far too much fun with this new and exciting game.« And: »Afterwards, the jackals were especially pleased, having found something to satisfy their hunger.« Finally, we need only remember the torture that captured guerrilla fighters were subjected to, or the execution of the courageous head of the Resistance, Omar Mukhtar, who was hanged in front of 20,000 Libyans, made an example of.

However, if I let myself be intimidated by that past, or if I let it inspire some degree of indulgence for the Colonel, it would mean giving in to an unacceptable kind of blackmail, as unacceptable as when Israelis throw the Holocaust in your face in order to justify their crimes. Regardless of what some people think, the sins of grandchildren are not cancelled out by their grandparents' martyrdom. And just as Anne Frank isn't a get-out-of-jail-free card for Jerusalem's vultures, Omar Mukhtar isn't a get-out-of-jail-free card for Tripoli's. In any case, the Colonel had already achieved a certain degree of revenge. He had driven all the Italians out of Libya, even those who had been born there, who had nothing to do with the atrocities committed by Badoglio or Graziani or Balbo, those who loved Libya as a second home. He had expelled them without warning, letting them take only one suitcase with them, mistreating and humiliating them until the moment they boarded their ships and their planes. He had done this after confiscating their land and homes and bank accounts, along with their schools and restaurants and clinics and pharmacies and cars and tractors and pets and even their churches. He tore down all the crucifixes, demolished the altars, threw away the bells, replaced the images of Christ and the Madonna with his own portrait, then transformed the churches into mosques or parking garages or warehouses. He destroyed the cemeteries that housed the remains of the soldiers killed in 1911 and in World War II, the victims of El Alamein, of Tobruk, of Al-Jaghhub, refusing to return the coffins to surviving family members and destroying the tombs with bulldozers. He broke up their bones and mixed them with the earth as fertilizer. He took the headstones that had remained intact and used them as floor tiles in a cafeteria, where people now walked around, trampling the names of the dead.

In truth, his cleverness was misdirected if he thought he could blackmail me with the missing sewers, which weren't built thanks to his ineptitude and my countrymen's negligence. I prepared myself for Juma's return with no guilty feelings. The torrent of slime had subsided, but a sheen of human waste remained, dotted with broken sandals and bloody diapers and rotten cabbage leaves, so the poor guy had to pull on a pair of rubber boots and pick me up and carry

me to the car that was waiting to bring us to El Ezeizia, the barracks where the Colonel lived and where, in all likelihood, Musa al-Sadr had been killed.

The security forces that surrounded Qom to protect Khomeini were a joke by comparison. Even a child, pausing at the entrance to El Ezeizia, would have concluded that the Colonel was terrified of being killed. Once we made it past the entrance, there were checkpoints every hundred meters, and at every checkpoint were tanks with cannons or heavy artillery. Around every tank was a group of thugs who kept their weapons trained on us. Juma helplessly showed his credentials and proof that we were expected. Waving their guns, they made us get out of the car and stopped us from continuing until permission came over their walkie-talkies. We were stopped at least eight times before we reached the Colonel's quarters, a luxurious palace at the center of the fort. This too was watched over by an impressive display of force. At the top of the stairway leading up to the palace were twenty or so soldiers, who quickly detained us as though we were assassins, pushing us into a room and searching us thoroughly, even combing through our hair. Juma got the worst of it after he protested; he was brought into an adjoining room and strip-searched. They let him continue, but confiscated his pen, since they were still suspicious. They closely examined my tape recorder, and tried to dismantle it to check for explosive devices; the photographer who had come with me watched as all his cameras were taken apart and one was irreparably damaged. Juma was taken away, with the pretext that his ballpoint pen had to be more carefully analyzed, and the photographer and I were escorted to another part of the palace, where the marble floors were so shiny you found yourself wondering who cleaned them. Were slaves allowed into El Ezeizia? Here we were led into a kind of library, papered with dozens of back issues of *Who's Who*. We were left there for more than three hours. At nine o'clock the Colonel still hadn't arrived and no one had bothered to offer an explanation, or bring us a coffee, or ask us if we needed to use the bathroom. Indeed, when I rebelled

at around eight o'clock, venturing into the hallway in search of a bathroom, the soldiers standing guard in the hallway jumped all over me, threatening me with their revolvers. At quarter past nine a man in civilian dress arrived, said his name was Ibrahim, and that he was the English interpreter. Soon after, the Colonel himself burst into the room. Without excusing himself for the delay, without greeting me, without even glancing in my direction or betraying that he had in any way noticed my presence, he threw himself onto a couch and began attentively reading some official document.

I observed him calmly. In terms of appearance, he didn't even inspire the curiosity that the little girl with the black bow in her hair had felt for Hitler and Mussolini; not to mention the curiosity that a journalist might feel when face to face with an historical figure. He certainly wasn't handsome, as many claimed. He had a big head, out of proportion with the rest of his body, a great mass of curly hair. The only features that attracted my notice were his exceedingly low forehead and his exceedingly long chin and heavy, fleshy jaw. This defect wasn't visible in photographs or on television because, knowing him, he kept his head up and tensed his neck muscles. Thinking about it now, the only thing that really caught my attention were his boots. They were in fine, soft leather, a nice warm brown color. They were tapered and had almost no visible stitching, made even more attractive by two little gold-buckled straps that encircled each ankle. They were, in short, expensive, and showed that his vanity went all the way down to his toes. It would be years before I saw another pair of boots as nice, and just guess who was wearing them: Fidel Castro. Of course, Castro's didn't have any flashy gold buckles, and they certainly didn't have a three-inch high heel that would have looked more at home on a woman's boot, like Qaddafi's. He must have really liked them: after he crossed his legs, he stared at them admiringly. He rotated his foot, raised it, showed it off, and sometimes even brought it up to his knee so he could caress the boot, leaving me dumbfounded. Was it possible that he was doing all this and actually concentrating on the document he was reading? After ten minutes he stopped reading, or stopped pretending to read. He turned to me in a condescending way and spoke in a soft and studied voice, the voice of an actor.

»I have bad news. There is movement in the American bases in Europe, in Greece, and in Turkey. The Americans are training paratroopers and arming them with missiles, gas, and neutron bombs. This is a serious matter. If this is the start of World War III, I will need to use all my forces to ensure that things remain under control. I am trying to convince the Iranians to release the hostages. An Iranian delegation composed of men very close to Khomeini has just arrived. These are the men Khomeini listens to. I will deliver a personal message to them, asking the Imam to release the hostages. This affair has become more and more dangerous. Naturally, if something happens in Iran, Libya will not remain neutral. The Iranians are our brothers, and with them we can form a powerful line of aggression against America.«

While Ibrahim translated, he enveloped me in a probing gaze, trying to ascertain if his ability to secure the hostages' release and avoid World War III had impressed me as much as he hoped it would. I didn't think it wise to reward his arrogance.

»This is surprising to me, Colonel. Because in mid-September, when I was in Tehran, I observed a great deal of hostility toward Libya and toward you in particular. To put it mildly, they certainly didn't consider you a brother. I suppose you know why.«

»No, I don't know why,« he said, caressing his heel.

»Well, I'll remind you. It was due to the disappearance of Imam Musa al-Sadr, the head of the Lebanese Shiites, the husband of one of Khomeini's nieces. Many said that you had him killed here in Tripoli.«

He didn't answer, and kept on stroking his heel.

»During my interview with Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, we spoke about this at length. Bazargan explained to me that the disappearance of Musa al-Sadr in Tripoli was the reason why diplomatic relations with Libya had not been reestablished. He added that the Italian government was telling the truth when it affirmed that, despite your claims to the contrary, Musa al-Sadr had never reached Rome. He said that Khomeini thought the same.«

He still didn't respond, just kept on caressing his heel.

»Look, Colonel. It's written right here ...«

I rose from my chair and handed him the issue of *The New York Times* that contained my interview with Bazargan. He didn't take it. He didn't even look at it. He just kept on stroking his heel.

»You won't answer me, Colonel?«

He finally let go of the heel.

»I can tell you that diplomatic relations between Libya and Iran have now been firmly re-established. I can tell you that the relationship between two revolutions is much stronger than the relationship between two normal governments. This is especially true after the expulsion of the Shah, after the success of the Iranian revolution. I can tell you that the re-opening of embassies both here and in Iran is nothing if not the confirmation of these relations, the obvious consequence of an already solid friendship.«

»I understand. The how can you explain the disappearance of a figure as important to the Iranian revolution as Musa al-Sadr was, here in Libya?«

Silence.

»And how can you explain the fact that Khomeini seems to have gotten over this disappearance in his decision to re-establish diplomatic relations?«

Silence.

»Because, and I'll say it again, he was very fond of his nephew-in-law.«

Silence. Then harsh, extremely scornful laughter.

»There are many men like me in the Iranian revolution. Men who know how to use the military to clear the way for the masses.«

»And your relationship is with them, and not with Khomeini: is this what you mean?«

»This subject doesn't interest me. The Americans are arming themselves with missiles and neutron bombs, as I said. I have bad news, I said, and you don't want to talk about it.«

»I do want to talk about it. Even more so in light of the bad news I have for you, Colonel. The American embassy in Tehran has been rigged with explosives, and the fifty hostages are in danger of blowing up at any given moment. The embassy in Islamabad has been burned and destroyed, and its employees died in the fire. There are

other attacks against embassies taking place in India, in Bangladesh, and in Turkey ...«

»An international revolution! An international revolution against America!« he shouted. And once again he laughed: drily, scornfully.

»Revolution or provocation, Colonel?«

»Revolution! These things are happening because people hate America, because hate toward America is exploding! Everyone hates America, everyone! If Carter doesn't like it, all he has to do is hand the Shah over to Khomeini.«

»Colonel ... if Uganda asked for Idi Amin, would you give him back?«

»If Idi Amin were here, I might be able to accept this comparison and consider your question. Since he's not here, the comparison is invalid and I have no answer to give you.«

»Colonel, the comparison is valid because Amin is here: he is your honored guest. He lives in the outskirts of Tripoli, in a villa with a park and a swimming pool. He lives with two of his many wives and ten of his even more numerous children. He was interviewed in this villa by a Filipino journalist, who you had arrested as punishment.«

»Maybe that journalist interviewed him while he was visiting Tripoli.«

»Visiting, Colonel? If you want to call it a visit, then we can say that the Shah is visiting New York. I'll repeat my question: if Uganda claimed Amin the way Iran is claiming the Shah, would you give him back?«

»Listen ... every individual has the right to ask for political asylum from whoever they choose, in whatever country or whatever part of the world they like, so I think that the Shah has the right to seek refuge in America and elsewhere. At the same time, however, the Iranians have a right to claim the Shah, and I hope they get him back. I don't understand the question about Amin.«

I looked at him, discouraged. Was he tired, did he not feel well? No, he seemed awake and in excellent health. Perhaps Ibrahim wasn't translating my questions properly, maybe he was obscuring my meaning? But it couldn't be this: even without Ibrahim's help, he understood English perfectly. Perhaps it was my fault, maybe I had

gone about it the wrong way, maybe I should begin again? Yes, perhaps I should start all over again, provoke him better, push it further.

»Colonel, cards on the table. I would like to take your portrait, and I would like to do it in the following way: I want to understand why everyone dislikes you so much, why you are so little loved ...«

He interrupted me with an icy tone: »I am not loved by those who act against the masses and against freedom, I am loved by those who fight for the masses and for freedom.«

»Yes, yes, but let me explain why I asked you that question about Amin. I chose Amin as a symbol of your bad friendships. Everyone knows that Amin is a criminal, a bloody tyrant who decimated his own people for years. So people ask themselves: why does Qaddafi always choose this kind of company, and ...«

»The fact that they ask why-does-Qaddafi-always-choose-this-kind-of-company shows the high opinion that people have of me. Even people who hate me. Anyway, your opinion of Amin is wrong, everything you say about Amin is wrong, the result of Zionist propaganda. You know nothing, you Westerners know nothing. Instead of speaking ill of Amin you would do better to condemn Nyerere, who is occupying Uganda today. What do I have to do with Amin's government? Did I have any right to interview in the way Amin chose to govern? I don't interfere in other people's business.«

»But you do, Colonel. You do, with the excuse of helping oppressed people, who are only oppressed when its convenient for you, you are continually interfering in other people's business: Uganda is one case among many. Let's talk about Chad ...«

»The people of Chad against French troops! We have the right to interfere with Chad to help those people fight the French! The same right we have to interfere in Uganda during the war Nyerere launched to conquer it!«

I looked at him, more discouraged than ever.

»Colonel, you keep contradicting yourself. Before you said that you don't interfere in other people's business, then you admit that you did interfere in Uganda and in Chad. First you say that Amin is a good person, and then you acknowledge that he isn't, though you do so in an indirect way. In the name of coherence, could I remind

you that you were friends with Amin long before he went to war with Tanzania?»

»Because Amin was and is against Israel. Because Amin was the first African president who dared to expel the Israelis from his country. Because Amin is a Muslim and his domestic policies do not concern me, I say. I am a realist. Have you ever heard of realism?»

»Yes, many times. But let's forget about Amin, Colonel: we are concentrating far too much on him, and I chose Amin only as an example. I might just as well have chosen Bokassa or ... «

»Who?»

»Bokassa. The one who eats roast baby.«

»The case of Bokassa is the same as that of Amin. I may find the personal character of Bokassa and Amin unpleasant, I may not agree with their domestic policies, but I like the interference of France and Tanzania even less. And above all, I do not like the support that you Westerners give Israel. Is that clear?»

»No. What does Israel have to do with Bokassa eating roast baby?»

»It's related. Because it's your Western attitude that causes Palestinians to die. It's your decision to supply arms to Israel, your refusal to acknowledge that you are the ones making World War Three the only possible outcome. Besides, you are always the ones killing us.«

Good God. It was like being caught in a rip tide, not knowing where it was taking you, and in the meantime picking up all the dross that was floating alongside you. What conceivable mental process had led him from Bokassa to the Palestinians? How could I have been so distracted to invoke Bokassa right after Amin? Was it possible that his lack of logic had infected me to the point that I was no longer able to control the interview? Was it possible that I wasn't going to get a single coherent response from him, a single intelligent phrase? I had to focus, to try to uncover the secret to his psyche. I couldn't simply conclude that I was face to face with an idiot. Sometimes he didn't seem like an idiot, and even if he was, his idiocy was hiding another, more serious defect. But what was it? And how could I identify it? Maybe if I let myself be carried along by the current, if I accepted this crazy dialogue.

»Who is massacring you at present, Colonel?«

»Eh!« he exclaimed, returning his attention to his ladies' high heel, and letting out another harsh laugh. »Was it Libya that invaded Italy or Italy that invaded Libya?«

»It was Italy, seventy years ago.«

»But today it's the same thing, even though you are attacking us with different systems, like supporting Israel and opposing Arab unity and our revolution, scowling at Islam. We have been far too patient with you, we have endured your provocations long enough: if we hadn't been so wise, we would have mounted wars against you a thousand times over. The fact remains that we were wise, and we were always civilized. Weren't we the ones who civilized you, in the Middle Ages? You were a bunch of poor barbarians, savage and primitive creatures, you knew nothing. The science you use today you learned from us, the medicine you use today you learned from us. And the same is true for mathematics, astronomy, literature, art ... «

»Do you mean to say that Giotto and Dante, Saint Augustine and Petrarch, then Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci all studied in Tripoli?«

»Well, Jesus Christ certainly wasn't Roman.«

»No, he was Jewish. But seeing as how Libya gave us all these graduates in physics and mathematics, in fine arts and sculpture, can I ask you a question linked to the theme of civilization?«

»Please,« he replied, magnanimous.

»Why did you cast out the bones of Italian soldiers buried in Libya?«

»Why did you cast out all the Arabs who had come to Italy to bring you the light of civilization 250 years ago? Why did you cast them out of Spain where they had been for 800 years for the same purpose? You will say it is because they were invaders. Well, we cast out the Italian dead because they were invaders!«

»Corpse invaders?«

»Of course. And anyway, despite our actions, we behaved very civilly. I'll explain. Because many Italian cemeteries—and many Islamic cemeteries too—were obstructing the urban planning we devised after the revolution, they had to be destroyed. But, in order

to ensure that Italy did not take this as an act of violence, I told the Italians that anyone who wanted the remains of their soldiers could come and take them back, otherwise they'd be removed with a bulldozer. And Italy took them back.«

»And where did the headstones end up?«

»I don't know.«

»Am I incorrect in stating that you used them as building materials for a cafeteria?«

»Trivialities and lies. These are typical of the kind of rumors that arise from Western hatred of Islam.«

»But there are photographs of these lies, photographs of a cafeteria floor made of headstones.«

»The I'll tell you that other Italian bodies will be expelled from Libya. At present the tombs of your soldiers who died at Benghazi and Tobruk during the Second World War are impeding our urban planning. Many of them are exactly where we intend to build roads, highways, and parking lots. If those bodies are not removed, our bulldozers will tear them apart,« he answered, in a mocking tone.

Yes, the crazy dialogue strategy was working: if nothing else, it revealed his cruelty. But I was still missing something, I still hadn't been able to uncover the secret to his psyche. If only something would happen: a disaster, who knows, an accident that would reveal the secret to me! If Ibrahim would only help me! I smiled at Ibrahim in a friendly way. Poor Ibrahim. He was a little, middle-aged man, with a timid, servile face. Who knows what bizarre twist of fate had led him to these barracks, risking a heart attack every time he had to pass on one of my questions. Be brave, Ibrahim, and forgive me.

»Colonel, will you allow me to continue my investigation and to cite one of the reasons why no one in the world likes you? It's your hobby of funding every terrorist group of our time ...«

»This is an unsubstantiated claim. A claim that arises from Zionist propaganda that seeks to defame me because I support the Palestinian cause.«

»No, Colonel, I wasn't referring to the support you lend to Palestine. I was referring to the support you lend to whoever wants to shoot and kill: the Irish, the Basques, the fascists ... but, since you

brought up the Palestinians, let's talk about them, too. For example, the massacre they staged at Fiumicino.«

»Where?»

»Fiumicino, the airport in Rome where many Italians died. Don't you remember? It's common knowledge that you were the one who financed that massacre, that you gave your blessing.«

He laughed his harsh laugh, raised his long chin, and snorted.

»I don't know. I don't remember.«

»You don't know? You don't remember? You should. Everyone knows that you paid for and supported that massacre. But let's find another example: what about Carlos's visit to the Munich Olympics? Wasn't that terrorism also sponsored and mandated by you?»

Another harsh laugh, another raised chin, another snort.

»It was a reaction to Israeli terrorism. Don't you remember when the Israelis shot down a Libya Airlines jet?»

»No, I don't remember. You don't remember the Fiumicino massacre and I don't remember the Libya Airlines jet. But I do remember the Red Brigades ... have you ever heard of them?» I insisted, digging through my purse for a pen. I had thought of a very wicked question and I wanted to write it down so I wouldn't forget it.

»Such phenomena are typical of the West and of capitalism. They are movements which express the rejection of a society which should be destroyed. It doesn't matter if they call themselves Red Brigades or Beatles or Sons of God. I don't want anything to do with them.«

»Nonetheless, you did have something to do with the Red Brigades. You gave them weapons, money, and you trained them with help from the Palestinians,« I shot back, finally locating a pen to write down my question. And this was when the disaster I had been hoping for happened. Right as I bent over my notebook, he began to emit a strange grunting, like an excited animal.

»Green! Green! Green!«

»Excuse me?» I turned to Ibrahim with a questioning air.

»He has noticed that your pen is green,« said Ibrahim, extremely embarrassed.

It was true: the pen was green. I had pens of many different colors in my bag, and I had located the green one first.

»Yes, it's green,« I allowed, uncomprehending.

»Green like the flag of Islam, green like the Green Book,« Ibrahim explained, even more embarrassed.

The grunting continued: »Green! Green! Green!«

»Do you want it?« I asked, somewhat worried.

Qaddafi reached out his hand and grabbed it like a greedy child grabs a much-desired toy. Then he removed a green handkerchief from his jacket and compared the two shades of green.

»It's the same green,« he panted. »It's *my* green!«

»Please, keep it.«

»No.«

»I'm happy to give it to you.«

»No!« And like a petulant child, he threw it on the couch, where it lodged between two cushions. He sat there, contemplating it in silence.

What now? I glanced nervously at Ibrahim.

»It's very late. I think the Colonel is exhausted,« murmured Ibrahim.

»I think so too. Could we continue tomorrow?«

»I'll ask him.«

He cautiously approached the couch, coughed a few times in an attempt to interrupt the Colonel's deep concentration on a pen lodged between two cushions. His fourth cough succeeded, and the Colonel turned a pale, blank face toward him. They spoke softly in Arabic for a few minutes.

»He says that we can meet again tomorrow at six o'clock,« Ibrahim translated. »But he wants to know if the photographer will be here.«

»Why?«

»Because if the photographer will be here he wonders if you prefer him with his burnous or his uniform.«

»What burnous?«

»A burnous of white linen with gold embroidery,« Ibrahim clarified. »It photographs very well.«

»Let's go for the white burnous with gold embroidery, in that case.«

»Here in the library or under the tent?«

»What tent?«

»The colonel has a Bedouin tent, here at El Ezeizia, with sand brought specially from the Sirti desert where he was born,« he explained. »That also photographs very well «

»Let's go for the tent with the desert sand, then.«

The Colonel seemed to have forgotten the green pen, and seemed very satisfied with my choices. And, as though we had just had the most cordial meeting imaginable, he shook my hand in a warm goodbye. Then he left me alone with a pressing question: was he crazy? And, if so, how crazy?

The problem is that the adjective »crazy« is too vague and ambiguous. What does it mean to be crazy? If you ask a psychiatrist he'll tell you that this term refers to any kind of mental alteration, any kind of anomaly that manifests itself in unconsidered or extravagant actions, anything outside the normal. Then he'll add that we're all a little crazy, that all our obsessions and superstitions and manias are phenomena well outside the normal. When you ask him what it means to be normal or abnormal, he'll tell you that being normal means acting within reality and recognizing the ambivalence of good and bad; being abnormal means acting outside of reality and not recognizing that ambivalence. In other words, denying all ambivalence and refusing all doubts in a drastic manner. His definition will leave you confused because, if mental health means having good sense and accepting doubt, faith itself is madness: anyone who follows a dream that lies outside of his immediate reality is crazy, anyone who supports a utopian idea or doctrine is crazy, anyone who formulates a moral or scientific principle is crazy, anyone who ignores the current definitions of good and bad, of possible and impossible, is crazy. Socrates, Plato, Moses, Jesus Christ, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, and the first men to walk on the moon—all crazy. But more importantly, whoever leads or holds power is crazy. Indeed, be they political or religious, leaders cannot avoid making a clear distinction between good and bad, nor can they allow themselves to doubt whatever they preach or enforce; they cannot doubt who they are or what they represent. Once they have married

their truth, they must adhere to it with a rigor which allows for no uncertainty or rethinking. Especially if they are a dictator or a tyrant.

But then the dictator and the tyrant are automatically crazy, far crazier than the person who tries to eat soup with a fork, crazier than the person who kills her children like Medea, and it's useless to ask if they are evil in the way they exercise their power, or if the exercise of power makes them evil. Should we hold a crazy man accountable for his wickedness? Isn't it true that when he breaks the law and kills someone, the courts rule him not guilty by reason of insanity? In the name of logic we should absolve them all, from Caligula to Genghis Khan, from Amin to Bokassa, from Khomeini to Qaddafi. We should absolve them saying poor things, they were sick, they are sick, they don't know what it means to act within reality, to recognize ambivalence, to distinguish between good and bad or to accept their doubts. This seems, to me, far too easy, and inexact as well, since the dictator and the tyrant know very well what it means to act within reality. They do so every day, every minute. They know very well the difference between good and bad, and they cynically use this knowledge daily. Therefore, their madness, or presumed madness, is nothing like eating soup with a fork or killing children a la Medea, or Ophelia drowning herself in a pond. We cannot separate their guilt from their acts, acts that would lead a normal murderer to life in prison or the electric chair. In short, wondering if the Colonel was crazy, and if so, how crazy, didn't absolve him at all. It only helped me to better prepare for the final encounter, which would take place under a tent.

I found Juma, who had been detained all this time by his persecutors, and while he drove me back to the hotel I reflected on the events that had preceded the incredible scene over the green pen. To begin with, there had been the three hour and fifteen minute wait, or really, the imprisonment that had kept me from even going into the hallway and looking for the bathroom. Then he had burst into the room without acknowledging me, without justifying his late arrival, without even looking at me. Why? Was it simply the nastiness or insolence of a despot unaware of good manners? Impossible. A head of state, no matter how coarse, doesn't behave like that by accident, and both episodes betrayed a very subtle calculation on his part: a precise intention of offending me. I would have to look for the

reason elsewhere, and I tried to remember what Juma had told me: »Everyone knows that you were mean to Khomeini. Even Qaddafi knows, and it's part of the reason you're here. He adores a challenge.« He had challenged me. He had done it with the slyness of someone who attacks in order not to be attacked, and who then assumes a disdainful air so that no one will accuse him of attacking. But then, why had this slyness not continued? Throughout the interview he had been incapable of putting together a single coherent sentence or crafting a single appropriate response. What had compelled him to hide behind those harsh little laughs, those haughty silences, and those bizarre non-sequiturs? Clearly, it was my fault. I had made a mistake: I had attacked him myself with the story of Musa al-Sadr and then Amin, from the very beginning, I had involved him in a war he didn't know how to fight. He had reacted by retreating into a kind of mental inertia, a lethargic apathy, he had stopped trying to defend himself. Was this what had led to the crisis, the delirium of the green pen? Of course it was. It didn't take a genius to deduce that the green of his Green Book, the green of Islam, was the symbol of his power, which he had seen insulted by a foreign enemy. The very sight of it had caused him to lose his self-control, and he had clung to that pen as though it were the side of a cliff off which he was about to plummet. »Green, green, green!« Had I been painting the portrait of a paranoid character? Everyone knows that a paranoiac isn't crazy enough to put in a straight jacket, but rather a seemingly sane person whose psyche is polluted by a delirium that makes him gradually lose contact with reality. He is a relatively lucid invalid whose mind is afflicted by delusions of grandeur that sometimes manifest in innocent ways: the illusion of building a perpetual motion device, or brewing the elixir of eternal youth.

The delusions sometimes manifest in dangerous ways, however: the pretension to take over the world, for example, a God-given right and a messianic role. Woe to anyone who doubts his superiority, his infallibility. He is a skittish, devious, distrustful megalomaniac; a persecutor who thinks himself persecuted, and who persecutes more and more the more persecuted he feels. When he's not persecuting, he closes himself off in disdainful silences that seem to

say: wretch, what do you know of my perpetual motion device, of my eternal youth elixir? Indeed, he never tests himself against other opinions, never holds an open dialogue, never allows for a debate he might lose, and demands to be everywhere revered, applauded, and admired. If he doesn't feel appreciated, he is tormented by fears. The fear of being misunderstood, criticized, insulted. The fear of being betrayed, poisoned, killed by his own friends and followers. The fear of the death he sees all around him, the death he fights in vain with his insistence that he is guided by supernatural forces. This is especially true if he has power. In his leader's costume he is a coward who delegates his own vendettas and his own fantasies of violence. He is also weak, hiding his weakness behind decisive male posturing. Of course, he is a terrible exhibitionist, a vain man wallowing in his own narcissism. Finally, he is often an onanist plagued by strange carnal desires, bizarre fetishes; a latent homosexual who both hates and envies women. At the root of his paranoia, psychiatrists say, is a homosexual impulse: think about Hitler, that paranoid par excellence.

»What are you thinking about?« Juma asked, interrupting my train of thought.

»Hitler,« I answered.

»What does Hitler have to do with anything?« he exclaimed, alarmed.

»Because I would have like to interview him,« I answered.

»You certainly don't mean to say that Qaddafi has something in common with Hitler?« shouted Juma, more indignant than alarmed, now.

»No, no,« I tried to calm him.

But he did. Once I had read an analysis of Hitler, and it was the same story, even in the seemingly unimportant details. Those tanks at the checkpoints, those thugs in uniform, ready to shoot, those exaggerated and extended searches, didn't they all prove his terror of being killed? The anxious desire to be photographed in his white burnous with gold embroidery, didn't it show his overgrown exhibitionism, his narcissistic vanity? And that sensual caressing of his high-heeled boots, wasn't it a sign of strange carnal desires, bizarre

onanistic fetishes? Psychoanalysts say that some people see a reflection of their own genitals in their shoes, the heel as an extension of the penis, so in other words ...

I burst out laughing.

»I'm glad to see you laugh. Are you happy?« asked Juma.

»Very happy,« I lied.

»It must have gone well,« said Juma.

»Very well,« I lied.

»Tomorrow it will go even better,« said Juma.

»I'm sure it will,« I answered, this time truthfully. Because I had no doubt that, in a few hours, I would have given the Colonel enough rope to hang himself. My only uncertainty regarded the location he had chosen for his suicide.

It was the funniest scene I could have hoped for, I concluded, as I returned to finish the interview. The tent was in the middle of a closed courtyard, planted in the asphalt, and it looked so absurd and unreal that I felt as though I were on the set of *The Sheik*, that film that made Valentino famous in the 1920s. All that was missing was the crew with their cameras, electric cables, microphones, and the director furiously yelling »Who the hell told you to put this tent here?!«

Two flaming braziers stood on the threshold, next to three blooming rose bushes, and the interior made me remember the scene where Rudolph seduces his lover singing »I am the desert king, your heart belongs to me, when you sleep tonight, I'll come to you and kiss you.« There was a blanket of fine white sand on the ground, with pretty mats laid on top of it. The ceiling and the walls were made of luxurious fabric with geometric designs, and on all sides were long couches covered with plump, inviting cushions. There were alabaster lamps on the tables which threw light against the sides and made the place seem like a love nest. In the center was a horrendous plastic armchair, just like the ones that actors use during their breaks. On that chair, there he was, wrapped up in his white linen burnous and as ready as an actor waiting to hear »action!«

He had chosen a regal pose. Shoulders straight, legs together, hands resting on the armrests and nose in the air. He couldn't hold the pose, however, and without realizing that I was looking at him, he kept readjusting his burnous, smoothing out wrinkles and fidgeting with the drapery. He was admiring his boots, which were black today, with a very high heel, and his gestures had a somewhat ambiguous nature, a kind of hermaphroditic flirting, a self-seduction. It was clear that he loved the way he looked dressed as a Bedouin, he felt beautiful, and he would have killed whoever said otherwise.

»Good evening, Colonel.«

He took up his pose again, maybe a little irritated at finding himself observed, and he didn't get up to greet me. He moved his big head of black curls in a gesture that might have been a greeting and he stretched his lips in something that might have been called a smile. He ordered Ibrahim to find out if the photographer was pleased, and once he had his answer he raised his right index finger to indicate the chair opposite him. I sat down and immediately handed him the noose, hoping that his suicide would be slow.

»Colonel, you are very rich. You buy land throughout the Western world, and you own, among other things, a share in Fiat. So I wonder: how is Qaddafi able to be such a friend to the terrorists who want to destroy Western society, while at the same time investing millions in that society, having business relations with its proponents, like Gianni Agnelli?«

»Gianni who?« he said, moving his legs to show off the burnous.

»Gianni Agnelli, the president of Fiat.«

»Fiat? Oh, Fiat! My company.«

»Yes, your company. Gianni Agnelli.«

»I don't know him.«

»You don't know Gianni Agnelli, your partner?«

»No. It's not my job to know him. That's a task that falls to my functionaries, the employees of my bank, the Libyan Foreign Bank.«

He was lying, of course. It was common knowledge that the two knew each other, they had even been photographed together in Moscow. Indeed, the Libyan Foreign Bank had invested an initial sum of nearly half a million dollars following that meeting.

»Colonel, you don't even know who this Agnelli is?«

»No, I don't.«

»And you've never seen his photograph, or heard his name?«

»Never. And why should I have? I have no interest in him, it has nothing to do with me. I have better things to do than know the names of my partners or the people who inhabit the world of finance.«

»I understand, you're joking.«

»Not at all. I am not a minister, I waste no time on these trivialities. I am interested in philosophy, in freedom, in struggle, and in my Green Book. I thought that you wanted to meet again to talk about my Green Book, and yet you do nothing but ask me about unimportant things: Iran, embassies, the diplomats being held hostage, Amin, Gianni Agnelli, Fiat. Frankly, these subjects bore me. Didn't you want to take my portrait?«

»That's what I'm doing, Colonel.«

»If you want to take my portrait, ask me about the Green Book. Ask me about the revolution and the Green Book.«

»Later, Colonel, later. Even these boring subjects are useful for your portrait. Because you always talk about the West as a corrupt world, the United States as a new version of Hitler's Germany, and it's important to note that you invest millions in that corrupt world, that new version of Hitler's Germany.«

»We Arabs live under American domination, under American imperialism. Whoever is dominated by other countries will speak for these other countries. Vietnam will talk badly about China, for example. And you need to ask me about the Green Book,« he said, stone-faced.

»But what does Vietnam, or China, have to do with anything? And the Soviets are in Vietnam now!«

»My experiences with the Soviet Union have not been negative. If the Soviet Union had an imperialist attitude toward Libya, I would call the Soviet Union imperialist. I don't want to talk about the Soviet Union, or about China and Vietnam. I want to talk about my Green Book, about the revolution.«

»Ma'am, please ...« said Ibrahim, tossing me a pleading glance.

»Alright. Let's talk about the revolution. What do you mean by revolution?«

»Revolution ... revolution is when the masses make a revolution. Popular revolution. But even if others make revolution in the name of the masses, expressing what the masses want, then it is revolution. Because it has the support of the masses and it interprets the will of the masses. Have I made myself clear?«

»No. Give me an example.«

»Libya. Iran. Vietnam.«

»But what happened in Libya in September of 1969 wasn't anything like a revolution. It was a coup d'état, remember?«

»Yes, but afterwards it became a revolution. I carried out a coup d'état and the workers made revolution by occupying the factories, becoming partners instead of employees, eliminating the monarchic administration and forming the popular committees I talk about in my Green Book. As a result, in Libya today, the people are the only thing that matter. I thought that you had realized this.«

»Indeed, I hadn't. Because wherever I look, all I see is your image, your photograph. There's even a photograph of you covering the facade of what used to be the Catholic cathedral in Tripoli.«

»And what do I have to do with it? What can I do to stop it? It is the people who demand it,« he replied, very pleased with himself. He reached out a hand and turned on a television set, which I hadn't even seen because of the love-nest lighting. The screen lit up, showing the same old chanting crowd that had followed me for the last three days in my hotel room. »Qad-da-fi! Qad-da-fi! Qad-da-fi!«

»You see? I can't do anything about it. I can't stop it.«

»You forbid many things, Colonel, I find it hard to believe that you couldn't forbid this as well.«

»But the masses love me! They love me too much!«

»Listen, colonel: if the masses love you so much, then why do you defend yourself against them? All of those tanks and armored cars, those soldiers ready to shoot ... I was stopped innumerable times before I could meet with you. I've had my hair and my shoes searched, and the same thing happens to whoever comes near El Ezeizia.«

»I see you are determined to avoid talking about my Green Book. I'll answer your question with a question: how do you interpret my caution?«

»I believe you are very afraid of being killed, Colonel. And I don't blame you. There have been many attempts on your life«

»This is another part of the ridiculous propaganda against me that the West generates. I can only laugh about it. But, even if those attempts on my life had occurred, how would you explain it?«

»I believe that you are not, in fact, loved in this country, and that the people applaud you out of fear.«

He sniggered sarcastically, twirling the hem of his burnous, and he turned off the television, plunging the tent back into its love-nest darkness. Then, crooking his finger, he ordered a servant hovering by the doorway to stoke the fire in the braziers and adjusted the noose around his neck.

»That seems like a very strange deduction, almost as strange as your assertion that I am a dictator.«

»I haven't told you that you are a dictator yet. But I will now.«

»You told Khomeini the same thing.«

»That's true.«

»And you told him that the masses supported Hitler and Mussolini.«

»That's true.«

»This is a very serious accusation that requires a very serious response. And here it is. You do not understand that there is a difference between me and Hitler or Mussolini, and between Khomeini and Hitler or Mussolini. You don't understand this because you have not read my Green Book. Hitler and Mussolini exploited the support of the masses to govern the people, we revolutionaries use the support of the masses to help the people govern themselves. I say to my people: if you love me, listen to me, govern yourselves. And this is the opposite of what Hitler said to the masses: I'll take care of you, I'll do everything for you.«

»Colonel, do you take the comparison to Hitler and Mussolini as an offense or not? I ask because you don't seem offended, and you talk about them with some degree of respect.«

»I ... I am not a dictator,« he replied after a long, long silence.

»Then what are you?«

»I am the leader of the revolution. It's clear you haven't read my Green Book!«

»But I have read it, Colonel.«

»All of it?«

»Of course, all of it. It doesn't take that long: half an hour at the most. It's so small! Perhaps we Westerners are used to great tomes like the Bible and *Das Kapital*, but don't you think you wrote a very small book?«

»You're like Sadat, who says that the Green Book fits in the palm of your hand.«

»It does! How long did it take you to write it?«

The rope jerked a bit, and the suicide began in earnest.

»Many years. Before I found the definitive solution I had to meditate deeply on the history of mankind, on past and present conflicts.«

»I understand. And how did you arrive at the conclusion that democracy is a dictatorial system, that Parliament is an imposture, and that elections are a trick? This argument leaves me somewhat confused.«

»It's because you haven't studied me properly. You should stay here in Libya for awhile, to better understand a country where there is no government and no Parliament and no strikes because there is Jamahiriya.«

»Jamawhat?«

»Jamahiriya! Command of the people, congress of the people, no? You haven't read me at all! You haven't understood anything, you don't understand anything!«

»I'm trying, Colonel. I'm here to learn, please explain.«

»Alright.« He took a piece of paper and began drawing the little circles, the little squares, and the arrows that I had labored over that first night. There were a few variations, though. In his drawing the little circles made up a larger circles and the arrows inside the little squares radiated out toward a big circle that enclosed everything.

»Here it is, try to keep up. The little circles are the People's Congresses which decide everything, even war and peace, the little squares are the Popular Committees. Every little square must answer to its little circle. Now, let's see if you've understood: where is the government? Which is it?«

»The biggest circle.«

»No, no, no! I told you that the government doesn't exist! I told

you that the People's Congresses, the little circles, which decide everything! I told you that there's no government!«

»So what's the biggest circle for?«

»It is the General People's Congress which meets once a year to discuss the decisions of the People's Congresses! The General People's Congress decides nothing! It counts for nothing!«

»If it counts for nothing, then why does it meet?«

»For discussion, as I told you. To contribute.«

»And who elects the little circles? Who elects the little squares?«

The rope jerked again, and his brain began to go cyanotic. I started to feel almost sorry for him.

»No one. In Jamahiriya no one is elected. There are no elections, there is no representation. You Westerners are such traditionalists! You only understand democracy, republic, those relics! You are not ready for the new age, the age of the masses. Let me summarize, let's see if you can follow me: first there was monarchy, right? It was the first stage of humanity, right? Then the people's struggle brought about the republic, with its governments and its parliaments and its presidents, right? This was the second stage, right? Right, now mankind has passed beyond the second stage. And it has created Jamahiriya, which is the final solution.«

»Final?!«

»Yes, because with Jamahiriya the authority of the people has been achieved. The dream of man has been realized. The struggle is over.«

»You're not very humble, are you, Colonel?

»No, I'm not. Because I can survive the attacks of the whole world. And because my Green Book has resolved man's problems, society's problems. America can wage war against us, the West can torment us, it doesn't matter: the world has my Green Book. All we need to defend ourselves is the Green Book.«

»But what about the opposition?« I asked, overcoming that sense of pity.

»What opposition? What does the opposition have to do with anything? When everyone is part of the People's Congress, what need is there for an opposition? The opposition expresses itself in

government. If government disappears and the people govern themselves, who would they oppose?»

»You.«

»Me?«

»Yes, because this thing with the little circles and the little squares doesn't work for me. I'm not convinced. And I'm opposed.«

»In the name of what?«

»In the name of freedom.«

»What freedom? Freedom is just another word for Jamahiriya. That is the only, true freedom. So there is nothing and no one who you can oppose.«

»I'm opposed regardless. And I say: if I refuse to accept your Jamahiriya, what will you do to me? Will you arrest me, shoot me, hang me?«

»But you cannot refuse it! Jamahiriya is the destiny of the world! It's the final solution!«

»The forty officials that you had shot last year refused it. The other fifty-five that you had shot in 1977 refused it. The ten students who you hung publicly in a square in Benghazi a few months ago refused it!«

»Lies. Slander from the West. These are the things that make me lose faith in you. Why do you say these things about me?«

»Because we are envious, I suppose we say them out of jealousy. Anyway, tell me one thing: are you really sure that your little book will change the world?«

The rope gave a final, definitive jerk. And while his sick brain hung down above the cord and his lifeless body, the delirium exploded again: this time so tremendous and so terrifying that the crisis of the previous day seemed like a sneeze by comparison. He got up slowly, he slowly raised his linen-wrapped arms and in a thundering, Messiah-like voice, he began to yell his answers directly in English.

»And the masses will seize power: thanks to the Green Book! And the laborers will become partners: thanks to the Green Book! Because the day of the worldwide revolution is upon us: thanks to the Green Book! And the guide of the revolution will be the Green

Book! My Green Book! The Green Book is the new Gospel! The Gospel of the future, the new age! The Green Book is the word! In the beginning there was the word, say the Gospels. The Green Book is the word, my word! A word from my book can destroy the world, it can make the world explode! A word from my book can redeem the world and change the value of things. Their weight. Their volume. Everywhere and always! Because I am the Gospel. I am the Gospel.«

He kept on for a minute or more, repeating, »I am the Gospel.« Without stopping, without breathing. »I am the Gospel. I am the Gospel. I am the Gospel. I am the Gospel.« Ibrahim was terrified, the photographer was more than shocked. His eyes were wide and his fingers clutched his Leica as he babbled: »We're not getting out of here alive. He'll kill us all.«

As for me, I could only say: »Colonel, please! Colonel, calm down.« Finally, he calmed down. Pale and sweating, he collapsed into his plastic armchair, where he remained, staring into a corner of the tent.

Perhaps I should have showed him a little kindness, and crept away on my tiptoes. But in that moment I hated him so much that I would have given my life to twist the knife one more time.

»Colonel, may I ask you one more question?«

»Yes, but make it quick,« he answered. »The Iranian delegates are waiting for me.«

»Do you believe in God?«

»Of course I believe in God! Why would you ask me such a question?«

»Because I thought you were God, Colonel.«

He looked at me, uncomprehending.

Mohammed Riza Pahlavi

Tehran, October 1973

ORIANA FALLACI First of all, Majesty, I'd like to talk about yourself and your position as king. There are so few kings left, and I can't get out of my head something you said in another interview: »If I could do it over again, I'd be a violinist, or a surgeon, or an archaeologist, or a polo player Anything but a king?'

MOHAMMED RIZA PAHLAVI I don't remember having said those words, but if I did, I was referring to the fact that a king's job is a big headache. So it often happens that a king gets fed up with being a king. It happens to me too. But that doesn't mean I'd give it up—I have too much belief in what I am and what I'm doing for that. You see ... when you say there are so few kings left, you're implying a question to which I can only give one answer. When you don't have monarchy, you have anarchy or oligarchy or dictatorship. And anyway monarchy is the only possible way of governing Iran. If I've been able to do something, or rather a lot, for Iran, it's due to the small detail that I happen to be king. To get things done you need power, and to keep power you shouldn't have to ask permission or advice from anybody. You shouldn't have to discuss your decisions with anyone and ... Naturally, I may have made mistakes too. I, too, am human. But I still believe I have a mission to carry out to the end, and I intend to carry it out to the end without giving up my throne. You can't foresee the future, of course, but I'm convinced the monarchy in Iran will last longer than your regimes. Or should I say that your regimes won't last and mine will?

OF Majesty, how many times have they tried to kill you?

MRP Twice, officially. And then ... God only knows. But what does it matter? I don't live with the obsession of being killed. Really. I never think about it. There was a time when I did. Fifteen years

ago, for instance. I said to myself, Oh, why go to that place? What if they've planned to assassinate me and they kill me? Oh, why take that plane? What if they've planted a bomb and it goes off in flight? Not any more. Now the fear of dying is something I don't feel. And courage and defiance have nothing to do with it. Such equanimity comes from a kind of fatalism, from blind faith in the fact that nothing can happen to me until the day I've carried out my mission to the end. Yes, I'll stay alive until such time as I finish what I have to finish. And that day has been set by God, not by those who want to kill me.

OF Then why are you so sad, Majesty? I may be wrong, but you always have such a sad and worried look.

MRP Maybe you're right. Maybe I'm a sad man at heart. But my sadness is a mystical one, I think. A sadness that comes from my mystical side. I wouldn't know how else to explain it, since there's no reason why I should be sad. I now have everything I wanted as a man and as a king. I really have everything, my life goes forward like a beautiful dream. Nobody in the world should be happier than I, and yet ...

OF And yet a cheerful smile on your part is rarer than a shooting star. Don't you ever laugh, Majesty?

MRP Only when something funny happens to me. But it has to be something really very funny. Which doesn't happen often. No, I'm not one of those people who laugh at everything silly, but you must understand that my life has always been so difficult, so exhausting. Just think what I had to put up with during the first twelve years of my reign. Rome in 1953 ... Mossadegh ... remember? And I'm not even referring to my personal sufferings—I'm referring to my sufferings as a king. Besides I can't separate the man from the king. Before being a man, I'm a king. A king whose destiny is swayed by a mission to be accomplished. And the rest doesn't count.

OF My goodness, it must be a great nuisance! I mean, it must be pretty lonely being a king instead of a man.

MRP I don't deny I'm lonely. Deeply so. A king, when he doesn't have to account to anyone for what he says and does, is inevitably very much alone. But I'm not entirely alone because I'm accompanied by

a force that others can't see. My mystical force. And then I get messages. Religious messages. I'm very, very religious. I believe in God, and I've always said that if God didn't exist, it would be necessary to invent him. Oh, I feel so sorry for those poor souls who don't have God. You can't live without God. I've lived with God ever since the age of five. That is, since God gave me those visions.

OF Visions, Majesty?

MRP Yes, visions. Apparitions.

OF Of what? Of whom?

MRP Of prophets. Oh, I'm surprised you don't know about it. Everyone knows I've had visions. I even wrote it in my autobiography. As a child, I had two visions. One when I was five and one when I was six. The first time, I saw our Prophet Ali, he who, according to our religion, disappeared to return on the day when he would save the world. I had an accident—I fell against a rock. And he saved me—he placed himself between me and the rock. I know because I saw him. And not in a dream—in reality. Material reality, if you see what I mean. I was the only one who saw him. The person who was with me didn't see him at all. But no one else was supposed to see him except me because ... Oh, I'm afraid you don't understand me.

OF Indeed I don't, Majesty. I don't understand you at all. We had got off to such a good start, and instead now ... this business of visions, of apparitions. It's not clear to me, that's all.

MRP Because you don't believe. You don't believe in God, you don't believe me. Many people don't. Even my father didn't believe it. He never believed it, he always laughed about it. Anyway, many people, albeit respectfully, ask if I didn't ever suspect it was a fantasy. My answer is no. No, because I believe in God, in the fact of having been chosen by God to accomplish a mission. My visions were miracles that saved the country. My reign has saved the country and it's saved it because God was beside me. I mean, it's not fair for me to take all the credit for myself for the great things that I've done for Iran. Mind you, I could. But I don't want to, because I know that there was someone else behind me. It was God. Do you see what I mean?

OF No, Majesty. Because ... well, did you have these visions only as a child, or have you also had them later as an adult?

MRP I told you, only as a child. Never as an adult—only dreams. At intervals of one or two years. Or even every seven or eight years. For instance, I once had two dreams in the span of fifteen years.

OF What dreams, Majesty?

MRP Religious dreams. Based on my mysticism. Dreams in which I saw what would happen in two or three months, and that happened just that way in two or three months. But what these dreams were about, I can't tell you. They didn't have to do with me personally; they had to do with domestic problems of the country and so should be considered as state secrets. But perhaps you'd understand better if instead of the word dreams I used the word presentiments. I believe in presentiments too. Some believe in reincarnation, I believe in presentiments. I have continuous presentiments, as strong as my instinct. Even the day when they shot at me from a distance of six feet, it was my instinct that saved me. Because, instinctively, while the assassin was emptying his revolver at me, I did what in boxing is called shadow dancing. And a fraction of a second before he aimed at my heart, I moved aside in such a way that the bullet went into my shoulder. A miracle. I also believe in miracles. When you think I've been wounded by a good five bullets, one in the face, one in the shoulder, one in the head, two in the body, and that the last one stuck in the barrel because the trigger jammed ... You have to believe in miracles. I've had so many air disasters, and yet I've always come out unscathed—thanks to a miracle willed by God and the prophets. I see you're incredulous.

OF More than incredulous, I'm confused. I'm confused. Majesty, because ... Well, because I find myself talking to a person I hadn't foreseen. I knew nothing about these miracles, these visions ... I came here to talk about oil, about Iran, about you ... Even about your marriages, your divorces ... Not to change the subject, but those divorces must have been quite dramatic. Weren't they, Majesty?

MRP It's hard to say because my life has gone forward under the sign of destiny, and when my personal feelings have had to suffer, I've always protected myself with the thought that a particular pain was caused by fate. You can't rebel against destiny when you have a mission to accomplish. And in a king, personal feelings don't count.

A king never cries over himself. He hasn't the right. A king means first of all duty, and I've always had such a strong sense of duty. For instance, when my father told me, »You're going to marry Princess Fawzia of Egypt,« it didn't even occur to me to object or say, »I don't know her.« I agreed at once because it was my duty to agree at once. One is either a king or one isn't. If one is a king, one must bear all the responsibilities and all the burdens of being a king, without giving in to the regrets or claims or sorrows of ordinary mortals.

OF Let's skip the case of Princess Fawzia, Majesty, and take that of Princess Soraya. You chose her yourself as your wife. So didn't it hurt you to repudiate her?

MRP Well... yes ... For a while, yes. I can actually say that, for a certain period of time, it was one of the greatest sorrows of my life. But reason prevailed very soon, and I asked myself the following question: What must I do for my country? And the answer was find another spouse with whom to share my destiny and from whom to ask for an heir to the throne. In other words, my feelings are never focused on private matters but on royal duties. I've always trained myself not to be concerned with myself but with my country and my thrones. But let's not talk of such things—of my divorces and so forth. I'm far above, too far above, these matters.

OF Naturally, Majesty, but there's one thing I can't help asking, since I think it ought to be cleared up. Majesty, is it true you've taken another wife? Ever since the day the German press published the news ...

MRP Slander, not news, and it was spread around by the French press agency after it had been published by the Palestinian newspaper *Al Mohar* for obvious reasons. A stupid, vile, disgusting slander. I'll only tell you that the photograph of the woman who's supposed to be my fourth wife is a photograph of my niece, the daughter of my twin sister. My niece, who besides is married and has a child. Yes, some of the press would do anything to discredit me—it's run by unscrupulous, immoral people. But how can they say that I, I who wanted the law by which it's forbidden to take more than one wife, have got married again and secretly? It's unthinkable, it's intolerable, it's shameful.

OF Majesty, but you're a Muslim. Your religion allows you to take another wife without repudiating the Empress Farah Diba.

MRP Yes, of course. According to my religion, I could, so long as the queen gave her consent. And, to be honest, one must admit there are cases when ... For instance, when a wife is sick, or doesn't want to fulfill her wifely duties, thereby causing her husband unhappiness ... after all! You'd have to be hypocritical or naive to think a husband would tolerate such a thing. In your society, when a circumstance of that kind arises, doesn't a man take a mistress, or more than one? Well, in our society, a man can take another wife. So long as the wife consents and the court approves. Without those two conditions on which I based my law, however, the new marriage can't take place. So I, I myself, should have broken the law by getting married in secret?! And to whom?! My niece?! My sister's daughter?! Listen, I don't even want to discuss anything so vulgar. I refuse to talk about it another minute.

OF All right. Let's not talk about it any more. Let's say you deny everything, Majesty, and ...

MRP I deny nothing. I don't even take the trouble to deny it. I don't even want to be quoted in a denial.

OF How come? If you don't deny it, people will go on saying the marriage has taken place.

MRP I've already had my embassies issue a denial!

OF And nobody believed it. So the denial must come from you, Majesty.

MRP But the act of denying it debases me, offends me, because the matter is of no importance to me. Does it seem right to you that a sovereign of my stature, a sovereign with my problems, should lower himself to deny his problems with his niece? Disgusting! Disgusting! Does it seem right to you that a king, that an emperor of Persia should waste time talking about such things? Talking about wives, women?

OF How strange, Majesty. If there's one monarch who's always been talked about in relation to women, it's you. And now I'm beginning to suspect that women have counted for nothing in your life.

MRP Here I'm really afraid you've made a correct observation. Because the things that have counted in my life, the things that have

left their mark on me, have been quite different. Certainly not my marriages, certainly not women. Women, you know ... Look, let's put it this way. I don't underrate them; they've profited more than anyone else from my White Revolution. I've fought strenuously so that they'd have equal rights and responsibilities. I've even put them in the army where they get the military training for six months and are then sent to the villages to fight the battle against illiteracy. And let's not forget I'm the son of the man who took away women's veils in Iran, But I wouldn't be sincere if I stated I'd been influenced by a single one of them. Nobody can influence me, nobody. Still less a woman. Women are important in a man's life only if they're beautiful and charming and keep their femininity and . . . This business of feminism, for instance. What do these feminists want? You say equality. Oh! I don't want to seem rude, but ... You're equal in the eyes of the law but not, excuse my saying so, in ability.

OF No, Majesty?

MRP No. You've never produced a Michelangelo or a Bach. You've never even produced a great chef. And if you talk to me about opportunity, all I can say is, are you joking? Have you ever lacked the opportunity to give history a great chef? You've produced nothing great, nothing! Tell me, how many women capable of governing have you met in the course of your interviews?

OF At least two, Majesty. Golda Meir and Indira Gandhi.

MRP Who knows? ... All I can say is that women, when they govern, are much harsher than men. Much crueler. Much more bloodthirsty. I'm citing facts, not opinions. You're heartless when you have power. Think of Catherine de Medici, Catherine of Russia, Elizabeth I of England. Not to mention your Lucrezia Borgia, with her poisons and intrigues. You're schemers, you're evil. All of you.

OF I'm surprised, Majesty, because it's you who appointed the Empress Farah Diba regent should the crown prince accede the throne while still a minor.

MRP Hm ... Well ... Yes, if my son should become king before the required age, Queen Farah Diba would become regent. But there'd also be a council with which she'd have to consult. I, on the other hand, have no obligation to consult with anyone, and I don't consult with anyone. See the difference?

OF I see it. But the fact remains that your wife would be regent. And if you took this decision, Majesty, it means you think she's capable of governing.

MRP Hm ... In any case, that's what I thought when I took the decision. And ... we're not here just to talk about this, are we?

OF Certainly not. Besides I haven't even begun to ask you the things that interest me most, Majesty. For example, when I try to talk about you, here in Tehran, people lock themselves in a fearful silence. They don't even dare pronounce your name, Majesty. Why is that?

MRP Out of an excess of respect, I suppose. With me, in fact, they don't behave like that at all. When I returned from America, I drove through the city in an open car, and from the airport to the palace I was wildly applauded by at least a million people overcome with enthusiasm. They cheered, they shouted patriotic slogans, they were by no means locked in silence, as you say. Nothing has changed since the day I became king and the people lifted my car on their shoulders and carried it for three miles. What was your question supposed to mean? That they're all against me?

OF God forbid, Majesty. I meant only what I said. Here in Tehran people are so afraid of you they don't even dare pronounce your name.

MRP And why should they talk about me to a foreigner? I don't see what you're referring to.

OF I'm referring to the fact, Majesty, that many people consider you dictator.

MRP That's what they write in *Le Monde*. And what do I care? I work for my people. I don't work for *Le Monde*.

OF Yes, yes, but would you deny you're a very authoritarian king?

MRP No, I wouldn't deny it, because in a certain sense I am. But look, to carry through reforms, one can't help but be authoritarian. Especially when the reforms take place in a country like Iran, where only twenty-five percent of the inhabitants know how to read and write. You mustn't forget that illiteracy is drastic here—I'll take at least ten years to eliminate it. And I don't say to eliminate it for everyone—I say to eliminate it for those who today are under the age of fifty. Believe me, when three-quarters of a nation doesn't know how to read or write, you can provide for reforms only by the strictest

authoritarianism—otherwise you get nowhere. If I hadn't been harsh, I wouldn't even have been able to carry out agrarian reform and my whole reform program would have been stalemated. Once that had happened the extreme left would have liquidated the extreme right within a few hours, and it's not only the White Revolution that would have been finished. I had to do what I did. For instance, order my troops to open fire on anyone opposing the distribution of land. So to say that in Iran there's no democracy ...

OF Is there, Majesty?

MRP I assure you, there is. I assure you that in many ways Iran is more democratic than your countries in Europe. Aside from the fact that the peasants own their land, that the workers participate in the management of the factories, that the large industrial complexes are owned by the state instead of private individuals, you should know that elections here begin in the villages and take place at local, municipal, and provincial levels. In Parliament, of course, there are only two parties. But they're the ones that accept the twelve points of my White Revolution, and how many parties ought to represent the ideology of my White Revolution? Besides those are the only two that are able to get enough votes—the minorities are so negligible, so ridiculous in size that they wouldn't even be able to elect a deputy. And be that as it may, I don't want certain minorities to elect any deputies. Just as I won't allow the communist party. The communists are outlawed in Iran. They only want to destroy, destroy, destroy, and they swear allegiance to others instead of to their country and their king. They're traitors, and I'd be crazy to let them exist.

OF Maybe I explained myself badly, Majesty. I meant democracy as we understand it in the West, namely, a regime that permits anyone to think as he likes and is based on a parliament where even minorities are represented ...

MRP But I don't want that kind of democracy! Don't you understand? I wouldn't know what to do with such a democracy! It's all yours, you can have it! Your wonderful democracy! You'll see, in a few years, where your wonderful democracy leads.

OF Well, maybe it's a little chaotic. But it's the only thing possible if you respect man and his freedom of thought.

MRP Freedom of thought, freedom of thought! Democracy, democracy! With five-year-old children going on strike and parading through the streets. That's democracy? That's freedom?

MRP Well, not to me. And let me add: how much studying have you done in the last few years in your universities? And if you go on not studying in your universities, how will you be able to keep up with needs of technology? Won't you become servants of the Americans thanks to your lack of preparation, won't you become third- or even fourth-rate countries? Democracy, freedom, democracy! But what do these words mean?

OF Excuse me if I take the liberty of saying it, Majesty. But in my opinion they mean, for example, not removing certain books from bookstores when Nixon comes to Tehran. I know that my book on Vietnam was removed from the bookstores when Nixon came here and put back only after he'd left.

MRP What?

OF Yes, yes.

MRP But you're not on the blacklist, are you?

OF Here in Tehran? I don't know. It could be. I'm on everybody's blacklist.

MRP Hm ... And here I'm receiving you in the palace, and you're here sitting next to me ...

OF Which is very kind of you, Majesty.

MRP Hm ... It certainly shows we have democracy and freedom here

OF It certainly does. But I'd like to ask you something, Majesty. I'd like to ask you: If I were an Iranian instead of an Italian, and lived here and thought as I do and lived as I do, I mean if I were to criticize you, would you throw me in jail?

MRP Probably. If what you thought and wrote went counter to our laws, you'd be put on trial.

OF Really? And sentenced too?

MRP I think so. Naturally. But, between ourselves, I don't think you'd find it easy to criticize or attack me in Iran. What would you criticize or attack me for? For my foreign policy? For my oil policy? For having distributed land to the peasants? For allowing workers to share

in profits up to twenty percent and to be able to stock up to forty-nine percent? For fighting illiteracy and disease? For having brought progress to a country where there was little or none?

OF No, no. Not for that, Majesty. I'd attack you ... let's see. I know: for the repression carried out against students and intellectuals in Iran, for example. I've been told the prisons are so full that new arrests have to be put in army camps. Is that true? But how many political prisoners are there in Iran today?

MRP I don't know exactly. It depends on what you mean by the expression political prisoners. If you're speaking of the communists, for instance, I don't consider them political prisoners because it's forbidden by law to be a communist. Therefore a communist to me is not a political prisoner but a common criminal. If then you mean those whose actions result in the death of old people, women, innocent children, it's all the more obvious that I don't even consider them political prisoners. To them, I show no mercy. Oh, I've always pardoned those who've tried to kill me, but I've never had the slightest pity for those criminals you call guerrillas or for traitors to the country. They're the sort of people who are capable of killing my son if only to plot against public safety. They're people to be eliminated.

OF In fact, you have shot them, haven't you?

MRP Those who have killed people, of course. They're shot. But not because they're communists—because they're terrorists. Communists are simply sentenced to prison, for terms that may vary from a few to several years. Oh, I can imagine what you think about the death penalty, and so forth. But, you see, certain opinions depend on the type of education one has had, on culture, on climate, and you shouldn't take it for granted that what goes for one country goes for them all. Take an apple seed and plant it in Tehran, then take another seed from the same apple and plant it in Rome—the tree that grows in Tehran will never be the same as the tree that grows in Rome. Here it's right and necessary to shoot certain people. Pietism is absurd here.

OF While listening to you, I was wondering something, Majesty. I was wondering what you think of the death of Allende.

MRP Here's what I think. I think his death teaches us a lesson; you must be one thing or the other, be on one side or the other, if you

want to accomplish something and win. Middle-of-the-road compromises aren't possible. In other words, either you're a revolutionary or else you insist on law and order—you can't be a law-and-order revolutionary. Much less a tolerant one. And if Allende wanted to rule in accordance with his Marxist ideas, why didn't he organize himself better? When Castro came to power, he killed at least ten thousand people, while all of you said, »Bravo, bravo, bravo!« Well, in a certain sense he deserved the bravos since he's still in power. But then so am I. And I plan on staying there by showing that with force you can do a lot of things, and I'll even prove that your socialism is finished. Old, obsolete, finished. People were talking about socialism a hundred years ago; they were writing about it a hundred years ago. Today it no longer goes with modern technology. I achieve more than the Swedes, and in fact you can't see that even in Sweden the socialists are losing ground? Ah! Swedish socialism! ... It hasn't even nationalized forests and water. I have.

OF Again, Majesty, I don't understand. Are you telling me that in a certain sense you're a socialist, and that your socialism is more modern and advanced than the Scandinavian kind?

MRP Of course. Because that socialism means a system of social security for those who don't work and nevertheless receive a salary at the end of the month like those who do work. The socialism of my White Revolution, on the other hand, is an incentive to work. It's a new, original socialism, and ... believe me, in Iran we're really much more advanced than you and really have nothing to learn from you. But these are things you Europeans will never write—the international press is so infiltrated by leftists, by the so-called left. Ah, this left! It's even corrupted the clergy. Even the priests! By now, even they're turning into elements whose purpose is only to destroy, destroy, destroy. And even in Latin American countries, even in Spain! It seems incredible. They abuse their own church! They talk about justice, about equality ... ah, this left! You'll see, you'll see where it'll bring you.

OF Let's get back to you, Majesty. So intransigent, so harsh, maybe even ruthless, behind that sad face. In the end so similar to your father. I wonder to what extent you've been influenced by your father?

MRP None at all. Not even my father could influence me. I've told you, nobody can influence me! Yes, I was fond of my father. Yes, I admired him. But that's all. I never tried to copy him, to imitate him. Nor would it have been possible, even if I'd wanted to. As personalities we were too different. My father started from nothing. When he came to power, the country had nothing. Nor did he even have the problems we have today on the frontiers, especially with the Russians. And my father could afford to have good neighborly relations with everyone. The only basic threat was represented by the British, who in 1907 had divided Iran between themselves and the Russians, and wanted Iran to constitute a kind of no man's land between Russia and their empire in India. But later the British gave up this plan and things became fairly easy for my father.

I, instead ... I didn't start from nothing, I found a throne. But no sooner was I on the throne than I found myself having to lead a country occupied by foreigners. And I was only twenty-one. That's not much, twenty-one, not much. Besides, I didn't only have to keep the foreigners in check and nothing else. I had to face a sixth column on the extreme right and extreme left—to exert greater influence on us, the foreigners had created the extreme right and extreme left No, it wasn't easy for me. Maybe it was more difficult for me than for my father. Without counting the period of the Cold War, which lasted up until a few years ago.

OF Majesty, you just mentioned the problems you have on the frontiers. Which is your worst neighbor today?

MRP You can never tell, since you never know who your worst neighbor is. But I'd be inclined to say that at the moment it's Iraq.

OF I'm surprised, Majesty, that you should cite Iraq as your worst neighbor. I was expecting you to say the Soviet Union.

MRP The Soviet Union... . With the Soviet Union we have good diplomatic and trade relations. With the Soviet Union we have a gas pipeline. I mean we sell gas to the Soviet Union. Technicians come to us from the Soviet Union. And the cold war is over. But the question with the Soviet Union will always be the same, and in negotiating with the Russians, Iran must always keep in mind the chief dilemma: to become communist or not? No one can be so crazy or

naive to deny Russian imperialism. And though Russia has always had an imperialistic policy, the fact remains it's much more dangerous today because it's linked to communist dogma. I mean to say it's easier to face countries that are only imperialist than countries that are both imperialist and communist. There's what I call the USSR's pincer movement. There's their dream of reaching the Indian Ocean by passing through the Persian Gulf. And Iran is the last bastion for the defense of our civilization, of what we consider decent. If they were to try to attack this bastion, our survival would depend solely on our capacity and our will to resist. So the problem of resisting comes up from now on.

OF And Iran is pretty strong militarily, isn't it?

MRP Very strong, but not strong enough to be able to resist the Russians in case of attack. That's obvious. For instance, I don't have the atomic bomb. But I feel strong enough to resist should the Third World War break out. Yes, I said Third World War. Many think the Third World War can only break out over the Mediterranean, but I say it can break out much more easily over Iran. Oh, much more easily! It's we, in fact, who control the world's energy resources. To reach the rest of the world, oil doesn't go through the Mediterranean, it goes through the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. So if the Soviet Union were to attack us, we'd resist. And we'd probably be overcome, and then the noncommunist countries would hardly sit there with their hands folded. And, they'd intervene. And it would be the Third World War. Obviously. The noncommunist world couldn't accept the disappearance of Iran, because it knows that to lose Iran would mean to lose everything. Have I made myself clear?

OF Perfectly clear? And horribly. Because you talk of the Third World War like something that's going to happen in the near future, Majesty.

MRP I speak of it as something possible with the hope that it won't happen. As a possibility for the near future, I see instead a small war with one of our neighbors. After all, we have nothing but enemies on our frontiers. It's not only Iraq that's giving us trouble.

OF And your great friend, Majesty, I mean the United States, is geographically remote.

MRP If you're asking me who I consider our best friend, the answer is the United States among others. Because the United States isn't our only friend—plenty of countries show us friendship and believe in us, in the importance of Iran. But the United States understands us better for the simple reason that it has so many interests here. Economic and therefore direct interests, political and therefore indirect interests... . I've just said that Iran is the key, or one of the keys, to the world. I need only add that the United States cannot shut itself up within the borders of this country, it cannot go back to the Monroe Doctrine. It's obliged to honor its responsibilities toward the world and thus to be concerned with us. And that does nothing to detract from our independence, because everyone knows that our friendship with the United States doesn't make us slaves of the United States. The decisions are made here, in Tehran. Not elsewhere. Not in Washington, for example. I get along with Nixon as I've got along with other presidents of the United States, but I can continue to get along with him only if I'm sure that he's treating me as a friend. In fact, as a friend who within a few years will represent a world power.

OF The United States is also good friends with Israel, and you've expressed yourself lately toward Jerusalem in very harsh terms. Less harshly toward the Arabs, on the other hand, with whom it seems you want to improve relations.

MRP We base our policy on fundamental principles, and we cannot accept the idea that a country, in this case Israel, should annex territory through the use of arms. We can't because if this principle is applied to the Arabs, it may one day be applied to us. You tell me it's always been like this, that frontiers have always changed as a result of the use of arms and war. I agree, but that's no reason to recognize this fact as a valid principle. Besides everyone knows that Iran has accepted the UN resolution of 1967, and if the Arabs lose faith in the UN, how are you to persuade them that they've been defeated? What's to keep them from taking their revenge? Even from using the oil weapon? Oil will go to their heads. Besides it's already going to their heads.

OF Majesty, you side with the Arabs but sell oil to the Israelis.

MRP Oil is sold by the oil companies, and so to anyone. Our oil goes everywhere—why shouldn't it go to Israel? It goes where it goes. And as for our personal relations with Israel, as you know, we have no embassy in Jerusalem but we have Israeli technicians in Iran. We're Muslims but not Arabs. And in foreign policy we take a very independent position.

OF Does such a position foresee the day when Iran and Israel will establish normal diplomatic relations?

MRP No. Or, rather not until the question of the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories has been resolved. And as for the possibilities of this question being resolved, I can only say that the Israelis have no choice—if they want to live in peace with the Arabs. It's not only the Arabs who spend enormous sums of money on war materials, it's also the Israelis. And I don't see how the Arabs or Israelis can keep it up for long. Besides, new phenomena are beginning to occur in Israel—strikes, for example. How long will Israel go on nursing the terrible and fantastic spirit that inspired it at the time of its formation? I'm thinking especially of the new generations in Israel, and of the Israelis who come from Eastern Europe to find themselves treated differently from the others.

OF Majesty, you said something a while ago that struck me. You said Iran would soon represent a world power. Were you perhaps referring to the forecasts of those economists who say that within thirty-six years Iran should be the richest country in the world?

MRP To say it will become the richest country in the world is perhaps going too far. But to say it will rank among the five greatest and most powerful countries in the world isn't going too far at all. Thus Iran will find itself at the same level as the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan, and France. I don't mention China because China isn't a rich country, nor can it become one if within twenty-five years it reaches the 1,400,000,000 inhabitants that have been predicted. We, on the other hand, in twenty-five years will be sixty million at most. Oh, yes, we can expect great wealth, and great strength, whatever the communists may say. It's no coincidence that I'm getting ready to launch a birth control program. And here's the point I want to make: you can't separate the economy from other things, and once

a country is rich economically, it becomes rich in every sense. It becomes powerful on an international level. Besides, when speaking of the economy, I'm not only referring to oil—I'm referring to a balanced economy that includes every kind of production, from the industrial to the agricultural, from handicrafts to electronics. We should have made the transition from carpets to computers—the result, instead, is that we've kept the carpets while adding the computers. We still make carpets by hand, but we also make them by machine. What's more, we make wall-to-wall carpeting. Every year we double our national production. Anyway there are so many signs that we'll become a world power. Ten years ago, for instance, when my White Revolution began, there were only 1,000,000 students in the schools. Today there are 3,100,000 and in ten years there'll be 5,000,000 or 6,000,000.

OF You've just said that you weren't only referring to oil, Majesty, but we all know that it's thanks to oil that you have computers, and that it's thanks to oil that you turn out machine-made rugs, and that tomorrow's riches are also coming to you thanks to oil. Shall we finally talk about the policy you've adopted concerning oil and with regard to the West?

MRP It's simple. I have this oil and I can't drink it. But I know I can exploit it to the utmost without blackmailing the rest of the world and even by trying to keep it from being used to blackmail the rest of the world. Therefore I've chosen a policy of guaranteeing its sale to everyone without distinction. It hasn't been a difficult choice—I've never thought of aligning myself with the Arab countries that were threatening to blackmail the West. I've already said that my country is independent, and everyone knows that my country is Muslim but not Arab, therefore what I do is not to suit the Arabs but to help Iran. Besides Iran needs money, and with oil you can make a lot of money. Oh, that's the whole difference between me and the Arabs. Because the countries that say »we won't sell any more oil to the West« don't know what to do with their money and so they don't worry about the future. Often they have a population of only six or seven hundred thousand inhabitants and so much money in the bank that they could live for three or four years without pumping or selling a

drop of oil. Not I. I have these thirty-one and a half million inhabitants, and an economy to develop, a program of reforms to complete. Therefore, I need money. I know what to do with money, and I can't afford not to pump oil. I can't afford not to sell it to anyone.

OF Meanwhile Qaddafi calls you a traitor.

MRP Traitor?!? Me a traitor, when I've taken the whole business into my hands and already dispose of fifty-one percent of the production that formerly belonged exclusively to foreign oil companies? I wasn't aware Mr. Qaddafi had addressed such an insult to me and ... Look, I can't take this Mr. Qaddafi at all seriously. I can only wish him success in serving his country as I succeed in serving mine, I can only remind him that he shouldn't scream so much—the Libyan oil reserves will be exhausted in ten years' time. My oil, on the other hand, will last at least thirty or forty years. And maybe fifty, sixty. It depends on whether or not we discover new deposits, and it's very, very likely that new deposits will be discovered. But even if that shouldn't happen, we'll manage extremely well just the same. Our production is visibly increasing—in 1976 we'll be extracting as much as eight million barrels a day. Eight million barrels are a lot, quite a lot.

OF In any case, you've made quite a few enemies, Majesty.

MRP That I still can't say. In fact, the OPEC hasn't yet decided not to sell oil to the West, and it may very well be that my decision not to blackmail the West will induce the Arabs to follow my example. If not all the Arabs, at least some of them. If not right away, in a short time. Some countries aren't independent like Iran, they haven't the experts Iran has, and they don't have the people behind them as I do. I can dictate my own terms, they still can't. It's not easy to reach a point where you can sell your oil directly and be free of the oil companies that have had a monopoly for decades and decades. And if even the Arab countries were to follow my decision ... Oh, it would be so much simpler, and safer too, if the Western countries were exclusively buyers and we direct sellers! There's be no resentment, blackmail, rancor, hostility ... Yes, it may very well be that I'm setting a good example, and in any case I'm going ahead with it. Our doors are wide open to anyone who wants to sign a contract with us, and

many have already offered to do so. British, Americans, Japanese, Dutch, Germans. They were so shy in the beginning. But now they're becoming ever more daring.

OF And the Italians?

MRP We're not selling much oil to the Italians at the moment, but we may reach an important agreement with ENI¹ and I think we're on the way to doing so. Yes, we may become excellent partners with ENI, and anyway our relations with the Italians have always been good. Ever since the time of Mattei. Wasn't the agreement I signed with Mattei in 1957 my first success in breaking the old system of exploitation by foreign oil companies? Oh, I don't know what others say about Mattei, but I know I'll never be able to be objective in talking about him. I liked him too much. He was a very decent fellow, and a man capable of reading the future, a really exceptional personality.

OF As a matter of fact, they killed him.

MRP Probably. But he shouldn't have been flying in that bad weather. The fog in Milan gets very thick in winter, and oil can really become a curse. But maybe it wasn't just the bad weather. And anyway it was a great shame. For us too. Well, I'm not saying that Mattei's death brought about a setback in our relations with EnI. No, no, since we're about to conclude a large deal. Mattei couldn't have done any better, since what we're about to do now is really the maximum. Still if Mattei had lived, we'd have reached this agreement years ago.

OF I'd like to go back and clarify the point you mentioned before, Majesty. Do you or don't you think the Arabs will end by carrying out their threat to cut off all sales of oil to the West?

MRP It's hard to say. Very hard, because one can just as easily say yes or no, with an equal chance of being wrong. But I'd be inclined to say no. To cut off oil to the West, to give up that source of profit, would be a very difficult decision for them. Not all the Arabs are following Qaddafi's policy, and while some may not need money, others certainly do.

OF And meanwhile the price of oil will go up?

1. Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (National Hydrocarbon Authority) (Translator's note).

MRP It certainly will. Oh, most certainly! You can carry back the bad news and add that it comes from someone who knows what he's talking about. I know everything there is to know about oil, everything. It's really my speciality. And I tell you as a specialist that the price of oil will have to go up. There's no other solution. But it's a solution you Westerners have brought on yourselves. Or, if you like, a solution brought on by your overcivilized industrial society. You've increased the price of wheat by three hundred percent, and the same for sugar and cement. You've sent the price of petrochemicals skyrocketing. You buy crude oil from us and then sell it back to us, refined into petrochemicals, at a hundred times what you paid for it. You make us pay more for everything, scandalously more, and it's only fair that from now on you should pay more for oil. Let's say ... ten times more.

OF Ten times more!

MRP But you're the ones, I repeat, who force me to raise prices! And certainly you have your reasons. But I too, if I may say so, have mine. Besides we won't go on quarreling forever-in less than a hundred years this business of oil will be finished. The need for oil is rising at an accelerated pace, the oil deposits are being exhausted, and you'll soon have to find new sources of energy. Atomic, solar, or something. There'll have to be many solutions; one won't be enough. For example, we'll even have to resort to turbines driven by the ocean tides. Even I'm thinking of building atomic installations for desalinating sea water. Or else we'll have to drill more deeply, look for oil at ten thousand meters below sea level, look for it at the North Pole ... I don't know. I know only that the moment has come to take strong measures and not waste oil as we've always done. It's a crime to use it as we do today, crude. If we'd only think that soon there won't be any more, if we'd only remember that it can be transformed into ten thousand derivatives, namely petrochemical products ... For me it's always a shock, for instance, to see crude oil used for electrical generators, without paying any heed to the value lost. Oh, when you talk about oil, the most important thing isn't the price, it's not Qaddafi's boycott, it's the fact that oil is not everlasting and that before we exhaust it we must invent new sources of energy.

OF This curse we call oil.

MRP Sometimes I wonder if that's not really what it is. So much has been written about the curse we call oil, and believe me, when you have it, on the one hand it's a blessing but on the other it's a great inconvenience. Because it represents such a danger. The world could blow up on account of this damned oil. And even if, like me, you're fighting the threat ... I see you're smiling. Why?

OF I'm smiling, Majesty, because you're so different when you talk about oil. You light up, you vibrate, you concentrate your attention. You become another man, Majesty. And I ... I'm going away without having understood you. On the one hand, you're so ancient, on the other so modern and ... Maybe it's two elements that merge in you, the Western and the Eastern that ...

MRP No, we Iranians aren't all that different from you Europeans. If our women wear the veil, so do yours. The veil of the Catholic Church. If our men have more than one wife, so do yours. The wives you call mistresses. And if we believe in visions, you believe in dogmas. If you think yourselves superior, we have no complexes. Don't ever forget that whatever we have, we taught you three thousand years ago.

OF Three thousand years ago ... I see now you're smiling too, Majesty. You don't look so sad any more. Ah, it's too bad we can't agree on the business of the blacklists.

MRP But can you really be on the blacklist?

OF Majesty! As if you didn't know, you the King of Kings and who knows everything! But I told you, it may well be. I'm on everybody's blacklist.

MRP What a pity. Or rather, it doesn't matter. Even if you're on the blacklist of my authorities, I'll put you on the white list of my heart.

OF You frighten me, Majesty. Thank you, Majesty.

Ayatollah Khomeini

Qom, September 1979

They called it the Blue Book because the cover had a dazzling sky-blue background, but the exact title was *The Commandments of Ayatollah Khomeini*. It contained the rules for daily life which, according to Khomeini, every good Shiite should know and scrupulously observe. The Ayatollah had been working on the book for years, and he had handled the printing personally. In Tehran they even sold it on the streets, and whoever knew how to read had a copy. In the West, however, it had been discovered by chance, and only the boldest newspapers dared to offer translations of the most shocking phrases.

»A man who has had sexual relations with an animal, for example, a sheep, may not eat that animal's meat, for to eat it would be a mortal sin. The same applies if the sheep has drunk sow's milk; in that case, the man may not have sexual relations with a sow, either.«

»If a man marries a girl who has not yet reached nine years of age and has relations with her, he must not break her hymen, or he could not continue relations with her.«

»The mother, daughter, or sister of a man who has had anal intercourse with another man cannot marry that man. However, if the marriage occurs before the anal relations between the woman's husband and her son, father, or brother come to light, the marriage is valid, as the two men are in-laws.«

»If, during the fasting for Ramadan, a man masturbates until he reaches orgasm, the fast is not valid. If, however, the man ejaculates involuntarily, he has not sinned. The same is true if he awakens and finds that he has ejaculated in his sleep. The fast likewise remains valid if the man has an involuntary ejaculation during the day, but intervenes to stop it. However, the fast is invalid if either men

or women vomit on purpose, wash their heads, or if they get themselves wet.«

I set aside the newspaper which had republished the above phrases, along with several more regarding marriage, divorce, conjugal violence, and sins of eating and drinking, and I tried to remember how I had reacted to what had been happening on in Iran during that hellish time in my life. Everything had happened so quickly, so unexpectedly. While I was caught in my fog¹ and the bodies of those killed in the uprisings against the Shah were piling up in Tehran, people began to talk about eighty-year-old Ayatollah Khomeini, who was leading the rebellion in exile from his home in the Parisian periphery. I had smiled and listed off the reasons why this news amused me, and nothing more. Number one: the Americans would have never allowed themselves to lose an ally, or really, a vassal as valuable as Reza Pahlavi, who never lifted a finger without their permission; a man who controlled not only a 5,000 kilometer border with the Soviet Union, but also the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, the two main routes through which oil passed to reach the West. Number two: Reza Pahlavi had learned to defend himself after

1. The »fog« Fallaci refers to here is the depression she suffered after the death of her lover and companion, Alexandros Panagulis, a Greek political activist and resistance fighter who opposed the dictatorship of Papadopoulos. Panagulis was killed in a road accident in May of 1976. Many, including Fallaci, believe he was assassinated by agents of the then-incarcerated Papadopoulos. After Panagulis' death, Fallaci retreated to her parents' estate in Tuscany and began composing a novelistic account of his life and their time together, titled *A Man*. She withdrew from journalism and wrote for more than two years, during which time her mother succumbed to cancer. While she approached the release of *A Man* with renewed interest in current events, she was deeply unsettled by her recent losses. In the preface to *Interview with History*, she notes: »I understand life now, and I'm lacerated by the doubts that accompany this understanding. Understanding life is not comforting, it's terrifying ... when you realize that good and evil are as subjective as true and false, just and unjust, every path appears uncertain and every judgment arbitrary. You are only sure of your own doubts and your own solitude.« Her interviews with Khomeini and Qaddafi were part of an attempt to engage with the world as she now saw it, to continue her search for understanding even as she was plagued by doubt. (Translator's note.)

having been deposed once before; he was well-armed and well-paid, and his army was capable of suppressing any attempt at revolution; his secret police functioned with sinister efficiency, arresting, torturing, and eliminating whoever attempted to claim a shred of freedom. Number three: despite his madness, his megalomania that had convinced him he was the heir to Xerxes, Reza Pahlavi was not an idiot. He had understood that the world was changing, and that even the Muslim world had to change, that changing was inevitable and necessary, and that the principal problem facing every society was learning to manage its own change. To accept the change, but at the same time, to prevent that change from subverting the constituted order too drastically. Besides, in his own way, he had already brought about a revolution: the White Revolution. He had given away some land to the peasants, stripped the feudatories of their ownership of forests and springs, launched a campaign against illiteracy, and introduced technology. More importantly, he had removed the obligation of the veil for women, explained that the chador was unacceptable on the eve of the twenty-first century, that women needed to remove themselves from domestic slavery and study, choose a profession, even take part in military service. In short, he had tried to introduce the realities of our age into his country. It isn't true that everyone hated him. Only those who knew the meaning of the word democracy and wanted something more than a tyrant's gift of progress wished him dead, at least of natural causes. Everyone else, which is to say the vast majority, were very happy to crowd the streets and applaud him whenever he changed wives, or welcomed another heir into the world, or returned from his vacations at Zermatt. An eighty-year-old priest who thought he could topple all that using mosques and prayers was clearly ignoring all logic.

A little while later I saw him on television. He was less like a priest and more like a saint in a Michelangelo painting, a stern Moses with a bright white beard and a black turban, and the terrible flashing eyes of an avenger who knows no forgiveness. He was seated cross-legged on a carpet, surrounded by a court of the fawning faithful. He damned the Shah in a whisper, damned his sister, his children, the future children of his children. Without missing a

beat, he continued, explaining how the villain would fall, how Allah would punish him. This time, I didn't smile. It wasn't clear what he wanted, but there was something about that ruthless face that was frightening, and not just because of his expression. It was something that I had never noted on Reza Pahlavi's face: the stuff of someone able to hold power in his fist even before he obtained it; the security of a leader who never gives up, not even in the face of impossibility; the dangerous charisma of a man animated by an unshakable faith, who knows how to manipulate the masses with the kind of arrogance that never misses its mark.

It wasn't surprising, then, that the messages he recorded and sent to Iran were enough to keep alive a rebellion that had been decimated by massacres. After they listened to his voice, the insurgents became extremely excited, as though they had taken a kilo of drugs. They became proud to die for him, throwing themselves in front of machine gun fire screaming »Shoot me! Shoot me!« They did this alongside their women, who cast aside the Western clothes that had freed them from the ghetto and participated in this suicide bundled up in their chadors. They hid stones and Molotov cocktails under the veil, holding it up with their teeth until it fell, until they were hit and tumbled to the ground like wingless bats.

I needed to wrap my head around the fact that History isn't written by logic, that fanaticism makes donkeys fly, that human beings always follow whoever tricks them best and whoever tricks them in the name of God, that God they can't do without. I needed at least to consider the hypothesis that the diabolical old man would win.

He won sooner than I had imagined. At the start of 1979, abandoned by the Americans and reduced to a sickly larva, Reza Pahlavi fled to Egypt with his family. The army that should have been defending the 5,000 kilometer border with the Soviet Union dissolved, the oil routes disintegrated, and the diabolical old man made his return to Iran to proclaim the Islamic Republic, where he was welcomed like Mohammed resurrected. While his mujahidin shot generals, ministers, functionaries, policemen, poor nobodies who were often innocent and thrown in front of executioners with no trial, the diabolical old man made it very clear what he wanted: the most insane

leap backward that our planet had ever seen. In just a few days he got rid of the lay faction who had struggled against the monarchy for years, he eliminated parties and groups that believed in democracy, he revoked every freedom of the press, of opinion, of feeling, and launched a genocide against the Kurds, who were killed daily in the provinces. Iran had become a giant mosque where coarse and ignorant mullahs enforced the blind observance of rules written 1,400 years prior, and, of course, the rules laid out in Khomeini's Blue Book. There was a rigorous separation between men and women, both at home and in the workplace, in processions and on the beach. Women were forced to cover themselves from head to toe with the funereal sheet called the chador: even in water, even when swimming, and God help anyone who said that wearing seven meters of fabric didn't let you swim, it let you drown. Girls were subjected to gynecological examinations before marriage to ascertain their virginity. It was completely forbidden to drink alcohol, to listen to music, to dance, to kiss outside of marriage, to do anything outside of marriage. Anyone who disobeyed met the firing squad. Now that the generals, the ministers, the functionaries, the Shah's police, people more or less compromised by their involvement with the old regime had been shot, the squads turned on adulterers and alleged adulterers, on homosexuals or alleged homosexuals, on young lovers caught showing their affection, on women who went around with their heads uncovered or partially uncovered, on the absent-minded who were caught drinking a beer or a glass of wine. The trials lasted four or five minutes, without any lawyers or any defense, the condemned were executed immediately after the sentencing. Shooting was alternated with stoning, where the victim was buried up to the neck and then stones were thrown at the exposed head until death. Only the most fortunate got away with being whipped in the bazaar, between fifty and three hundred lashes which reduced the back to pulp. No one resisted. No one spoke out, no one said enough, we didn't fight the Shah for this, we didn't massacre ourselves in front of his machine guns for this.

The West observed in uncomfortable silence, and those who had greeted the coming of the Ayatollah with enthusiasm were forced

to admit, through clenched teeth, that they had been wrong. The so-called left, that left who thinks a revolution should always be forgiven, and that whoever doesn't agree is a fascist, even attempted to justify the slaughter.

»You have to understand that revolution is not a dinner party.«

»Remember Robespierre and the thousands of guillotines during the Reign of Terror, remember Lenin and the hundreds of thousands liquidated during the Great Purges.«

»Don't forget that certain excesses are inevitable and necessary. It's not the first time that a revolution has devoured it's own children.«

Hadn't they said the same things, moreover, when freedom had been assassinated in Poland and Czechoslovakia and Hungary and East Germany, when dreams had been betrayed in Cuba and Vietnam? Hadn't they already been tarnished by the same bad faith, those hypocrites, hadn't they already hidden behind the same dishonesty, the same fear of appearing to be reactionary? I knew it well. As long as I was publishing accounts of the horrors I had seen in Saigon, the strikes of the Americans and the South Vietnamese and people like Loan, I did very well, pulling in hoards of admirers and friends. »A wonderful journalist, a wonderful writer, a wonderful woman!« But, as soon as I began to publish accounts of the horrors I had seen in Hanoi, the strikes of the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong and the Japanese, I was lynched in the newspapers. And my admirers turned into disparagers, my friends into enemies. »Villain, slanderer, Pentagon stooge! She has offended the revolution!«

The revolution. Ever since the storming of the Bastille, the West has been living a lie called revolution. Ever since that day, this equivocal word has captured our minds like a holy word, to such a degree that it ends up being a synonym of liberty-equality-fraternity, a symbol of redemption and progress, hope for the oppressed. Ever since that day, the massacres committed in the name of revolution have been forgiven, justified, and accepted, the fact that its children are butchered after having butchered has been accepted. The idea that revolution is the cure for every cancer, a panacea for every illness, has been accepted. We still pronounce this word with respect, we respectfully study it, we respectfully analyze it in political and

philosophical treatises. Our respect for the word >revolution< is so great that we dare not contest it, refute it, unmask it and spit it back in the face of the imbecilic and violent people who use it to advance their careers. Years ago, an Italian revolutionary, who pre-dated the Red Brigades and is now a banker in London, told me: »If a few bombs don't go off, the revolution won't happen here.«

It doesn't matter that Mussolini called his dictatorship revolution, as did Hitler, as did Papadopoulos, as did Pinochet. It doesn't matter that revolution failed in France, in Russia, and everywhere else it has been repeated to the soundtrack people crying out for liberty, equality, fraternity, justice, and progress. It doesn't matter that this word has spilled and continues to spill futile rivers of blood all over the world; that it has destroyed and continues to destroy things that should be preserved, the triumphs of civilization; that it has established and continues to establish despotic regimes that are often worse than the ones they replaced; that it clouds consciences with fear and brain-washing. It doesn't matter. The storming of the Bastille remains an event that should be honored, a day that should be celebrated. The word revolution is a holy word, and to debate it is sacrilege; it is a dogma more unassailable than Mary's virginity.

And so, once again, we were being shown that revolution is a lie which only ever brings about a change of tyrants, a trick that we've been worshipping for two centuries, because we're intellectually lazy or cowardly or timid. True revolution is patience, perseverance, intelligence. It's a caterpillar which very slowly turns into a butterfly, which learns to fly from flower to flower, to feed on pollen and not on blood, bringing joy to the eyes of those who jealously admire its freedom. You know how long it takes, how much patience and tolerance it takes for a caterpillar to become a butterfly. If you upset it with your haste, or torment it with your needs, it won't even become a chrysalis.

And so, once again, I was trying to understand why the lie had worked, why wickedness had triumphed with the help of bad faith and stupidity. In short, I decided I needed to go to Tehran, to interview this Khomeini, to ask him how he dared to call his bloodbath a revolution; to ask him what kind of principles had led him to classify music and uncovered hair sins, while raping a sheep was allowed as

long as you didn't eat it afterwards. There was a problem, however: getting to him, and persuading him to see me. He had never granted a real interview, let alone to a woman, and his relationship with the press to date had consisted in brief encounters with male journalists.

You can imagine my surprise when, exploring the probability of carrying out the project, they told me: »If anyone can hope to interview Khomeini, it's you. In Iran, you're a kind of heroine.«

»Me?! And from what might my heroism derive?«

»From your interview with the Shah. During the rebellion the mullahs cited it like the Quran, and the insurgents waved it like a flag. The collection it's published in has been reprinted in fourteen different editions in Tehran, they even sell it on the sidewalks. If you need confirmation, just ask the journalist Miriam Mafai: she was mistaken for you at a conference and given a hero's welcome—she was even forced to address the crowd.«

My interview with the Shah! I thought back on the two afternoons I had spent with Reza Pahlavi in his office at the Palace of Mirrors in autumn of 1973. I asked myself if I had been too hard on him, if, in condemning him so harshly, I had let myself be trapped by the same kind of Manichaeism that I had used to liquidate Loan. And yet, sitting behind that desk heavy with useless, precious objects—thick gold boxes adorned with the letter »R« spelled out in the purest and largest rubies I had ever seen; statues encrusted with sapphires, each so brilliant and perfect that one would have been enough to buy a villa in Cannes—he had worked very hard to strip away any sentiments of understanding or sympathy I might have had. He had confided in me, explained himself, forced himself to combat my hostility with arguments: »Oh, I can imagine what you think about the death penalty and all that. But listen, certain judgments depend on the type of upbringing one has had, on the culture, the climate, and it would be a mistake to start from the assumption that what is good for one country would be good for every country. If you take an apple seed and plant it in Tehran, and plant another apple seed in Rome, the tree that grows in Tehran will never be the same as the Roman one.« When the harsh tone of my questions began to alarm him, he asked me if I had been blacklisted by his government. I told him it

was possible, since I had been blacklisted by almost everyone, and he let his face melt into an indulgent smile: »It doesn't matter ... I'll put you on the white list in my heart.«

I had done everything to torment him, to force him to say something stupid. And God knows he did. He told stories of visions, of saints who materialized before his eyes to tell him the future and confirm his divine mission. At five years old, the prophet Ali had appeared to him, saving his life: »I fell against a rock, and he saved me. He threw himself between me and the rock. It was material reality, do I make myself clear?«

» ... Majesty. This story of visions, of apparitions ... I don't quite understand, that's all.« I never helped him out of the predicaments that I led him into, I never encouraged him to explain how he was trying, in his own way, to improve a backwards and feudal society. I hated his absolutism too much, I hated his wealth, his pomp. I was only interested in painting a portrait of the image I had of him: a crazy person poisoned by megalomania.

It is a mistake to think that anyone is completely evil. Even if they are, there's always someone worse. Now that portrait, which didn't take his positive side into account, was being sold in fourteen different editions, and to Khomeini's advantage. I was a heroine because of that portrait, a heroine to a regime a thousand times worse than the Shah's. I was dismayed, to say the least, and found myself tempted to write a letter to Reza Pahlavi, who was by then reduced to a cancer-ridden worm, traveling from country to country looking for a bed to die in, from Egypt to Morocco, Morocco to the Bahamas, the Bahamas to Mexico, Mexico to Panama, Panama to Texas, Texas to New York.

»Your Majesty, I'm the woman who treated you badly in 1973, and I am writing now to ask your forgiveness. You were a real son of a bitch, Majesty, a greedy and cruel despot, but in light of the way things are going in the wake of your cowardly escape, I have to admit that you were the lesser of two evils. It would have been better if you had stayed in Iran with your emeralds, your rubies, your sapphires, and your stupid apparitions. Under your rule, at least people had a dream to fight for and hopes to cling to: the dream of freedom

and the hope of a better future. Please accept my regards, devotedly yours, etc. etc.«

In the end, I didn't write him. I looked up Miriam Mafai who confirmed her adventure in Iran and gave me some advice. Getting to Khomeini? There were only two laypeople who Khomeini listened to: the Finance Minister Banisadr, and the director of state television Gotzadeq. Asking for their help wouldn't be difficult, as their lackey was a young man who called himself the translator of my books into Farsi: Bagher Salami. I should call him, here was his number. I called him and eight days later I set foot in the Reign of Terror.

All despotic regimes sustain themselves through fear. The fear of being spied on, reported, threatened, arrested, kidnapped, tortured, punished in one way or another. The fear of being guillotined, hanged, decapitated, shot, stoned. This fear is fed by soldiers, police, guardians of power: in short, anyone who wears a uniform and carries a pistol, a rifle, and a sword. Furthermore, the head of a despotic regime usually wears a uniform as well: think of Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Reza Pahlavi, Castro, Pinochet, Qaddafi, Idi Amin, Bokassa. If he doesn't wear a uniform, he covers himself in medals, like Soviet dictators. If he doesn't cover himself in medals, he has a warlike past or present, like Robespierre or Ho Chi Minh. In any case, the fear that despots inspire also reaches us through their armed men in military garb. Looking at their uniforms is enough to make you feel threatened, even if their faces are kind. You can't see their faces. When you look at a soldier or a policeman, or any guardian of power, you only see the uniform, and your eyes jump right over the face and the head of the person wearing it, coming to rest on the beret or the helmet. Soldiers, policemen, and guards are headless creatures, with hats perched on their invisible skulls. You only realize that they are human beings in the moment that they die or fall, bleeding, to the ground. Just like you, they are vulnerable; just like you, they are frightened; just like you, they are afraid; just like you, they are victims of arrogance and cynicism. And then you are no longer afraid of them, you are even able to cry for them, but by then, it's too late.

Well, in Khomeini's Iran, fear was not transmitted in this way. While there were armed men, called the Pasdaran, fear was bred by unarmed men without uniforms, men dressed as priests: the mullahs. Mullahs in the service of Khomeini, another unarmed man, without a uniform or medals, without a warlike past or present. However, this man was in direct contact with God, who had elected him as His representative. And this meant that in Iran, fear came directly from God, from Allah. Allah was the one spying on you, reporting you, threatening you, arresting you, kidnapping you, torturing you. Allah was the one shooting you, stoning you, eliminating you by punishing your soul along with your body, eternally damning you. So this fear, the fear of being damned for all eternity, was incorporated into all the other fears, the fears of seeing your own body tormented. And you lived in fear, whatever you did, wherever you were, even in the secrecy of a locked room with no microphones, even in the mysteries of your own conscience. Just in case you managed to forget that you were being constantly watched by Allah's divine eyes, listened to by Allah's divine ears, Khomeini intervened to remind you with his omnipresent image. Sooner or later you would end up betraying yourself, exposing your sins to someone who would report them to a mullah. The mullah then called the Pasdaran, who liquidated your earthly and unearthly existence.

This was the diabolical trick of the diabolical old man who had taken the Shah's place. This was the incredible swindle of his infinite power. You'd have to go back in time to the darkest point of the Dark Ages to find a similar tyranny, to the time when the supreme science was theology, when the Inquisition was dismembering heretics, burning young girls at the stake, and humiliating Galileo by making him declare that the Earth didn't spin. When kings governed with permission of the Pope. When culture and art and morality depended on the Church. When the best and the brightest had to bend to the will of cardinals or monks, sculpting or painting only Jesus Christs and Saints and Madonnas, building only cathedrals or chapels or convents, composing only sacred music. When everything was a sin, when you could go to hell for eating a sausage on Friday.

But there was an important difference between Khomeini's

despotism and that theocratic despotism: the tyranny of the Middle Ages managed, somehow, to nurture the intellect and the spirit, to broaden the field of ideas, to produce splendid statues and frescoes and paintings of Jesus Christs, Saints, and Madonnas; wonderful cathedrals, exquisite chapels, extraordinary convents, sublime Gregorian chants—in short, the grace and beauty of civilization. Khomeini's theocratic despotism produced nothing but dullness and bigotry, weakening the intellect, eradicating ideas, eliminating beauty and grace, replacing civilization with barbarianism. It even altered the very notion of sin, reducing it to an obsession with sex, as though life was nothing more than a phallus or a vagina or a sphincter. This was the first thing I noticed when I reached Tehran.

»I am sorry, Allah does not permit it,« the Iran Airlines employee murmured, without looking me in the eye. I had extended my hand to thank him for coming to meet me on the tarmac. He was so frightened by my outstretched hand, which had come so close to touching him, that he held his hands behind his back like a child caught touching some forbidden object.

I quickly drew in the forbidden object, and rested it on my chest to show him that I was sorry, that I had no intention of getting him pregnant. I immediately understood that this was an even bigger mistake. With my palm outstretched toward him, my fingernails were not visible; now that my palm was resting on my chest the scandalous red nail polish was revealed. He stared just like the undersecretary of the embassy had stared when he gave me my visa and chided: »Those red nails! You shouldn't go to Iran with those red nails!«

»Your passport please, I need to check it,« he said, once he regained control of himself. As he reached out he index finger and thumb to take it—evidently attempting to avoid any contact with my skin—he finally decided to look me in the face. And he saw my long hair waving in the evening breeze.

»Oh, God! My God! Don't you have a scarf to cover your head?«

»No.«

Of course I did. What kind of idiot would have come to Iran without a scarf to substitute the chador, even if it only covered the head

and neck? However, I wasn't about to do him the favor of putting it on here on the tarmac.

»Never mind. They'll understand that you're a foreigner. And if they give you trouble, I'll remind them about your interview with the Shah. Please, follow me.«

»Thank you.« The whole exchange had unsettled me, as had a gigantic portrait of Khomeini which caught passengers unaware as they approached the terminal. I followed the employee along with the other passengers who had disembarked with me: two French people, three Germans, six Arabs from Kuwait, and an American who imported fresh caviar and was threatening to break his contract. »They don't know how to do anything anymore. They can't even close the tins properly. What little I receive is always rotten. If it keeps up like this, I'll start buying from the Russians.«

Looking around, it wasn't hard to believe that what he said was true. The airport, which had been a masterpiece of cleanliness and efficiency during the Shah's reign, was almost unrecognizable now: the walls were covered in scribbles and greasy fingerprints, the floors were littered with spit and crumpled paper, and a teeming throng of mullahs crowded the halls, though it wasn't clear what they were doing, or why they were there. The arrivals terminal was practically deserted, but the departures terminal—visible through a pane of glass—was desperately crowded. Hundreds and hundreds of people were camped out with children and bundles of clothing, making an infernal racket. The American told me that they gathered there every day at dawn in the hopes of leaving the country, begging for a seat on a plane, any plane, it didn't matter to where. Many of them were women, and their chadors made my naked hair seem even more naked, made my refusal to cover myself seem even more rash. What if they wouldn't let me in?

I didn't have to worry for long: that damn interview with the Shah was a truly precious passkey. At the police checkpoint, the employee of Iran Airlines had my passport stamped with surprising speed, and at customs, where a dozen mini-Khomeinis were menacing passengers who had been stupid enough to travel with a copy of *Playboy* or a bottle of whiskey, no one even asked if I had brought alcohol or

pornography with me. Before I knew it I was in the clear: waiting for me underneath the ninth Khomeini portrait on the left was a bespectacled youth with the mustache and the beard of an ancient Persian. This was my so-called translator Salami, who would be my guardian from here on out. Armed with a document that seem to bypass any problems, he strode through the mullahs and, keeping his hands tight against his sides to avoid any possible contact, he bent in an impeccable bow and addressed me in my own language.

»Allah is great. Welcome to Tehran. My car is at your disposal to take you to the city.«

The street leading into the city was a never-ending sequence of Khomeinis staring at you from every building, out of every window, at every crossroads. My guardian was the last person in the world I had imagined I would be with in this situation. He appeared to be tormented by a thousand worries. I would later discover that he was gnawed at by a thousand lies, starting with the lie that he had already obtained an appointment with the Ayatollah.

He was desperately ashamed of his last name. »Don't call me Salami, please, call me Bagher. I tell all Westerners that my last name is Bagher.« His complex about being named Salami had begun in Florence, where he had studied at university for eight years without ever finishing his degree. They had treated him with typical Tuscan cruelty: »Bread and salami, bread and salami! Rustic salami, boar salami, salami alia cacciatore! Little baby salami, little queer salami!« He was very religious, and he spoke Allah's name with a guttural sound that came out of his mouth like a burp, only to be sucked back in like a bite of food. He exhibited an almost hysterical love for the Ayatollah.

»Not an Ayatollah, an Imam. Imam means > saint.<«

He spoke about the revolution—which he had joined in the last days, picking up a wound or two—with breathless fervor. This was understandable, seeing as how it had been the launching point for his career. He had gotten into the good graces of Banisadr and Gotzadeq and obtained a position at the offices of state television. He thought the revolution was a great victory for humanity, the beginning of a golden age that would bring the principles of Islam

to the four corners to the earth. Every time he alluded to the heroic months of rebellion, the number of dead grew. At the first intersection it was fifty thousand. At the second, sixty thousand. And as we drove through the gates of the city it was one hundred thousand. Over the next few days it would climb to one hundred twenty thousand, then one hundred and fifty thousand. In moments of particular euphoria, it was sometimes as much as a million.

»Didn't you say fifty thousand before?«

»You must have misheard me.«

He was ready to allow any abuse, any foolishness in the name of those dead, who kept multiplying like the loaves and the fishes, and who seemed to have died just to give Iranians a hard-on. He even understood the disgust of the Iran Airlines employee:

»It is forbidden to shake hands with a woman,« for it is disrespectful to women.

»It is forbidden to paint one's nails red,« for it is disrespectful to men.

»It is forbidden to go out with one's head uncovered,« and there was no need to give a reason why. But if I thought about it, he was sure I would understand: what's the most attractive anatomical part of a woman, to a man? No, not an ample bust or round hips or a nice pair of legs. Some of those attributes are important later, in the release that comes with bestial pleasure. What is most attractive about a female, to a man, more than anything else, more than her eyes or her mouth, is her hair. Especially if it's long and blown by the wind. So this explains why the hair must be covered above all, and why sometimes it is acceptable to replace the chador with a kerchief that hides the forehead and knots at the neck like a wimple. But nothing can truly replace the chador, because nothing delights a man's fantasy quite like a chador. If you see a pretty face framed by a chador, you burn with excitement, you immediately ask yourself what's under it. If you can't even see her face because she's so devoted to God that she covers that too, well, you just about lose your mind. This morning he was nearly driven mad when he crossed paths with a woman so modest that she was walking around with everything covered except one eye. He started following her in

the hopes of at least seeing her second eye, and all of his senses were alive with questions: is she young or old, fat or thin, pretty or ugly?

»You Westerners, on the other hand—everything's out in the open. It's clear if you're young or old, fat or thin, pretty or ugly. It's impossible to get excited about you. And the more clothing you remove, the less we feel.«

I couldn't understand if he was saying it out of conviction, opportunism, or fear. But he sang the praises of the Ayatollah—excuse me, Imam—in the same tone. A great philosopher, a great leader, a great statesman and theologian. Without him, how would we remember that Islam is law, and that the law of Allah is thus the only law; that only theologians who know the law should govern society, resolve legislative, executive, and administrative problems; that no government of a Muslim country is legitimate unless theologians are behind it? How would we recall that outside the Quran there is no justice, that there cannot be justice, that the Quran cannot be surpassed or outmoded, that the laws on capital punishment are still the best way to discourage thieves, drunks, and drug addicts? Besides, the Imam was honest, he wasn't a thief like Reza Pahlavi. He owned nothing, aside from the blue and white carpet he slept on when he was exiled in Neuilly-sur-Seine, which he still slept on in the holy city of Qom. And this was the moment I discovered the lie about the appointment with the Shah.

»While we're on the subject, when will I see this carpet?«

»Soon, soon. Don't worry about it.«

»But I am worried about it. I need to prepare for the interview, to go to Qom.«

»We'll go to Qom together. A woman cannot enter Qom unaccompanied.«

»Alright, that's fine, but what date will the interview take place?«

»There is no date.«

»Well, since there's an appointment, there must be a date, right?«

»There is no appointment.«

»No appointment?! Are you telling me that you made me fly from New York to Tehran without the appointment you assured me you

had already arranged when we spoke on the phone? Are you telling me that you lied to me?!«

»Yes, I lied. If I hadn't lied, you wouldn't have come. You wouldn't have discovered this great revolution, and it's not a sin for a Muslim to lie if the lie is in the service of Islam. Actually, if the lie is in the service of Islam, it's a duty to lie. A virtue.«

»You goddamn liar, disgusting con-artist, dirty hypocritical chador-chaser!«

»Don't insult me. Allah does not like it when his faithful are insulted by infidels. You'll get in to see Khomeini, I promise you will. He knows you, he has seen your interview with the Shah. In the meantime, why don't you interview Gotzadeq?«

»I don't give a damn about Gotzadeq.«

»Then interview Banisadr.«

»I don't give a damn about Banisadr.«

»You're making a mistake: the world will know their names.«

»The world will know your name if you don't get me an appointment with Khomeini, do you understand? Because I'll string you up with a chador!«

With this I left him in front of my hotel, only to run straight into another gigantic Khomeini which was almost blocking the entrance. There was another Khomeini in the lobby, and then at check-in, at the concierge, in the restaurant. In my room, the television was on so that I could see another Khomeini—this one moving and in color—as he addressed the crowds in Qom. I turned the TV off, furious. I opened the refrigerator, hoping to have a drink and calm my nerves. Instead, I bathed my dry throat with screams. The refrigerator paralyzed me with an orgy of lemonade, orange juice, and mineral water. Of course, there wasn't even a single beer. Suddenly I was grasped by a fitful desire for beer, wine, liquor, for any liquid that tasted like alcohol. Me, a woman who always drinks in moderation, who has never been drunk in her entire life. I called down to room service, determined to break the law, to somehow get revenge for the dirty trick that lying bigot had played on me. I would have risked arrest, scandal, and public beating, just for a single drop of alcohol.

»I want a beeeer!«

»No beer, no beer,« said the waiter, as he ran away, terrified. I tried again, calling down to the concierge, who seemed like the type of person willing to do any number of things for a tip.

»I am a foreigner, as you know, and I want a beer.«

»I'm sorry, in Iran beer is not served,« he answered, sharply hanging up.

So I called the manager who had been so overjoyed to welcome me and had promised to attend to my every need.

»Please, have a beer brought to my room.«

»That's impossible. If you asked for the moon I would give it to you, but don't ask me for a beer.« He added that the housekeeper would come up to my room to explain.

She arrived quickly, with a worried smile and a copy of my book. Her head was barely covered by a transparent kerchief, and she had kind, good eyes. She seemed ready to throw herself on a pyre just to calm me down.

»You have to get me a beer. Please, be nice, find me a beer.«

Her smile went out immediately and my book slid onto the bed as though her hands could no longer bear to hold it.

»I know that you want a beer. By now everyone knows that you want a beer. But no one can help you.«

»I'm not Muslim. I have no obligation to obey Mohammed.«

»That's not important here. And even if it was, it wouldn't make any difference. Every case of beer was destroyed, along with every bottle of wine, of champagne, cognac, whiskey, vodka, and every other kind of liquor. The Pasdaran came with the mullahs and they broke them one by one. Then they set fire to all the places that sold them, the hotels, the restaurants, and the stores. Only the embassies were spared. Everywhere you looked, the city was burning; everywhere you walked, you suffocated from the stench of alcohol. And now there's nothing left except what the doctors use to disinfect their instruments in hospitals. But ...«

»But?«

Her smile returned, and she winked at me. She went to the door and opened it, checking to make sure that no one was listening in the

hallway, then closed it again and came back to where I was sitting. She began speaking again, this time in a whisper.

»You should know that I admire you very much. I think you're wonderful, even though I don't know you. I have all your books, and when I found out you were coming here I told my husband, who enjoys your books just as much as I do. This is his copy, if you wouldn't mind autographing it? My husband said that we should bring you a present, and he gave me something to give you. I have it downstairs in my office.«

»Thank you so much! What is it?«

»A bottle of champagne.«

»A bottle of champagne?!?«

»Shhh! Don't yell! My husband was saving it for his birthday, but he told me to bring it to you. Anyway, we never would have had the courage to drink it. It wasn't easy, you know, bringing it from my home to the hotel. I was very afraid. I didn't know where to hide it, so I wrapped it up and kept it under my chador. Now the problem is getting it up here to you and figuring out where to put it.«

»Put it in me, I'll drink it. No, we'll drink it together.«

»No, I could never. I would feel too guilty. And anyway, the problem is after.«

»After what?«

»After you've drunk it. I mean, what will you do with the empty bottle?«

»I'll throw it away.«

»And if they find it? If they investigate, and they discover it was me? Not even the manager knows. We need to be careful. The maids are under orders from the mullahs to check all the rooms. Every hotel is supervised by a mullah, and when a guest leaves, the maids go rifling through their rooms. Sometimes they even break the locks on the suitcases.«

She seemed to be regretting her boldness, her generosity. Now I was the one trying to calm her down.

»Don't worry, I'll take the label off the bottle with the hot water in the bath.«

»A bottle of champagne is still recognizable without its label.«

»I'll throw it out the window, into the middle of the street «

»That's even worse, the shattering glass would attract too much attention.«

»Then I'll leave it on another floor, in front of some Khomeinist's door. Then he'll be accused and we'll have a little fun.«

She liked the idea. She left the room, giggling, and came back quickly with the risky present in her purse, happy to get rid of it. But the bottle was warm, and since I couldn't put it in the refrigerator, where the spies would have found it in the morning, I stashed it in the toilet tank, where at least it would stay cool. Then, resigned, I took a sleeping pill and fell asleep. When I woke up in the morning my mind was humming with questions and confusions. Was it rash to think that things were better under the Shah, to conclude that revolution had failed yet again, that it actually wasn't revolution as much as involution? What if all those people died, only to make things worse? What if my mind had been clouded by the moral and ideological principles I was raised with? What if my cult of reason and freedom had blinded me in the same way the mullahs were blinded by the cult of Allah and his commandments? Fine, the things I had experienced upon my arrival were just as disconcerting as what I had read before leaving, but was it right to draw definitive judgments after one or two minor episodes? Was it smart to close myself off in rage and disdain? It was possible that I had been the victim of a few unfortunate episodes, or had been influenced by other people's exaggerations. After all, Islam had contributed a great deal to civilization: refined poets, ingenious mathematicians, exalted philosophers, masters of knowledge like Averroes. The heights reached by the religious and mystic thought in this part of the world couldn't be erased by the clerical pettiness of the diabolical old man. And besides, when it came to clerical pettiness, my part of the world was no better: the rigors of pre-Eucharistical fasting were equivalent to those of Ramadan; the forbidden Friday sausage equivalent to the outlawed beer; and the medieval chastity belt was crueller than the cruelest chador. Why was I surprised? In its hypocritical arrogance, the West had even launched the Crusades, dressing them up like a noble undertaking and never admitting that they were colonial wars, genocides. Yes,

our Inquisition was five hundred years ago, but witches were burned in Salem by children of the Reformation not too long ago, and the fear of sin that I felt as a child was no more than forty years in the past. Ultimately, the difference was in the dates and the names. Here, people said that it was right to lie in the name of the Quran, we said that the end justified the means. Had Salami really deserved my scorn and my yells? He seemed so convinced that he had done me a favor by tricking me, so sure that I would end up appreciating their revolution. In short, I needed to try to see things with a greater degree of detachment and flexibility. I needed to try to understand. Maybe it was a good thing that the appointment with Khomeini had not been set up yet. It gave me time to check certain information, to overcome the shock of my unfortunate arrival, to face the interview in Qom with fewer prejudices and biases.

And so, forgetting, wanting to forget the splendid frescoes of the Jesus Christs, Madonnas, and Saints; the amazing cathedrals, exquisite chapels, and extraordinary convents; the sublime Gregorian chants that theocratic despotism redeemed itself with in Europe, I resolved to approach the rest of my stay in Tehran with logic and tolerance. But I made this resolution without considering the rebellious instinct that fights against reason. As soon as my generous internal diatribe was over, I was overwhelmed by a need that was just as fitful as my desire for beer the night before. I needed to find a hairdresser to wash my hair, so I could scandalize my enemy with hair that inspired overwhelming longing. I usually have the same hostile relationship with hairdressers that I do with dentists. I hate curlers and hairbrushes just as much as I hate drills and pliers. I am repeatedly tricked by straightening treatments that last no longer than half an hour, after which I'm forced to pull all my hair back into a messy ponytail with a rubber band. But the more I told myself that this was silly impulse, a waste of time, a whim, the more the need grew. It was indomitable, irresistible, and came with all manner of contradictory excuses. I had to come up with a challenge that was even more extreme than the champagne that I was hiding in my toilet tank. I had to come up with something to punish those crazy teetotalers who were more obsessed with hair than the Indians

who scalped pioneers in the Far West. Showing my clean and styled hair in its shameful—no, obscene—nudity was a piece of mischief that was more than just revenge: it was a political position, an act of Resistance.

I called my friend the housekeeper and asked her if there was a hairdresser in the hotel. She said that she would come up to my room in a few minutes, and soon she was coming in the door with a conspiratorial air, telling me that the phone was being monitored and that it was better not to be overheard talking about such a delicate subject. Yes, there was a hairdresser, and he was very talented. But he was a man, and male hairdressers had been forbidden to work. After the passing of this new law, fifty thousand *coiffeurs pour dames* were out of a job, and the hotel's hairdresser was only able to work with the help of his sister, who was sick today. Could we persuade him to break the law? She doubted that we would succeed. But she said that we could try, and, whispering, she brought me down to the basement, where the doors to the beauty salon were open and a man in his fifties was sitting unhappily behind the perfume counter. He knew what I wanted before I even opened my mouth, and a desperate scene exploded.

»Please, ma'am, don't ask me! Don't ask me! If I did it I would be risking arrest, they could burn my store! Do you know how many beauty parlors have been burned in the past few weeks?»

»No one will see. No one will hear. We won't tell anyone.«

»They could still find out, ma'am. Please, I beg you, wash your own hair! Look, I'll loan you my hairdryer. I'll give you the shampoo. I'll give you a new hairbrush. I'll give you anything, just please don't ask me to touch your head. A man can touch a woman's head only if that woman is his wife.«

»But this lady is the one who interviewed the Shah. And she's here now to interview Khomeini,« the housekeeper interjected. Suddenly his desperation vanished and he was illuminated by an almost wild joy, brimming with understanding and willingness.

»Will you really interview him?«

»Within the next forty-eight hours,« I lied.

»In the same way you interviewed the Shah?«

»In the same way, you can be sure.«

»In that case ... let me think. Maybe I could close the shop and make them think I've gone home, then I'll come back in through the garage and wash your hair behind closed doors.«

»That sounds like a great idea.«

»I'll need a witness, though. You know, the way doctors have a nurse in the room when they examine a patient. Do you see how I mean? That way, if things go wrong, someone can testify that I was washing your hair in a professional capacity, and that I had no bad intentions.«

»I can stay,« said the housekeeper.

»Alright, then.« He lowered the salon's rolling shutter with the caution of a conspirator preparing for a meeting that will decide the fate of a nation. He left, telling everyone he met that he had had enough for the day, and was going home. Ten minutes later he was back by the garage entrance, stealthily opening the doors to the beauty salon, ushering me and the housekeeper in and shutting it quickly behind us. He put me in a chair and tilted my head back into the sink.

But I hadn't counted on Allah, terrible Allah who can see and hear even in a locked room with no microphones, even in the mysteries of your conscience. Now, knowing that he was being watched by divine eyes, and listened to by divine ears, he realized the folly of his decision.

»I can't! Oh, I can't! Forgive me, I can't!

»Come on, my hair is already wet! Are you going to leave me with wet hair? I'll get a cold!«

»Wash it yourself, dry it yourself, I can't, I'm scared. It's stronger than I am ... please understand, I beg you.«

»No, you promised. And look, we have a nurse, I mean a witness. Come on, keep going. I won't look.«

»He's looking at me! He sees me!«

»But He knows that we aren't doing anything bad. He knows that you're just doing your job! And besides, doesn't the Quran say that we need to keep ourselves clean, that within a dirty body is a dirty soul? The head is part of the body. By washing it, you're obeying one of Allah's commandments.«

»No, no, no! You're a woman! A woman!« A century seemed to pass before he decided to pour out the shampoo. When he finally began to massage my scalp, his hands were trembling as though he were committing sacrilege. To overcome his fear he talked, and talked, and his voice shook more than his hands: it splintered, it caught in his throat. But he wasn't stupid. He wasn't even ignorant. He had traveled, he had trained for his profession in Paris. He even spoke decent French.

»I don't feel anything untoward, you know. Nothing. To me, it's the same as taking out an appendix. A surgeon doesn't worry about who has appendicitis, if it's a man or a woman. He touches, he cuts, he removes, and that's it. A surgeon can't refuse his services. If a surgeon can't refuse his services, why should I? This is my profession. I dedicated my life to this profession, to this art. I studied with Alexandre, it's not right to forget what I've learned. And I'm sure that, in this moment, Allah understands me, and forgives me. Am I right?«

»Yes.«

»Allah is merciful, and he does not love those who would take his mercy away. Above all, this is an act of mercy. You had dirty hair, and now, thanks to me, you will soon have clean hair. And I feel nothing, I'll say it again: nothing. Not even when I dry it. Of course, drying it is even more compromising, because there is pleasure in feeling the hair pass through the fingers when it's clean, and light, and soft ... oh no, what have I said! Oh please, don't misunderstand me! I did not mean to speak those words! You must believe me, do you believe me?« Then, blind with panic, he set down the brush and the hairdryer and refused to continue. I would have had to finish the set on my own, with the help of the housekeeper.

But at this point the act of Resistance had been completed. My hair was a floating mass that would have made an entire tribe of Apache or Navajo, Red Cloud himself, Sitting Bull himself, lose their minds. Now I could work, I could study the frightening mess I had gotten myself into. I could look through my own eyes and watch the tragedy of people destroying themselves.

This country was like a ship without a rudder or oars, battered by waves in a storm, filling up with water that the passengers didn't even bother to bail out, since they were too intent on bashing each other's heads in. The only constructive activity they undertook was praying to God for salvation, and as a result the country was descending slowly into pure, hopeless anarchy. When the regime was not terrorizing its people with fear of Hell, punishment, and death, or nurturing suspicion and mutual distrust, its only real pursuit was the organization of huge processions, where millions of crazy people raised deafening cries of »Allah Akbar! God is great!«, or of giant assemblies where gun-toting priests shouted threats or demanded the extradition of the Shah—who was still looking for a bed to die in. All the things that make up the mechanics of a nation, the functional moving parts of a society which thinks and acts had been torn apart and scattered by chaos, disorganization, and laziness. They had even stopped tending their oil wells, having abandoned most of them and not exporting the little oil that was still pumped out of the ground. They had even stopped producing caviar: salmon swam upstream, their bellies swollen with eggs that would never be collected; the few that were fished out of the stream decomposed in the sunlight until they became a putrefied and useless mush. They had even stopped tending the land, and no longer grazed their sheep: the few vegetables and rams gathered together by a handful of volunteers to bring to the urban centers rotted and died, since there were no trains or cars, and no transport in general; food was dramatically scarce. Most of the factories had been closed due to lack of materials and managers, who were often arrested and sometimes killed. Eighty percent of stores were closed because they had nothing to sell, or because their owners had fled abroad. Schools had not been reopened because the clerics wanted only the Quran to be taught, while the experts on the Quran, the mullahs, preferred political activity to teaching. The universities had yet to be reopened because the question of female students was not yet resolved. Reza Pahlavi had encouraged many young women to modernize themselves, to enroll in medical school, to become architects or engineers, but the new regime forbade women from attending courses. You certainly couldn't ask men

and women of child-bearing age to share the same classrooms and the same laboratories, now could you? And even if you conceded women the right to study in separate classrooms or laboratories, you certainly couldn't allow respectable young women to aspire to be doctors, a science that required its practitioners to examine and touch nude bodies, now could you?

In other words, the collapse of legitimacy and the disintegration of all structure had created an abyss that Khomeini's tyranny was unable to fill. He was living a self-imposed exile in the holy city of Qom, a kind of large village almost exclusively composed of mosques and religious academies surrounded by desert and about six hours from the capital by car. He completely ignored the problems that needed to be addressed to keep the country going. If you asked him what an electrical grid or a transit authority was, he wouldn't have been able to tell you. His knowledge was exclusively mystical and moral, his leadership was limited to the imposition of laws regarding sex and fasting, and his primary activities were concentrated on protecting his personal power. Curled up on the carpet that Salami believed to be a symbol of infinite virtue, he was faithful to a proverb of his own invention: »when a chicken lays an egg, her clucking bursts the eardrums.« In this spirit, he kept himself very busy publicizing his own irreplaceability and feeding into the fanaticism that kept him in power. He settled rifts and conflicts among the various Ayatollahs, he mediated between different factions, alternately reaching compromises and inciting brawls. In short, he played the role of puppet master, made his marionettes dance, and delivered daily speeches that were broadcast on Gotzadeq's television, so that the faithful would never forget those ruthless eyes. Consequently, as long as no one transgressed against ideological laws, everyone was free to do as they pleased. No one knew who was in charge.

There was a government, or at least something that resembled a government, and it was run by the only intelligent man who had emerged in the aftermath of the revolution: Mehdi Bazargan. Seventy-two years old, Bazargan had entered politics during the age of Mossadeq, and had spent most of his life in prison: except for a few brief intervals, he had been incarcerated from 1955 to 1978. He

was unilaterally respected for his honesty and his steadiness, and everyone believed him to be the one person who could bring order to Iran's chaos. Even the Shah had asked his advice when, as the rebellion broke out, he realized that it would be necessary to reach a compromise. He sent the head of the Savak to Bazargan's cell: »His Majesty would like to know what conditions you would require in order to leave this cell and accept the position of Prime Minister.« But Bazargan had not given in, he turned his back and replied: »My condition is that he give up his throne and leave.« He was extremely religious, to such a degree that he is said to have stopped his car on the highway, gotten out with his mat, and begun to recite the evening prayer in the middle of traffic. He nonetheless defended the right to secularism and was, in a sense, a little Dutch boy attempting to shore up the only dyke that could stop the murky waters of the clerics from engulfing the country. Khomeini was said to respect him—and to tolerate him—because he knew how to keep a clear head. But his entreaties fell on deaf ears, and his favorite saying was: »The gave me a dagger, but only the hilt. Other people are holding onto the blade.« No one listened to him. He spent his nights writing letters of resignation, which he sent to Qom each morning, and which were always rebuffed by Khomeini with the same words: »You'll work it out. Raise your voice, make them obey you. And publicize your affairs better. When a chicken lays her egg, her clucking bursts the eardrums.«

There was still a Parliament, or something that vaguely resembled a Parliament, but the huge majority of its members were obtuse and quarrelsome mullahs who wasted each session fighting about the enforceability of the Blue Book. If, when you are preparing for Ramadan, you find yourself without a toothpick, and in good faith believe that you have removed the food between your teeth with a pinky nail, but a crumb remains under your gums, is the fast valid or not? If the sheep you seduced is butchered and sold at the market, and your wife buys its meat to make you stew, since you don't know that you are eating your ex-lover, are you committing a sin or not?

There was still a court system, or something that might have called itself a court system, but Khomeini had put in the hands of

the notorious Khalkhali, an Ayatollah who had been locked up in a psychiatric hospital for three years because he had been amusing himself by strangling cats. Khalkhali was responsible for abolishing every kind of testimony and defense in trials, thereby reducing debate to a simple reading of the charges and then the death sentence. The fact that he was crazy was also visible in other extravagances. For example: he believed himself to be extremely handsome, despite his beer-bellied gnome's body, and would strut in front of photographers yelling »Am I not pretty, delightful, charming?«

There was still a police force, or something conceptually like it. But its management fell to the ferocious and incompetent Pasdaran, who, instead of imposing civil discipline, committed every kind of abuse and resurrected the tactics used by the Shah's cops, falling back on torture to get confessions from those who had nothing to confess. Fingernails were pulled out, feet were flayed, genitals were burned, penises were clubbed and crushed.

There was no military, if not a miserable residue of the military power built up by Reza Pahlavi. Once the generals and high-ranking officials had been shot, ninety percent of soldiers had thrown their uniforms away and sold their rifles. Despite this, Khomeini had declared himself Supreme Leader of the Armed Forces and had invited deserters to punish the Kurds, who, after having fought more than any other ethnic group to topple the monarchy, were now asking for regional autonomy. What's worse, his invitation worked. Having commandeered all available taxis, buses, motorcycles, and trucks, a throng of plainclothes thugs descended on the Kurdish cities of Kermanshah, Sanandaj, and Mahabad. Once there, they formed roadblocks so big that the representatives of the miserable residue were unable to push them back or contain them. »Get back, you idiots! Who sent you here? Go back home, don't interfere with operations,« shouted the captains and colonels, firing blindly into the crowd. But they stayed put, letting themselves be hit, repeating over and over that they were obeying the orders of the Supreme Leader, and that no captain or colonel could overrule an order of the Supreme Leader. It took ages to get rid of them, and some were able to find their old uniforms and guns in order to hunt the Kurds more

effectively. Every day news of another massacre reached the capital. A girl who had fled to Tehran told me, sobbing, about the murder of her brothers, aged twenty and twenty-five. The older one had been wounded in the head, the younger in the legs, and both had taken refuge in a hut. The thugs found them, dragged them outside, and threw them against a wall to kill them. Regulations state that men must be killed standing up, and the thugs ordered them to stand at attention. The older one with the head wound was able to, but the younger one with the wounded leg was not, so the older pulled his younger brother onto his shoulders, and they died like that, one on top of the other, screaming long live freedom.

The only person who opposed this genocide was Ayatollah Taleghani, who had been in prison for eleven years, six of which were spent in the same cell as Bazargan. Instead of adapting to the infamies of the new power structure, he condemned them, holding meetings with a rifle slung over his shoulder and openly criticizing Khomeini, shouting that this was no kind of revolution, that a revolution that takes away freedom, that doesn't help the poor and the illiterate and rather oppresses them more ferociously than the old oppressor is no kind of revolution at all. He was a sincere idealist who had preferred to educate himself with Western liberal and socialist texts rather than with the Quran. Taleghani understood that the revolution had failed for all the usual reasons, tyranny unseating tyranny, and he tried to salvage what he could by reawakening people's consciences. But that same week he died in mysterious circumstances. He was eating dinner and bam, he fell lifeless onto his plate. Was it a heart attack or poisoned soup? The official version said that he had succumbed to fatigue, to old illnesses, to present disappointments. The nonexistent rumor was that he had been liquidated on Khomeini's orders, that he had been seen as a dangerous rival. Regardless, his death provided an excuse for the umpteenth procession, attended by hundreds of thousands, men on one side and veiled women on the other, paralyzing the city from sunup to sundown. I also attended, with the idea of mixing with the wingless bats, but instead of enjoying the triumphs my friend Miriam had been greeted with, I was pushed away like an interloper with

uncovered hair. I withdrew to the terrace of a nearby home, and the spectacle I saw unfold before me frightened me. Not so much for the human magma that extended for miles like a shroud, but rather for the noise, which tore through the air like apocalyptic thunder: »Zandeh bad, Imam! Payandeh bad, Imam! May you live eternally, Imam! May you be eternal!« They were there to mourn the death of a man who had loved them, who had sacrificed himself for them, and instead they were wishing eternal life on his probable murderer.

It was then that I understood that I needed to know more before I went into battle at Qom. I needed to understand more clearly just who this diabolical old man was, to discover what was hiding in the midst of all that chaos, to intuit how a catastrophe of this magnitude had come about. And to find out what I needed to know I chose Bazargan, the man no one listened to.

I wasn't expecting to find an accomplice: a criticism of Khomeini had never passed his lips. And meeting with him wouldn't be easy, either: over forty years in politics, he had never spoken to a journalist, the verb >interview< annoyed him, and he was surrounded by a strange void, almost a conspiracy of calculated silence. Whenever you tried to get close, you saw yourself decisively pushed back. »No, Bazargan no.« But if there was a leader capable of supplying an illuminating take on the situation, it was Bazargan. Someone had told me that one of his daughters, Fareshteh, was an avid reader of my work, and that she would probably be able to convince him to see me. I called Fareshteh and the following morning she called me back: »I did it! The appointment is tomorrow in the government building. I'll come with you and translate.« Twenty-four hours later, my head covered judiciously with a scarf, I found myself in front of a wiry and sullen old man who seemed like the author Luigi Pirandello's twin: he had the same bald, pear-shaped head, the same pointy face made even longer by a white goatee, and the same glasses in front of his bright, humor-filled eyes. And, surprise surprise, I felt him shake my hand while his clear, sharp voice said in Farsi: »I'm about to put the noose around my neck, I know. And my daughter should be tried for

indirect patricide. But if I have to be strung up, at least I'll die well: ask me what you like. What's your first question?« My first question could only be the one I'd been unable to find an answer to yet. I sat down, turned on my recorder, and asked:

»Mr. Prime Minister, how much does the government which you lead matter, or rather, how little does it matter?« His eyes grew dark immediately and he let out a sigh of resignation.

»It's a legitimate question, and the answer is not easy, because it is tantamount to asking me who is leading Iran today. If I tell you that I am leading, I would be lying; if I tell you that Khomeini is leading, I wouldn't be telling you the whole truth; and if I tell you that a mass of people is leading, I wouldn't be answering clearly. Of course, I matter very little. Partly because a revolution has truly taken place here, and partly because Khomeini has an unparalleled influence over the people. They think in the same way, they speak the same language. A nod is enough to create an understanding between them. So, we could say that, from a formal perspective, the government leads; from an ideological perspective, Khomeini leads, with the help of his revolutionary committees, his revolutionary counsels, his revolutionary guards—the Pasdaran—and his special relationship with the masses. Then there are the revolutionary tribunals, the religious authorities who manage a number of cities with the excuse of continuing the revolution, and create all kinds of messes ... it's not a comfortable situation, no.«

»Indeed, it seems like the only thing you do is threaten resignation.«

»Yes, and even though I've never really thought about seriously leaving, the temptation is very strong. It has been from the start, from the moment I realized that the government had no authority because there were too many people involved, most of all him. I went to Qom and told him 'I can't work like this, Imam. If you want me to be Prime Minister, this interference has to stop. And if you intend to give orders that go over my head, you have to ask me first.' He promised that he would and then he just kept behaving in the same way. Two months ago it was the same thing, and then he began to level some heavy criticism at me: that I wasn't leading an effective

government, that I wasn't leading a revolutionary government, that everything was my fault ... I wrote him a letter. I reminded him that I had only taken up this office at his insistence, I repeated that I couldn't keep the government going if everyone thought that they were in charge, and I concluded: if you are unsatisfied with me, let me go, this will be my resignation. He replied that he wouldn't have anyone else, he asked me to stay, he promised again that he wouldn't interfere, and then ...«

»And then he interfered. In some very unexpected ways, like when he proclaimed himself Supreme Leader of the Armed Forces. Isn't that the behavior of a dictator? Isn't that a form of fascism?«

»No. I see how a Westerner could have this impression, but he doesn't want to be a dictator. He doesn't want to impose his decisions or his wishes. Even when he goes over my head with his orders, even when he bombards me with imperious advice—which happens all too often—he doesn't have dictatorial intentions. He behaves unconsciously, and I would say in good faith: you're mistaken to call this behavior fascist. I wouldn't compare him to Mussolini, not even to Napoleon, or De Gaulle. You'd have to meet him to believe it, to understand his character, his way of being. In this sense, Mossadeq was just like him. He said: you're right, some decisions should be made by Parliament. Then he forgot all about it and did what he wanted, convinced that he was acting in the best interests of the people. And Mossadeq was educated in Switzerland, in the cult of democracy. Khomeini believes he is acting in the people's best interests.«

He answered my questions without getting irritated. There wasn't the slightest trace of emotion in his clear, sharp voice, on his face, or in his gestures, which were practically nonexistent. After his eyes darkened and he let out that long sigh he seemed to have turned to stone, to be weighing his words, and he sat like a statue: his back ramrod straight, his legs still, his arms immobile. Even his hands, which were resting on his knees, hadn't moved once. Fareshteh, on the other hand, seemed very nervous, and every time I asked a question she shivered, she raised her lovely face and fixed two pleading eyes on me, so that I had to encourage her with a smile. I encouraged her with a smile.

»Mr. Bazargan, I have interviewed many dictators, and I've never met one who would call himself a dictator; all of them say and believe that they are acting in the people's best interests.«

»This is another typically Western discourse. It comes from the concept you Westerners have of democracy and freedom. Here it's impossible to trace a straight line and say: if you act like this you're democratic, if you act like this you're fascist. Leaving aside the fact that there are cases that must be decided by him, and responsibilities that only he can take, you need to understand that he considers himself a kind of father, the head of a family. He would like everyone participating in this government-family, but at the same time he recognizes that leading falls to the father alone. He forgets that some choices also fall to the mother, and others still to the children. In other words, he forgets that there is an executive power and a legislative power and a political power. But if you remind him of this, he realizes his mistake very quickly. In some ways, this is a relief, and in others it is a disaster, because a leader with his power should not change his mind so easily. Regardless, these are not the characteristics of a dictator.«

»Maybe they're just the characteristics of a despotic old man.«

»No, they're the characteristics of a man who has no experience as a political leader. Khomeini has never really been a political man, he has never been a general or the head of a company. What I mean is, he has never trained to deal with the managerial responsibilities which he now has to shoulder. He doesn't know how the administration of a country works. He entered politics when he began to fight against the Shah, and he entered politics in a very specific way, as a religious man and with no intention of leading a revolution. I sometimes ask myself if he understood that he would bring about a revolution. And yet, he was the one who made it happen, who triggered it, and History will record this fact. Look, in some ways Khomeini is a crude, primitive man, in others he's a genius. I've never met anyone who has his capacity to interpret the mood and the will of the masses, who knows how to communicate with them with a simple glance or a turn of phrase. The extraordinary thing is that he's not just popular with the masses, many intellectuals like him as

well. There are many intellectuals who have followed him around like orphans looking for a father, pupils looking for a teacher.«

»Do you like him?«

»Yes, in spite of his faults and his disconcerting ability to change his mind. It's impossible not to like a man like him. I like him and I can't even begrudge him the right to feel like more than a religious leader, to feel like the tutor and the supervisor and the guardian of the revolution. Because I can't forget that it was him who gave us the strength to depose the most powerful monarch in the world. I like him and he likes me: if someone speaks ill of me he doesn't listen to them, and he defends me angrily. In short, from a human perspective, our relationship is good. From a political perspective, it is not. We go forward on the power of our conflicts and our divergences. They began the day I arrived in Paris to study our strategy for fighting Reza Pahlavi with him. I believed in a step-by-step approach, in gradual resistance. I was convinced that we needed to cause the United States to abandon the Shah little by little, making him weaker and weaker while the people grew stronger. I was convinced of this because the Iranian people have always been under the despot's thumb: obedience is expected, and consequently, every time that they have revolted with force things have gone badly for those in power. I said: the people are not ready for freedom, we have to get them used to the idea, we have to train them politically. Let's gain power in small increments, first the schools, then the press, then the judicial system, then the economy, and then the military. Let's move slowly, otherwise everything will sink into chaos and we'll end up with another tyrant.«

»And what did he say?«

»He said exactly the opposite: no gradual approach, no waiting, we couldn't even afford to lose a day, a minute, the people demanded immediate revolution, now or never. He wanted everything right away. We almost began arguing. But when I saw that he was so sure that he was right, so sure of winning, I was completely overcome by his unshakeable faith, and I gave in. I said okay, let's take the plunge, let's make a revolution.«

He uttered this last sentence with extreme detachment, as though he were concluding an anecdote about a lovers' quarrel that

had arisen from some silly situation: choosing an apartment, buying a carpet. Let's buy it, let's not buy it, let's pay it all up front, let's pay it in installments, okay, fine: we'll buy it and we'll pay up front. In that moment I was sure I had misunderstood him, and I asked Fareshteh to confirm his answer.

»Could you repeat that, please?«

»I said okay, let's take the plunge, let's make a revolution. And he didn't even bat an eye. He ordered me to be Prime Minister of the government that would have taken control after our victory. However, despite the fact that things went exactly as he had predicted they would, point by point, with stunning accuracy, I still think that mine was the right strategy. If we had taken a step-by-step approach, we would not have the problems that we have today, and the country would be experiencing this shock in quite another way. Wanting everything right away is an old Iranian vice which brings a whole load of trouble with it.«

»Trouble and death, Mr. Bazargan. Because of Khomeini's desire to have everything, right away, tens of thousands of people were butchered. And are still being butchered. Doesn't it seem like too high a price to pay?«

»I'll answer you with a question: have you ever heard of a revolution, and not necessarily a political revolution, but even a scientific revolution, that occurred with no spilling of blood? No despot leaves his throne when asked, when kindly invited to give up his power. The last act is always war. My strategy would have ultimately required blood to be spilled, as well.«

»Really? But you just admitted that Iran would be experiencing this shock differently if Khomeini hadn't been so impatient. And, I would add, the butchery wouldn't still be going on.«

»Yes, I have to admit that because of this spontaneous revolution and immediate victory, that the government is beginning to lose control. Just look at the revolutionary tribunals, the deplorable state of the military, the police, the guards: these are all necessary organisms if we hope to reestablish legitimacy. Since the people consider them a diabolical residue of the past, a dangerous remnant of the imperial regime, we've been unable to put them in order. Furthermore, the

revolutionary committees cannot substitute them because they are incapable and completely consumed by infighting ... the dispersion of power is such that no one even knows who is directing traffic.«

It was getting late, and there were many other questions I wanted to ask him. So I didn't interrupt him to say that this was precisely the problem: humankind's inability to make revolution without making a mess, the eternal error of those who need blood and chaos to change things or to make a better world. Besides, he wouldn't have understood. Despite his bright eyes and his Pirandello head, despite his elegant composure, he was one of them. In his own way, he also belonged to the much lauded and worshipped and glorified stock of Robespierre, Saint-Just, Danton, Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, Castro, and all the supermen who feel that the sacrifice of sheep is not just acceptable, but necessary. If blood doesn't flow on the altar of dreams, if chaos doesn't destroy even that which should be saved, then ideas are flimsy and leaders have no balls. Hadn't he just admitted that even his step-by-step approach would have ended in death and pain? Hadn't he just admitted that he liked Khomeini, wasn't he his accomplice and servant? What he was saying now, to justify the ineptitude of his own government gave me bitter proof of this. It was important to be aware of internal enemies, he was saying, of the left which was subversive and smoldering, which spread slanderous lies, which provoked workers and businessmen with underhanded opportunism. It was important to be aware of Savak's ex-collaborators, who incited women already corrupted by the old regime to leave the house with their heads uncovered, to protest against the chador. It was important to consider the resentment of the opposition forces whose newspapers had been closed and whose printing presses had been confiscated. No revolution could allow itself the luxury of tolerating freedom of the press or any other form of freedom—freedom in the sense that we Westerners understood it, in our sensible societies. Revolution forbids everything, it stuffs gags in mouths, it punishes, and whoever bears the brunt of it will try to get their revenge. As far as external enemies were concerned, like the Kurds, they had attacked first. Even though they were radical extremists, Khomeini had accepted their demands for autonomy: that the governor of

Kurdistan be Kurdish, that the soldiers of Kurdistan be Kurdish, that the administrative offices of the cities be managed by Kurds. But then, with the agrarian reforms and the distribution of lands that had belonged to the Shah, the Kurds had demanded that Kurdish lands be given to Kurds. They had begun to throw stones at the officials visiting from Tehran, they had organized protest marches and people had brought knives and clubs, they had tried to regroup the members of the Kurdish Democratic Party, the enemy of Islam. And it had been necessary to confront them with the military, sometimes to shoot them.

»What can you tell me about the revolutionary tribunals, Mr. Bazargan?«

»That's a different story. The revolutionary tribunals do not report to the government. They are completely out of my hands. If it were up to me ... in a message to the nation I condemned their abuses, their practice of holding trials without witnesses or defense attorneys. I protested, I expressed my disdain, what more could I do? They are supposed to issue judgment according to Islamic law, but they don't even do that. The Quran doesn't require the shooting of adulterers, prostitutes, and homosexuals. In the instance of adultery, it doesn't even require a trial, unless there is incontrovertible evidence, which there hardly ever is.«

»The Quran says that adultery can be proven only if a thread cannot pass between the two bodies, and that the proof must occur in the presence of four witnesses. In this regard, at least, you are surprisingly liberal.«

»Exactly, and consequently I do not understand how those tribunals are able to justify their actions. Who is assuring them that the sexual act was actually committed? Or rather, who has given them the authority to make judgments like this? Mohammed also says: it is better for ten guilty men to go free than for one innocent man to be punished. But even here, regarding these shootings, you Westerners are exaggerating. One hunchback, forty hunchbacks, as we say here in Iran. Do you know that fable? A man comes home and says to his wife: >There's a hunchback outside.< The wife tells her neighbor: >There are two hunchbacks outside.< The neighbor tells her

brother: >There are four hunchbacks outside.< The brother tells his friend: >There are eight hunchbacks outside!< Until they reach forty, at which point everyone runs away screaming: >The hunchbacks have invaded!< You're treating us unfairly. You never talk about the positive elements of this revolution, you never write a single word about the efforts we are making to reconstruct the country. But as soon as something unpleasant happens you pounce on it greedily. This didn't happen under the Shah. But he was very good at making friends with the foreign press.«

»I wasn't his friend, you know that.«

»You weren't, but you do exaggerate about the shooting of adulterers. And you probably won't say anything about the criminals we have shot because they are raping children or forcing young girls to prostitute themselves. You won't write that most of the shootings are for political crimes.«

»I'll write it, don't worry. I'll write it.«

»With disdain, I'm sure. And without noting that, when compared to other revolutions, the number of people shot for political crimes has been relatively low. Like comparing a drop of water and a lake.«

»I doubt that, Mr. Bazargan. But, if we grant for the sake of argument that you're right, I'll say this: sometimes even a drop of water is enough to show us the reality of a society. In this case, the reality is the despotism of an obtuse and enraged cleric who is manipulating ignorance and poverty in the name of God. Can I ask you a very difficult question, Mr. Bazargan, very difficult indeed?«

»I already told you that you can ask me anything you like.«

»Alright, then. The revolutionary tribunals are in the hands of the clerics, the revolutionary committees are in the hands of the clerics, the revolutionary guard is in the hands of the clerics, and Parliament is in the hands of the clerics. The weakness of your government, this last bastion of secularism, shows that there's no place for the secular in Iran. Is this what you wanted when you agreed to send all those people to be butchered?«

»No! And, as paradoxical as it may seem, neither did Khomeini. I've known this since our first encounter in Paris. He wanted everything, but he didn't want the country to wind up in the hands of the

clerics. If this hadn't been the case, I would not have accepted the post of Prime Minister. I am a very religious man, this is well known, but my sympathies have always lain with people like Ayatollah Taleghani, who said that an imposed religion cannot be valid. I'll say more: one of my favorite books has always been Ayatollah Nairn's, in which he explains that there are always two despotisms to struggle against: monarchic despotism and religious despotism. The fact is that, after the revolution, something unexpected and unforeseeable happened: the clerics tripped us up and were able to take control of the country«

»Do you mean to say that there was a kind of coup d'état within the revolution?«

»Not exactly, since the revolution occurred according to the principles of Islam, and since the clerics had an uncontested and decisive role in this. I mean that the ascendancy of the clerics occurred exactly in the moment when priests were supposed to be substituted by laypeople. But it was our fault, the fault of the laypeople. If we had been more alert, if we had behaved like a political force instead of becoming distracted, what you call a coup d'état would not have happened. Or we would have been able to stop it. But we were so overwhelmed with all the country's problems, with the urgency of getting it back on its feet, that we didn't realize we were missing the boat. Yes, after the revolution, all the political parties of the Islamic group fell asleep on the job. And when they fell asleep they left the reigns to a clergy that, perhaps, didn't even intend to monopolize power, and that was merely taking advantage of an opportunity offered them by History: to fill the void that we had left. As for the left-wing parties, they wouldn't have been able to do much, even if they had wanted to. They have never been able to attract the masses in Iran, they have always remained at the margins of reality.«

»And now how will you get rid of the clerics?«

»Eh! Sooner or later we'll be able to yank their despotism out from under them; this hateful business has gone on far too long. Besides, especially in the regions far from the capital, the void we left has been filled in a truly horrible way. Many of them are not actually mullahs, they just pretend to be because a mullah's dress commands

respect and obedience, and they commit all the abuses you would expect of ignorant people. But again, it's important not to exaggerate, or to involve the whole clergy in this accusation. There are also cases where the void had been filled in positive ways, like the young, alert priests who fought in the resistance against the Shah. Taleghani died, but he left behind educated, progressive, and modern disciples, and his thought still has strong roots in Iran. No, I don't believe that a religious dictatorship will be established here. The people would rebel.«

He seemed so cautious now, so intent on hitting the target, on saying everything without saying anything that would compromise him too much, and it would have been too much to ask him if Taleghani had died because someone put poison in his soup. I limited myself to observing that the dictatorship of the clergy was, by now, established, and that the people were not rebelling because they were afraid. Spurred on by fear, they crowded the departures terminal at the airport and escaped on the first plane headed toward another country, it didn't matter which. Their fear was feeding an exodus comparable to that of the boat people in Vietnam. But disappointment mingled with their fear, the same disappointment that had struck us in the West when we realized that the Shah represented a lesser evil. They felt a kind of rage at having been tricked by those who had inspired hope and faith, there was a refusal to allow themselves to be enslaved by a book written fourteen hundred years ago, by a buried past.

And then he lost his composure. With his white goatee trembling, stabbing his index finger hard against his knee, he answered angrily that only the collaborators of the old regime were fleeing, the rich bourgeoisie who didn't like the new economic structure, the impatient people who found it easier to die in battle than to live through the sacrifices imposed by a changing society, the ball-breakers who were never happy with anything. It wasn't true that the Islamic movement was a hodgepodge of reactionaries incapable of appreciating modern culture, the civilization of our times. It wasn't true that the Quran was exhuming laws that were valid fourteen hundred years ago. It wasn't true that Khomeini's Iran wanted to wall itself up in the past. Some people were far too strict, yes, but I had to

understand that in the disorganized atmosphere that arises after a revolution, any theory could prove itself to be inadequate, any excess could occur. And regardless, revolution is not a dinner party.

It took some time for us to make peace. When we did, the interview degenerated into a tired dialogue. We started talking about his anger toward the Americans, his mistrust of the Soviets, his antipathy toward Qaddafi, who had never justified the disappearance of Imam Moussa Sadr in Libya. It was only when I asked him if he was afraid of being killed that he rewarded me with a smile:

»It could happen, even though I'm not at all willing to throw myself to the wolves. What do you want me to say? Every man's life is in Allah's hands.« I took my leave, telling him I hoped for the wolves' defeat, and I left, thinking that knowing more does little to assuage discouragement. But it did make me ready to face the Battle of Qom.

When would it happen? The days passed slowly as I waited, the bottle of champagne remained hidden in the toilet tank, the desire to show my clean hair slowly faded under the scarf that, by now, I even wore to bed. My pride disintegrated into pitiful serfdom.

Having alienated Bazargan with my quip about the Shah being the lesser of two evils, I could no longer delude myself that I could get to Qom without the help of an accomplice. I found myself, once more, at Salami's mercy, Salami who I had so mistreated on my arrival. I courted him with despicable calculation, I demanded that he use the informal Italian mode of address—*tu*—with me, I pretended to be horribly offended if he didn't come visit me with his whiskered equivocations, his lying excuses, his invitations to be optimistic: »The Imam is sick, the Imam is busy, the Imam is giving a course on theology. Have faith, he will see you soon.« I was patient as he kept renewing his offers of interviews with Gotzadeq and Banisadr, having been encouraged by my meeting with the Prime Minister. These two shamelessly offered themselves through Salami, making it clear that their willingness to get me close to Khomeini depended entirely on my willingness to interview them. Never mind that this just added another problem to all my current problems. Divided by

violent jealousy, these two hated each other with every fiber of their beings, and I quickly deduced that interviewing one would make the other my enemy, that interviewing both of them would make them both my enemies, so I had to do my best to keep them happy with vague promises and avoid meeting either of them. This was easy with Banisdar, a haughty, suspicious man; it was extremely difficult with Gotzadeq. You couldn't escape from Gotzadeq and his mania for publicity. He came to my hotel every night, escorted by his bodyguards, to dine in the restaurant where the Western press ate, and was always able to find a journalist willing to let him talk. If the journalist was a woman, things got very ugly very fast. With his bully's athletic build, his certainty of being irresistible, and the English that he had learned during four years of exile in Washington, D.C., he circled you with an exuberance that you had no idea how to escape. He sent me a gigantic bouquet of red roses and a note that was so steamy that I began to skip dinner in order not to see him, and often ended up tormenting the housekeeper for hours.

»Go down and see if he's here, and if he's eating.«

»He's here, but he hasn't ordered yet.«

»Go check again.«

»He's ordered, but he's eating very slowly.«

»Go check again.«

»He's finished, but he's still there, chatting.«

»One more time, please.«

»All clear!«

If you had told me that I would have secured an appointment with Khomeini thanks to Gotzadeq, I would have laughed in your face. But God works in mysterious ways, and the hate that divided those two rivals had even more mysterious consequences. One evening he wasn't at dinner, so I went down to the restaurant to eat. As soon as I took the first bite, he burst into the room with his bodyguards and chose the table right next to mine. He sat down, pretending not to have seen me. He looked like an arrogant bull mastiff, or better, like a boxer who has gone one too many rounds. He ordered a hamburger and a Coca-Cola in a very loud voice, and finally turned toward me, not wasting any time on introductions, and did something that I still

don't understand. Was he trying to shock me, to scandalize me? Was he still harboring resentment for the way I had been avoiding him? Was he trying to create an alibi for himself on the off-chance that someone was listening? Whatever it was, without any conceivable motivation, and without explaining why he was talking to me, he launched into the most ferocious diatribe against Americans that I have ever heard: they were murderers, criminals, the Nazis of our time, the trash of History, the shame of the human species, he hoped they all died of cancer. Then, just as suddenly as he had started, he stopped. He gulped down his Coca-Cola and took a huge bite of his hamburger, and he asked my opinion.

»What do you think?«

Smiling, I replied: »I think that anyone who hates Americans so much shouldn't be eating hamburgers and drinking Coca-Cola. And he certainly shouldn't have accepted their hospitality for four years.«

He didn't like that. It threw him into an uncontrolled, wild rage—the same rage that would lead him, two years later, in front of the firing squad. Hamburgers and Coca-Cola were the only good things that infected people had ever invented, he began shouting. He spit on the hospitality of the Americans, he would have died before he ever thanked them. As for me, I could go to hell right along with them, I was one of them anyway, all Westerners were. And, having let loose a rumbling belch, he got up, leaving me convinced that I should return to my room and start packing. Goodbye interview with Khomeini.

I had forgotten the mysterious consequences of the hate that divided those two rivals. In order to prove to Khomeini that Gotzadeq was a brainless fool, a stupid boy who didn't deserve his attention, Banisadr would have cut off his own finger. He would have cut off two if he thought that he could show a European that there was only one man capable of providing access to the Supreme Leader: the Finance Minister, the future President of the Islamic Republic. So, as soon as he heard about Gotzadeq's performance in the restaurant, he hurried to Qom on my behalf, and two days later an embarrassed Salami burst into my room. He didn't approve of my insolent provocation of Mr. Gotzadeq, he said, and he certainly wasn't admitting

that the opinions of a revolutionary who was, besides, his superior were wrong: indeed, the Americans had done nothing worthwhile, apart from Coca-Cola and hamburgers. Nonetheless, he was happy to give me a bit of good news. Mr. Banisadr had persuaded the Imam to receive me. We were leaving for Qom the next morning. Yes, the next morning at eight, the appointment was set for three in the afternoon and reaching the Holy City would take five or six hours by car. Was I ready? Did I have the appropriate clothing? Clothing was very important: I had to remember that I was a woman, and that the Imam had never let himself be interviewed by a woman, that such an exception was remarkable and that it would behoove me not to make any mistakes.

»I brought some black pants and a long-sleeved black shirt with a very high neck.«

»It's not enough.«

»I also brought a black scarf that covers my head and shoulders.«

»It's not enough.«

»I also brought a black shawl that goes all the way down to my feet.«

»It's not enough.«

»How is that not enough?«

»You need a chador.«

»I don't have a chador.«

»I'll loan you one of my wife's. And please: no red nails. The Imam would take offense.«

»Of course.«

»No blush, no lipstick. The Imam would be scandalized.«

»Of course.«

»No perfume, no frivolities of any kind. The Imam would see it as a provocation.«

»Of course.«

I was so happy that even if he had asked me to shave my head, I would have. Caught up in that happiness, I threw caution to the wind and ran to the toilet tank. I pulled out the bottle of champagne and offered to share it with Salami. But he refused, horrified, and suggested that we celebrate by smoking opium in the house of a few of

his government friends. Opium was allowed, as was hashish, it was even written in the Blue Book: »Drinking wine or any other beverage that causes drunkenness is a sin. It is not a sin to use opium or hashish, even in liquid forms.« I had to say yes. And so, I spend the eve of my great adventure yawning on a carpet alongside a dozen hypocrites who would have sold their own mothers for a glass of beer, as they passed an ivory pipe between them with an enraptured air. In the bowl of the pipe, a black, sticky ball was burning, giving off an unbearable dung smell: a prelude to the sad escapades I would experience at Qom, a place that everyone should have to see, so that they can understand that power is nothing serious.

There's something missing in all writings about power: very few are able to capture how funny it is. When they examine the horrors that power commits, the sufferings it imposes, the blood with which it stains itself, historians and political scientists always forget to highlight the ridiculous aspects of the inevitable monster. They always see power as very serious, and never ridiculous; they always narrate tragedies, never comedies. Please don't misunderstand me, in many ways this is a legitimate choice, since the principal ingredients of power—pain and death—aren't very funny. In other ways, this is a mistake. If we only write about the tragedy, the image of the monster that remains is distorted and incomplete; it fails to communicate that, apart from being evil, the monster was funny. All we need do is look at the men and women who represent power, even when they're dignified and polite people—which, anyway, is a very rare occurrence—to see how funny they are. Their superciliousness as they try to convince us that they are excellent and deserve to lead us or dominate us is funny. The false modesty they adopt to justify their inherited or hard-won privilege is funny. The respect that they demand from their subjects, even when they call them comrades, is funny. The way they all sit dignified on the presidential chair or throne is funny; the way they move or speak when they know people are watching is funny; the way they believe in their own importance is funny. Their discomfort and their ease is funny; their ironed

uniforms and precious tunics and unearned medals and invented awards are funny. It's all so funny that a sudden, spontaneous urge arises to ask why people bow or draw back, intimidated in front of them, rather than laughing in their faces.

Is it because of fear? Not entirely, especially if you consider that the powerful are afraid, too: above all, they are afraid of the very people they frighten, or want to frighten. They are afraid of losing their position; afraid of being unmasked, overwhelmed, killed; afraid of losing all the people they frighten, or want to frighten. Is it because of blindness, or some need to bow before a commanding leader? Not entirely, if you consider that no one likes having power imposed upon them, and that often the powerful are more hated than they are loved. Is it because of laziness, or resignation to the fact that we can't get by without them, that someone has to stay at the top of the social pyramid? Perhaps. But in order to overcome that fear, that need to bow before a leader, that laziness, that resignation, all we need to do is look with the eyes of the child in Hans Christian Andersen's fable, who points his finger and shouts: »The Emperor has no clothes!» We need to consider the miseries of leadership: yes, they can punish and ruin and kill, but they can also end up punished, ruined, and killed. In any case, they are vulnerable creatures who live in the nightmare of their own inadequacy. I've always tried to look at them like this, sometimes I even imagine them in their underwear, or in embarrassing circumstances. It always works very well, even though it adds a kind of human pity to the desire to laugh, which could all too easily give way to a dangerous kind of indulgence. But it's a fact that when they lose their ironed uniforms, those gray and blue double-breasted jackets, those unearned medals and invented awards, they cease to be funny. Especially if they become victims the next powerful person: victims are never funny.

It's undeniable that power makes us comical, or at least amplifies the potential for buffoonery that exists in all of us; the proof is in the fact that, the more evil a powerful person is, the funnier he becomes. Just think how ridiculous Hitler was, with his little toothbrush mustache and his affected haircut, his hysterical barking whenever he got angry or addressed the crowds in Alexanderplatz. Think how

ridiculous Mussolini was, with his arrogant face and puffed-up chest, his hands on his hips and his tendency to say idiotic things. Think how ridiculous Napoleon was, with his superman's sulk, his hand always stroking his gut, his short little legs and his claim to be Emperor of Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité. And, just to use a current example, think how ridiculous Castro is: with his little beard and his high voice, his Simon Bolivar ambitions and his eternal masquerade as a guerilla who has just come down from the Sierra Maestra: hiking boots, pistol at the ready, a winter uniform on a tropical island. Think of the facetious use their peers of every race and color have made and always will make of authority, transforming it into parody, caricature of oceanic parades, arches of triumph, vulgar yells. And tell me: how is it possible that people support them, admire them, applaud them? How is it possible that the squares don't erupt in giggles each time they starting squawking? Tell me, what would they do if an entire square full of people began laughing at them? Would they kill them all? Okay. And if instead of shooting the soldiers tasked to kill began to laugh as well? If the whole population laughed?

In any case, there is something more ridiculous than a squawking dictator. I'm referring to the force of stupidity: the idiotic laws, senseless regulations, and absurd rules that power uses more effectively than weapons to keep itself in place. And the comic rigidity with which the servants of power enforce the idiotic laws, senseless regulations, and absurd rules, causing situations which are so grotesque that the people involved long for the firing squad. If the oceans of tears that monsters have spilled throughout the history of mankind could be measured against the grotesque situations that their imbecility have caused, no one would have any more doubts about the humor of power and the need to explain in comic terms, rather than tragic ones. Especially in Iran. Take the chador. At first glance, it seems harmless: at worst, a piece of fabric, which is upsetting in that it symbolizes servitude. But just try getting yourself into a mess that involves the chador, try entering the citadel of power that birthed the chador, the laws that establish a woman's sphere, the relationship between the two sexes. You'll see what happens to you. You might even find yourself married to the man you happened to be

standing next to at that moment in time. You truly cannot imagine what can happen because of a chador. Everything that happened to me happened because of the chador that I had to wear in front of the diabolical old man.

It happened like this. After the opium party Salami went back home to find his wife's chador, but couldn't find it because his wife wasn't in Tehran and he had no idea where she kept it. So he asked one of the other men's wives, and so the rumor that Salami was looking for a chador spread, along with a reasonable question: why? The obvious answer to this question was soon arrived at: since Salami was working closely with me, the chador could only mean that I was preparing to interview Khomeini. At this point the rumor became news, the news reached journalists, and a television crew decided to camp out in the hallway in front of my hotel room to surprise me as I left, to follow me, and to join in the festivities. But Salami found out about it ahead of time. He came to get me before eight the next morning with the borrowed chador, and had to run for cover. »They're waiting downstairs, and thank God they don't know that we're leaving this morning. We need to slip out right under their noses without tipping them off: you can't leave dressed formally. Put on a T-shirt and blue jeans.« I took his advice and hid the sacred garment in my purse along with my recorder and my tapes. I breezed out of the hotel, past my colleagues, with the air of someone going to pick up a pack of cigarettes. In my hurry, I didn't ask myself any of the questions that were currently tormenting Salami. Would they let me into Qom in a T-shirt and jeans? Would we find a hotel where I could change clothes? The first problem seemed less serious, since I could resolve it with the chador, even though I hadn't had time to try it on or learn how to use it. The second problem was more worrisome: there were very few hotels in Qom, and they were always packed. So were the places that rented mattresses. Indeed, pilgrims often brought tents with them. The public toilets were only for men, and it would be impossible to ask for hospitality in one of the private homes. He never would have dared. In conclusion, in order to avoid unpleasant surprises, it would be smart to change before we arrived. But where? We were at least five hours outside of Tehran and we had yet to pass a single town, gas

station, or hut. The road snaked across a desert of sand and stones, a few grassy dunes, and there wasn't so much as a tree to pee behind.

»What if I changed my clothes here in the car?«

»In the name of Allah! Are you joking?« He was so shocked that it seemed he feared I was going to take advantage of the situation and rape him. And now, with the Holy City becoming clearer on the horizon—a cluster of gray minarets in the middle of nowhere—the problem began to weigh on us very heavily. It became more urgent with each kilometer, as the traffic grew; even if he were able to overcome his modesty and let me do what I had suggested, I wouldn't have been able to. I mean, they would have seen me. And I would have risked being lynched.

»What if we went back? I could hide behind a hill? There was a little hill about a half-hour back.«

»It's almost one o'clock. We'll be late.«

»Let's keep going then, we can do it.«

Suddenly we were at the gates of the city, a tangles of trucks, camels, buses and caravans jammed full of the faithful, who had come from all over the country to pay homage to the diabolical old man, to look upon him for a moment, to be blessed. They writhed around like larvae, many of them with frightened, heartbreaking children, more heartbreaking than the very idea of ignorance and misery. Some of them had walked, bringing only a goat and a carpet with them, and they sat there lumped together in a pile of bodies and rags and dust—but they were happy and impervious to fatigue, to hunger, to the brutality of the guards who mistreated them, ordered them to move so the cars could pass, to the drivers protesting, shouting, honking their horns in a hellish cacophony. I wanted to cry, as I watched them: to think, that tens of thousands died for this.

»Cover your head,« said Salami, nervous.

I covered my head.

»Hunch down a little, try not to let them see you.«

I hunched down a little, trying not to let them see me.

»Have your chador ready.«

I had my chador ready.

I clutched the chador, ready to put it on as soon as I was ordered

to do so. And the order came as we drove down the main street in Qom: a smelly, unpaved pathway, full of vendors and little yellow huts. Among them was an almost pompous building that could have been a hotel. We stopped in front and I got out to cover the provocative T-shirt and blue jeans, but as soon as the black shroud enveloped me I was frightened. It was nothing like I had thought: I had expected it would be a kind of scarf to throw over your shoulders and hold around your face. It was more like a sheet, very long, very heavy, a trap. I had no way of knowing where it began or ended, which was the front and which was the back.

»Put it on, quickly!«

»How do I put it on, where do I put it?«

»You put it over you!«

»I don't know how!«

I tried throwing it over my head like a towel, but it slid off immediately, bringing my scarf with it, and now it was slithering all over the place like an eel; if I grabbed the right side it slid to the left, if I grabbed the left side it slid to the right. Meanwhile, my hair was bare in the sun, to the shock of people passing by, and I was cursing fearfully.

»Goddamn your Imam! A curse on the Quran and whoever reads it!«

»Oh please, be quiet!«

Finally, he figured out where the front and the back were. He helped me get it on by pressing an edge against my forehead and letting the sides drop alongside my face. I determined that if I held the two sides together at my chin and pressed the mass of fabric against my chest, I could hold it on for a few minutes.

»Can you do it?«

»Maybe.«

»Can we go?«

»Let's go.«

I followed him, tripping constantly: the horrible trap got caught up between my feet and I risked a pratfall with every step. I went into the hotel with him and someone immediately pushed me out again, yelling about who knows what.

»What is he saying? What does he want?«

»He says that women are not admitted.«

»What does that mean, women are not admitted?«

»It means they're not admitted. Don't worry, we'll find one where they are.«

We got back in the car and kept driving until we found another hotel. This time Salami went in alone, saying that it would be easier without me there. After a while he reappeared, waving a key triumphantly.

»I did it! And I paid in advance! Go!«

I recommenced wrestling with the chador, and ended up looking like a trauma victim wrapped in a blanket after an accident. I took the key, and walked past the doorman with a decisive air. He said nothing, but I hadn't gone ten feet when a mullah blocked my path.

»No ladies.«

»But I have a key, I paid!«

»No ladies. Out!«

I went back to Salami, feeling like the Virgin Mary looking for a place to give birth. I would have been perfectly happy with a stall full of cows and donkeys.

»If we could find a public toilet ... I would change there. There has to be some place in Qom where women are allowed to use the toilet.«

»We'll try.«

The third hotel was better than the other two. I was allowed to walk about twenty feet through the lobby, and Salami and I were even able to argue with an employee who spoke English. We told him who I was, what I needed, why I was in Qom. We offered to pay the price of a small apartment for access to a bathroom, we dangled the promise of a considerable tip in front of him, we even shared our concern about what a spectacle the revolution was making of itself in front of a foreigner, who only wanted to use the bathroom. The employee was as nice as he was unmoved. He had recognized me, he said, my photograph was as famous as my interview with the Shah. He hoped that I believed him when he said that, if he had had a house in Qom, he would have opened it to me. But unfortunately he lived in the hotel, where the regulations were iron-clad, and he would

have risked jail by breaking them. Women were not admitted, and this was true for the bathrooms as well. Why didn't we go talk to the mayor? Women's access to public bathrooms was an old debate that he hadn't yet been able to resolve, and my noteworthy case would surely force him to reexamine this injustice and lack of humanity. I turned my back on him, seething.

It was almost two in the afternoon, the appointment was approaching with disturbing speed, and Salami seemed very depressed, unable to help me out of this mess. But, when we got back in the car, his face lit up.

»He gave me an idea! Let's go to the town hall, to the mayor!«

»Why on earth would we go see the mayor? Why the hell should I give a damn about the toilet debate in Qom? We're going to be late!«

The mayor was not in his office, but there was a kind official there who quickly understood the situation. He could offer us the throne room; since the Shah had fled no one used it anymore. Would the throne room work? It would. So, off we went. Gripping the purse with the sacred garment, we let ourselves be led to a large room, furnished only with a giant gold seat. We went in happily, locked ourselves in, I threw the sacred garment on the throne, and Salami turned around so as not to see me undress.

What happened next will remain in my memory like a sped-up nightmare. It all happened so quickly, and so unexpectedly. The images overlap in my memory, and the sounds, the sensations. Me taking off my blue jeans, thinking that it's already twenty past two, and that there's no time to waste. Me taking off my T-shirt and feeling a vague sense of oncoming disaster that I try to ignore, not wanting to distract myself. The door creaking open, a gray turban peeking in, and the door shutting again with a slam. Salami letting out an incredibly pained groan. The kind of groan wounded animals make, the groan of a creature who has lost all hope.

»Oh nooooo!«

»Who was it?«

»A mullah. And he saw you.«

»It is bad?«

»It's very bad. I have to talk to him. You keep getting dressed.«

He left without looking at me, and I kept dressing with frenetic speed. Black pants. Black shirt. Black scarf. Black shawl. Chador. When I was ready, Salami came back in, deathly pale. Behind him was a brute with cruel eyes, the mullah who had caught me with my jeans around my ankles.

»He wants to see your papers, he wants to know if we are married.«

»Tell him we are!«

»I told him, but he didn't believe me.«

Cursing, I handed over my passport. The brute thumbed through the pages, not seeming to understand much, and then handed it back to me, clucking out a long speech in his incomprehensible language.

»What is he clucking, what does he want?«

»He says that this passport doesn't prove that we're married because you don't have my name. He says that two people of the opposite sex cannot be in the same room if they are unmarried, and a woman certainly cannot undress only a few steps from a man who is not her husband. He says that we can't leave here until he has decided what to do with us.«

»We can't leave? It's two thirty-five, goddamnit! Tell him that we have an appointment with Khomeini at three o'clock!«

»I already told him. I made it worse. He replied that the Imam does not receive impure people.«

»Impure people! I'm leaving. You're leaving. And you're bringing me to Khomeini, do you understand?«

»It's impossible. They would stop us. He saw that I'm married on my papers and, in theory, I could be accused of adultery and punished accordingly.«

»It's not true! You need a thread to prove adultery! Bazargan himself told me! Tell him!«

»It wouldn't do any good. But, maybe, there's a way out of this.«

»A way out? How?«

»An immediate, temporary marriage. You are unmarried and I, as a Muslim, can have as many as four wives.«

I looked at my watch. It was almost two-forty, and it would take at least fifteen minutes to get to Khomeini's residence. And that was

without the checkpoints. Salami had told me when he was looking for the mayor.

»How long would it take to do this immediate, temporary marriage?«

»A minute. All we have to do is sign in front of two witnesses.«

»Well, let's get married, for Christ's sake! Let's go!«

They spoke softly among themselves, walked away a little bit, gesturing excitedly, and then came back, bearing a registry in Farsi and a terrified little man. All four of us signed, standing there, my name clearly written alongside those mysterious hieroglyphs, and we paid the cost of the disturbance. Finally, I gathered up my T-shirt and jeans, I adjusted the chador, which kept sliding off my silk shawl, and there I was: married and wrapped up like a black mummy, heading toward he who does not receive impure people. It was a sunny afternoon and the weight of the rags I was carrying was as oppressive as the thought of my clear signature in that registry. I was sweating, and not even thinking about the questions that I was about to ask the tyrant: what I had just done was much more troubling. What did »temporary marriage« mean, exactly? Was it a contract only valid for a week, a month, a year? How much value would it have under Iranian law? And under Italian law? Was there any kind of agreement between the two countries regarding conjugal matters? When I got back to Tehran I would have to call my embassy and clear this up. It had seemed like a joke back in the town hall, as I impatiently looked at my watch, but maybe it wasn't. And if it wasn't, how was I going to get out of it? I wasn't. I found myself tied for who knows how long to this kid with Assyrian-Babylonian whiskers, who I didn't even like. Me, a woman who trembles at the thought of marriage. I was his wife. Mrs. Salami. And his first wife, the real Mrs. Salami, how would she take it? Badly, I was sure. I knew that she was Spanish, and everyone knows Spanish women are jealous. They shoot, they stab. Oh God. I was going to end up stabbed by a jealous Spanish wife, all because I wanted to interview Khomeini. Great. Then my readers would say: How did Fallaci die? Was she hit with machine-gun spray in Vietnam, by a stray bullet in Bangladesh, by a bomb in Beirut? No, she was stabbed to death by a jealous Spanish wife in Iran.

Unless she was in on it: this whole mess could be part of a diabolical plan. Let's assume that Salami organized all of it, step by step, with her. Let's assume that the story about the missing chador was a lie, as well as the story of the journalists intent on following me, the necessity of leaving in blue jeans. Could he really not have known, that idiot, that women can't enter hotels in Qom, that they can't even go to the bathroom? Could he really not have guessed that town halls everywhere are dangerous places, that people are married in town halls, that they should always be avoided? Of course he knew, and knowing this he crafted a set-up worthy of Agatha Christie. As a matter of fact, he had stayed in the throne room with me while I undressed. Why had he stayed, even if he turned around to face the wall? He had seemed so modest in the car; why had he suddenly lost his modesty? No, he wanted to be seen by the mullah, the mullah was part of it too. But why would he want to marry me? No sensible man would want to do a thing like that, marry me. Maybe it was really just an accident, a trick of destiny, a trick of the chador. Maybe in that moment the poor thing was just as anxious as I was, maybe he was thinking about how to get an annulment. What did Khomeini have to say about annulment? »Marriage can be annulled only if the man discovers, after the ceremony, that the woman has one of the following defects: madness, leprosy, blindness, skin disease, evident lameness, or sexual defects. It may also be annulled if, after the ceremony, the woman discovers that the man is crazy or missing a genital organ.« Well, he would never admit to being crazy or missing a genital organ, and I didn't have leprosy or sexual defects or skin disease. I wasn't even blind. But I could admit to being a little crazy and a little lame. I had been hit in the leg by a bullet in Mexico, and when it rains I limp. Anyway, I had to re-read the Blue Book, which had a relatively comprehensive chapter on the subject and ...

»We're entering the Imam's neighborhood,« said Salami. As he parked the car, I immediately forgot about the mess I was in. In front of me there was something more terrifying than an unwanted temporary marriage. There was a mass of screaming fanatics that made the mob of bodies at the city gates seem like a small gathering. They pushed each other, shouting, they trampled each other, they

suffocated each other. The women worst of all: there were more of them than men, and they were much more ferocious. One fainted in her delirium, and as soon as she lost consciousness they passed her over the heads of the crowd like an object that had outlived its use. They threw her on a truck where the Pasdaran sprayed her with police hoses.

»Who are all these screaming people?«

»They're pilgrims from the caravans. And they're not screaming, they're praying.«

»Are they always here?«

»Always. Even at night. They sit all night on the ground, waiting.«

»Waiting for what?«

»Waiting for the Imam to go up on the roof and bless them.«

»And we have to cross through this nightmare?«

»Yes, come on.«

We threw ourselves into the crowd, and it was awful. The multitude pushed us back, beat us, kept us from reaching the first checkpoint, the one that controlled the principle access road. By the time we reached it, I had lost my chador twice, my shoes three times, my purse and recorder once, and when we got there the Pasdaran didn't want to let us through. Salami protested vainly that the Imam was waiting for us, and begged them to get confirmation on their walkie-talkies. It took a long time for confirmation to come, but finally we were walking toward the second checkpoint, still being beaten and kicked and pushed. The Pasdaran at the second checkpoint were even more hostile than the first group, and we had to go through the same thing again in order to reach the third and final gate, where we had to be searched. Their embarrassment at having to pat down a woman was extreme, since according to the Quran, a woman may not be touched. Great confusion about what to do ensued, and in the end they decided to take my word for it. The third gate opened onto a lane with a squawking chicken and two miserable one-story buildings, covered in lime: Khomeini's house on the right, his office on the left. Here, guards were swarming everywhere, from the roof to the terrace, side by side, like a Pancho Villa movie. They were armed with rifles, revolvers, machine guns, and they

followed you with their fingers on the trigger, not losing their focus for a moment. A sudden gesture, a false move, and they would have unloaded tons of lead into you. Bathed in sweat and aching from the blows I had received, the chador reduced to a dusty scrap, I watched them in amazement: was there really such a risk that the much-loved Imam would be assassinated?

»Enemies of the revolution are everywhere,« intoned Salami, kicking at the chicken who had been pecking around his feet. He pushed me toward the building on the right to knock at a barred door. There was the sound of a heavy chain being lifted, and the door swung open. We found ourselves in a yard swarming with turbans and tunics, then in a large room where other mullahs crouching on mats drank tea in a church-like silence. Among the mullahs was a little man with glasses in civilian dress. His wrinkled jacket was open over a shirt, but no tie, and with his arms around his knees, curled in on himself, he seemed like a modest nun trying to protect herself from a mob of seducers. I had no idea who he was, or why he was there.

»It's Banisadr. He came to take you to the Imam and to act as interpreter,« whispered Salami. »Thank him. He speaks French.«

Being careful not to disturb the church-like silence, I drew near my benefactor, who raised his long, melancholy-filled dace, unexpectedly livened up by a pair of Chariot whiskers. I introduced myself and extended my hand.

»Bonjour ...« he answered, in a voice that seemed like a lament, pretending not to see my hand.

I sat down next to him and expressed my gratitude for the appointment and his unexpected presence in Qom.

»C'est rien, it's nothing,« he said, in the same sad voice.

I explained how honored I was that he would be acting as my interpreter.

»Ça va, that's alright,« he said in the same way.

I tried to start a longer conversation, describing the difficulties that we had had getting through the checkpoints and the crowd. Had he experienced the same thing?

»L'hélicoptère!« he whined, almost resentful of the idea that I could imagine him in such an indecorous situation: didn't I know that

important people travelled by helicopter? He folded in on himself again, as though exhaling those few words had required superhuman effort. Silence fell again, until a great shuffling was heard, and a young, athletic man, his priest's tunic covering a thick neck and rugby player's shoulders, came trundling up on a pair of sandals that were as dirty as his feet.

»That's Ahmed, son of the Imam,« murmured Salami with the deference of a vassal presenting himself at court, nearly fainting from the honor.

»Good afternoon. Now Imam receive you three. One hour, not more,« said Ahmed in terrible English. We crossed back through the yard and the front door and went back into the lane with the chicken. With the chicken on our heels we entered the building on the left, and were then abandoned in a dirty hallway that, however, did have a bench. Here we waited, alone, for an interminable amount of time: I got more and more tired, Salami got more and more excited, and Banisadr got more and more closed off into his own silence. Finally Ahmed reappeared, he made us take off our shoes, and ushered us into an ugly little room with no furnishings, full of bearded men. In the ugly little room, seated with his legs crossed on a blue and white carpet, immobile as a statue and covered in a brown wool tunic, was the head of Iran, the great leader of Islam: His Most Sainted and Most Reverend Excellence Ruhollah Khomeini.

He was a very old man. He seemed so remote behind his pride, so vulnerable and yet so solemn, that you began to doubt that he was only eighty years old—a figure that was, at any rate, only a guess, since he himself didn't know the date of his birth. He was also the most handsome old man I had ever met. An intense face, sculpted, with deep, grooved wrinkles crossing his face, a high forehead and a prominent nose, lips that were both sensuous and sulky, the mouth of man who has suffered greatly to repress the temptations of the flesh—or perhaps never repressed them at all. A white beard, compact, almost like a Michelangelo painting; severe, marble-like eyebrows that made you anxiously look for the eyes beneath them. I couldn't see his

eyes, actually, because he kept his eyelids half-closed, his gaze fixed stubbornly on the carpet, as though he were trying to let me know that I didn't deserve his attention. Or that giving me his attention somehow offended his pride, his dignity. He was oozing dignity, that much is certain. You couldn't imagine him in his underwear, it was impossible to attribute any of the characteristic ridiculousness of dictators to him. Instead of ridiculousness, you noticed a mysterious sadness, a mysterious discontent that consumed him like a sickness. As you noticed this, you were shocked to realize the feelings that observing him inspired: an undeniable respect, an unexplainable tenderness, a scandalous abstraction that made you feel real shame. Was he really the author of the Blue Book? Was he really the man who had thrown everyone into catastrophe, the man who had committed so many infamies, so many disgraces? Yes, and I prayed that I would not forget this. That I would not let myself be distracted by his enigmatic charisma, or seduced by his old patriarch's charm. And while Banisadr sat by his side, and Salami settled in at a respectful distance, I faced my enemy: I was ready for attack, ignorant of the cowardice that was about to upset the first part of my project.

»Imam Khomeini, the entire country is in your hands. Every decision is yours, your wishes are commands. And many people say that there is no freedom in Iran, that the revolution brought no freedom, and that, on the contrary, it killed freedom.«

He remained with his eyelids half-closed, and with a voice so thin that it seemed like the echo of a whisper, he offered up a response that Banisadr translated with a strange kind of embarrassment.

»We know your work and your name. We know that you have travelled in many countries, that you have seen war and interrogated strong men. We therefore thank you for the honor you bestow upon us; we thank you for condolences over the loss of Ayatollah Taleghani.«

Was he making fun of me, or had Banisadr not translated my question? I turned, confused, to Salami. He shook his head slightly, giving me to understand that my question had not been translated.

»You translate it!«

And he did, though it made all the color drain from his face.

But those eyelids stayed half-closed, his invisible pupils remained locked on the carpet, and not even a shadow of emotion passed over that thin voice that carefully meted out each word.

»Iran is not in my hands. Iran is in the hands of the people. For it was the people who entrusted their country to the care of one who wants the best for it. You saw that, after the death of Ayatollah Taleghani, people poured onto the streets in the millions, without being threatened. And this means that there is freedom in Iran, that the people are following men of God. And this is a symbol of liberty.«

Well, he knew how to defend himself. He had even neutralized any possible provocations about the nature of Taleghani's death by bringing it up first, so that I couldn't use it to shake him up. I shot a glance at Banisadr, warning him not to play any more tricks, and I continued.

»No, Imam Khomeini. Perhaps I didn't explain myself well. Please forgive my insistence: I wanted to say that many people, in and outside of Iran, think you are a dictator. Or better, the new dictator, the new tyrant, the new Shah of Persia.«

But from the response I got from Banisadr, it was once again clear that he had invented an innocuous question. It was clear that this was the reason he had come to Qom, the reason he had elected himself translator. To manipulate the interview and to manage any risk.

»Yes, the defeat of the tyrant has brought us into an epoch rich with values and morality. We are happy about this and we feel honored to be able to interpret these values and this morality. We very much appreciate your second question, and ...«

»Stop!« I silenced Banisadr and I turned again to Salami, who confirmed the betrayal with a slight nod. And so I knelt in front of Khomeini, trying to make him understand me in some other language than Farsi.

»No, Imam, no! Mr. Banisadr is not translating my questions. Il ne me traduit pas. Non mi traduce. Understand, comprenez? I say that today you are the dictator, the tyrant, the Shah. Aujourd'hui c'est vous le dictateur, le tryan, le nouvel shah. Vous. Comprenez? Lei è il dittatore, il tiranno, lo scia. Ha capito?«

He understood, or at least intuited. In fact, his eyelids rose suddenly, and with a lightning strike as sharp as a knife blade I finally saw his eyes: extremely intelligent, hard, terrifying. But it was only a moment, and it passed: his eyes returned their focus to the carpet. Never breaking his gaze, he whispered something to Banisadr that must have been petrifying, for that little melancholic face turned gray, his moustache seemed to tremble in panic, and rivulets of sweat began to stream from his temples, his cheeks, and his neck. Then Khomeini's hand—as much like a Michelangelo as that beard-rose disdainfully to indicate that Banisadr had been relieved of his duties, and an imperious index finger ordered Salami to come to his side. Shaking with emotion, Salami sat at his right.

»Don't be afraid, translate what I said. And ask him if it gives him pain or leaves him indifferent,« I encouraged him. Salam courageously began to translate; Khomeini remained impassive.

»It brings me some pain, yes, because calling me a dictator is unjust and inhumane. However, I do not care at all, because I know how much spite is part of the human character, and how much of it comes from my enemies. The path that we are taking is a path that runs counter to the interests of superpowers, and it is to be expected that the servants of foreigners will attempt to sting me with their poison and throw all manner of slander against me. No, I do not delude myself that countries used to pillaging and devouring us will remain quiet and calm. Oh, the Shah's mercenaries say many things: even that Khomeini has ordered women's breasts cut off. Tell me, does it seem likely to you that Khomeini has committed a monstrosity of that nature, that he cut off women's breasts?«

»No, it does not, Imam. And I have not accused you of cutting off women's breasts. But you are a frightening man, even if you don't mutilate women. Your regime lives on fear. They are afraid and make everyone afraid. Even this crowd calling your name is frightening. Do you hear it?«

From the window behind his shoulders, the noise of the roiling crowd below, agitating between the first and second blockades. »Zنده bad, Imam! Payandeh bad!« It was so loud it often drowned out our voices.

»Of course I hear it. I even hear it at night.«

»And what do you feel when you hear them yelling like that, even at night? How does it feel to know that they would get themselves killed just to see you for an instant?«

»I enjoy it. It's impossible not to. Yes, I enjoy it when I hear them and when I see them. Because their cries are the same cries that drove out the usurper, because they are the ones who drove him out, and because it is good that they continue to boil in this manner. Until our internal and external enemies have been subdued, until the people have slaked their thirst, they must boil. They must be alert and ready to march if necessary. And of course, what animates them is love.«

»Love or fascism, Imam? It seems like fanaticism to me, the most dangerous kind: the fascist kind. Could anyone deny that there is a real threat of fascism in Iran today? Perhaps that fascism has already been established?«

»No, fascism has nothing to do with it. Fanaticism has nothing to do with it. I repeat that they are yelling because they love me. And they love me because they can feel that I want what's best for them, that I act in their interests, to apply the commandments of Islam. Islam is justice, and in Islam dictatorship is the gravest of sins, thus fascism and Islamism are two irreconcilable contradictions.«

»Perhaps we're not clear on the meaning of the word fascism, Imam. I am talking about fascism as a popular phenomenon, for example, the fascism that Italy experienced under the rule of Mussolini. Crowds would applaud Mussolini the way they are applauding you now. They obeyed him just as they obey you now.«

»No, that type of fascism is common in the Western world, but not among Muslim peoples. Our masses are Muslim masses, educated by clerics, by men who preach spirituality and goodness. Therefore, this kind of fascism would only be possible if the Shah returned, or if communism arrived. Shouting my name does not make them fascist, it means that they love freedom.«

Now that my questions were reaching him, the attack was easy. But he was defending himself more easily with each new query, with the bravura of a champion who is able to sidestep every unforeseen

or unfair blow, the resistance of a boxer who never bends, not even after being punched in the gut. He did this using two rare techniques: imperturbability and sincerity. After having shaken me with that lightning gaze he had never raised his eyes again, never breaking his focus on the carpet, never moving a finger or a muscle, never changing the tone of his thin voice, answering every accusation and insolence. I was unable to break his composure. I was unable because, and here's the point: he truly believed in what he was saying. Since he believed it, he had no need to fall back on the evasions or lies that men in power always use to defend themselves. As if this wasn't enough, he liked sparring with this foreigner who had travelled many lands and met many people, but who was now at his feet, drowning in pounds of rags that were foreign to her. My assault was bringing him secret joy. Salami felt no such joy. As soon as I asked something he would throw a strangled look my way and translate with his heart in his throat. As far as poor Banisadr was concerned, he had remained paralyzed in the same position he had been in at the moment of his dismissal; he was still sweating.

»Let's talk about freedom then, Imam Khomeini. In one of your first speeches you said that the new government would guarantee freedom of thought and expression. This promise has not been kept, and if someone goes against your precepts you damn them and punish them. For example, you call the communists Children of Satan, the Kurdish minority Evil on Earth ...«

»First you make assertions and then you expect me to explain them to you. You would even expect me to acknowledge the conspiracies of those who want to corrupt the country. Freedom of thought and expression does not mean freedom to conspire and corrupt. For more than five months I have tolerated those who think differently from us, and they have been free to do as they please, within what I allow. With Mr. Banisadr here I have even invited the communists to come and talk with us. And in response they burned grain harvests, they set ballot boxes on fire, they reacted with weapons and guns, they exhumed the Kurdish issue. So, when we realized that they were taking advantage of our tolerance in order to sabotage us, when we discovered that they missed the Shah, that they were inspired by the

ex-regime and the foreign powers who desire our destruction, yes, we made them be quiet.«

»Imam Khomeini, how can you say they missed the Shah when they fought against him, when they were persecuted and arrested and tortured by him, when they helped bring about his downfall? Do the living and the dead on the left count for nothing?«

Banisadr began to move, finally coming out of his catatonic state. He removed his jacket to reveal a shirt so drenched with sweat that it could have just been dunked in a bucket of water. Khomeini, on the other hand, didn't bat an eye.

»They count for nothing because they have contributed nothing, they served the revolution in no way. They did not fight or suffer, if anything they fought for their ideals and their ideals alone, their aims and their aims alone, their interests and their interests alone. They cared nothing for our victory, they had no relationship with the Islamic movement, they did not influence it in any way. On the contrary, they threw a wrench into the works. They were just as against us during the Shah's regime as they are now, they hated us more than they hated the Shah. It's no accident that the current conspiracy comes from them. From my perspective, they are not even a real left, but an artificial left, born and nursed by the Americans to slander us and to destroy us.«

»In other words, when you speak about the people, you are only referring to those who are faithful to you. In your opinion, these people killed themselves for Islam, and not for freedom?«

»For Islam. The people fought for Islam. And Islam means everything, even the things that, in your world, are called freedom and democracy. Yes, Islam contains everything, Islam envelops everything, Islam is everything.«

»I don't understand. Please help me to understand. What do you mean by freedom?«

»Freedom ... it's not easy to define this concept. Let's say that freedom is being able to choose your own ideas and to think as you choose, without being forced to think another way ... and to live where you want ... and to do the job that you want ...«

Well, he was beginning to falter; with a little effort it might be possible to hit him in the jaw.

»To live where you want and to do the job that you want, and nothing else. To think what you want but not to express or materialize what you think. Now I understand better, Imam. And what do you mean by democracy? Because, if I'm not mistaken, when you called the referendum for the Republic, you prohibited the expression >Democratic Islamic Republic.< You erased the adjective >democratic,< you reduced the expression to >Islamic Republic< and you said: >Not one word more, not one word less.<<

He recovered immediately.

»To begin with, the word Islam needs no adjectives. As I have just explained, Islam is everything: it means everything. For us, it's sad to put another word next to the word 'Islam,« which is complete and perfect. If we want Islam, why do we need to add that we want democracy? It would be like saying that we want Islam but we need to believe in God. Also, this democracy that's so dear and so precious to you has no precise meaning. Aristotle's democracy was one thing, the Soviets' was another, the capitalists' yet another. As a result, we couldn't let ourselves insert such an equivocal concept into our constitution. Then, when I say democracy, I mean what Ali meant. When Ali became the successor of the Prophet and the head of the Islamic state, when his reign stretched from Saudi Arabia to Egypt, and included a large part of Asia and also Europe, a confederation with every kind of power, he had a disagreement with a Jew. And the Jew had him called before a judge. And Ali accepted the judge's call, and arrived in the judge's chambers. When the judge saw him enter he stood up, and Ali angrily said: >Why do you stand when I enter, but when the Jew enters you remain seated? Both parties should be treated equally before a judge? Then he submitted to the sentence, which was against him. I'll ask you, since you've travelled to many countries and met many people: can you give me a better example of democracy?«

»Yes. One that allows something more than living where you want, doing the job you want, and thinking what you want without expressing it. And even Iranians are saying this, because they, like us foreigners, do not understand where the Islamic Republic is headed.«

»If some Iranians don't understand, so much the worse for them. It means that they haven't understood Islam. If you foreigners don't understand, it doesn't matter. Anyway, it has nothing to do with you. You have nothing to do with our choices.«

Thank goodness, the climate was beginning to heat up a bit. So it wasn't impossible to make him lose his temper. All I had to do was keep his boxer's stamina in mind. I upped the ante.

»Perhaps it has nothing to do with us, Imam, but the despotism that the clerics are exercising today certainly has something to do with the Iranian people. And, since we are here to talk about them, will you please explain the idea that the head of a country must be the supreme religious leader, in other words, you? Can you explain why political decisions can only be taken but those who know the Quran well, in other words, priests?«

»The Fifth Principle, ratified by the Assembly of Experts during the charting of the Constitution establishes that what you have said is not in contrast with the idea of democracy. Since the people love the clerics, trust the clerics, and want to be guided by the clerics, it is correct that the supreme religious authority oversee the work of the Prime Minister and the future President of the Republic. If I myself did not exert this authority, they might make mistakes or go against the law, against the Quran. Myself or a representative group of clerics, for example, five wise men capable of administering justice according to Islam.«

»Oh yes? Then let's talk about the kind of justice your clerics administer, Imam. Let's begin with the five hundred deaths by firing squad that have been carried out over these last few months in Iran. Tell me if you approve of the summary way these trials are held, with no lawyers and with no appeal.«

Banisadr choked out a whimper that would have made a stone feel pity. Salami let out a sigh that seemed to carry all the breath out of him. Ahmed looked at his watch and the guards in the room began to mutter in a threatening way. But Khomeini was implacable.

»Evidently you Westerners are unaware of who these people were, the people who were shot. Or perhaps you feign ignorance. They were people who had participated in massacres, or people who had

ordered massacres. People who had burned houses, tortured prisoners, branding their arms and legs, frying them alive on iron grilles. Should we have pardoned them, perhaps? Let them go? And we did allow them to respond to the accusations against them, and to defend themselves, they could reply in any way they liked. As soon as we had ascertained their guilt, however, did we really need lawyers and appeals? You may write whatever you like, after all: you are the one holding the pen. Ask whatever questions you like, but know that my people do not need to ask these same questions of themselves. I'll add that, if we had not ordered those executions, vigilantes would have emerged and street justice would have broken out unchecked. And the dead, instead of five hundred, would have been in the thousands.«

»And they will be, if you keep going at this pace, Imam. Regardless, I am not referring to Savak's torturers and assassins. I was referring to the victims who had nothing do with the crimes of the ex-regime. In other words, the people who are still being punished today for adultery or prostitution or homosexuality. In your opinion, is it justice to shoot a prostitute or a woman who cheats on her husband, or a man who loves another man?«

»If one finger falls to gangrene, what must be done? Let the rest of the hand and then the whole body fall to gangrene as well, or cut off the finger? Things that bring a people to corruption must be torn out like weeds in a field of grain. I know, there are societies that allow women to enjoy the company of men who are not their husbands, and men to enjoy the company of other men. But the society that we want to build does not permit these things. Through Islam, we want to bring about a purifying politics. And until we are able to achieve this aim, we must punish those who perpetrate evil by corrupting our young people. Whether you Westerners like it or not, we cannot allow evil people to spread their evil ways. And then, don't you Westerners' do the same thing? When a thief steals, don't you put him in prison? In many countries, are assassins not brought to justice and executed? Don't you do it because, if they were to remain free and alive, they would infect others and widen the stain of their wickedness? Yes, the wicked must be eliminated, pulled up like weeds.«

He had said this with his usual imperturbability. While he spoke, a fly circled downwards and came to rest on his left hand, scratching its head and indulging in all sorts of somersaults and dances. But he made not so much as a gesture to free himself of the creature, he even let it crawl up to his beard, where it was now playing contentedly among his white whiskers. It was driving me crazy, because it was distracting me and becoming a sort of symbol of my impotence. Was it possible that he wouldn't falter even a little, lose his composure for only a moment? The only sign of progress was in his breathing, which, from answer to answer, became increasingly feeble, exposing the weakness of an old man who needs a nap every now and then. As a result, besides being irritated, I was also anxious that he would fall asleep under his turban. I had to stop it.

»Imam Khomeini, how dare you place a citizen exercising his sexual freedom on the same level as those Savak monsters? Take the case of the young man who was executed for pederasty yesterday ...«

»Corruption, corruption. We must eliminate corruption.«

»Take the case of the pregnant eighteen-year-old who was executed for adultery a few weeks ago.«

»Lies, lies. Lies like the women with their breasts cut off. In Islam these things do not happen, we do not shoot pregnant women.«

»They are not lies, Imam. All the Iranian newspapers wrote about the pregnant girl who was killed for adultery. There was a debate on television over the fact that her lover was only punished with one hundred lashes.«

»If they only punished him with one hundred lashes, then he only deserved the lashes. If they sentenced her to death, then she deserved death. I don't know anything about it. Ask the courts that condemned her. And let's not talk about this anymore, sexual freedom and all these things. They are not important. Huh! Sexual freedom. What does it even mean? This is making me tired. Enough!«

Here, it was happening. He was falling asleep.

»Alright, let's talk about the Kurds who are being killed because they want autonomy, Imam. Let's talk about ...«

»Those Kurds are not the Kurdish people. They are subversives who are acting against the people; yesterday they killed thirteen

soldiers. When they are captured and executed I feel great pleasure. Enough. I don't want to talk about this either, enough. I'm tired. I want to rest.«

Ahmed intervened, with the manner of an heir to throne attending to the king's every need.

»The Imam said enough. The Imam is tired and wants to rest. The Imam does not want to talk about these things.«

»Let's talk about the Shah, then.«

»No, you must say goodbye to him and let him rest. The hour is up. You must say goodbye to him and go away.«

But the word »Shah« had reached his divine ears. And it had accomplished what even the fly on his beard had been unable to with its dancing and somersaulting. Unexpectedly, the motionless turban moved, and the motionless eyes forgot the carpet and turned to Salami.

»Did she say Shah?«

»Yes, Holy Reverend Excellence.«

»What does she want to know about the Shah?«

»He asked what you want to know about the Shah,« Salami whispered with a worried expression.

»Only this, Imam: someone ordered the Shah to be killed abroad, and made it clear that the killer would be considered a hero. That if he were to die carrying out the killing, that he would go to Heaven. Was it you?«

»No! I don't want him to be killed abroad. I want him to be captured and brought back to Iran, and tried publicly for the fifty years of crimes he committed against the people, including the crimes of theft and betrayal. Theft of capital. If he dies abroad, that money is lost. If we try him here, we can get it back. No, I want him here. Here! I want him so much that I pray for his health, just as Ayatollah Modarres prayed for the health of that other Pahlavi, the father of the Pahlavi who fled as well, and who took a lot of money with him, too. I know that he is sick. I'm sorry about it because he could die of an illness. Woe unto us if he dies of an illness while he is still abroad.«

»And if he gave you the money, would you stop praying for his health?«

»If he gave us back the money, that part of the score would be settled. But the betrayal that he brought against Islam and against his country would remain. The Black Friday massacre would remain, the massacre of sixteen years ago. He cannot be forgiven for the deaths that he has left in his wake. Only if the dead came back to life would I content myself with getting back the money that he and his family have stolen.«

»Do you mean to say that the order to capture him and bring him back to Iran also pertains to his family?«

»Those who commit crimes are guilty. If his family has committed no crimes, I don't see why they should have to be condemned. Belonging to the Shah's family is not a crime. For example, I don't think that his son Reza has stained himself with crimes against the people, and so I have nothing against him. He may return to Persia when he likes and live as a normal citizen. Would that he would return.«

»I'll bet he won't.«

»If he doesn't want to, then he won't.«

»And Farah Diba?«

»The courts will decide her case.«

»And Ashraf?«

»Ashraf is the Shah's ugly twin, as much a thief and a traitor as he is. For the crimes that she committed, she will be tried and committed just like he will. Yes, I also want the ugly twin.«

»And former Prime Minister Bakhtiar? Bakhtiar says that he already has a government ready to replace Bazargan's. And he adds that he will soon return.«

»Would that he would return! Holding hands with the Shah, I hope. Then they can go to court together. If Bahktiar will be executed or not, I don't yet know. But I know he must be tried, and I will admit that I would dearly like to see him and the Shah brought back together, hand in hand. I'm waiting for it.«

»Death to Bahktiar as well, then. Death to Ashraf the ugly twin, death to Farah Diba, death to everybody. Imam Khomeini, will you allow me a question that goes beyond the moral scope of the revolution? Many people say that revolutions do not forgive, that they do

not know pity. You, as man, and indeed, as a priest, have you ever forgiven anyone? Have you ever felt pity or understanding for an enemy?»

»What? What?»

»I asked if you know how to forgive, to understand. And, since we're on the subject, I'll ask you this as well: have you ever cried?»

»I cry, I laugh, I suffer. I am a human being. Do you think I'm not? As far as forgiveness is concerned, I've forgiven most of the people who have hurt us. And as for pity, I granted amnesty to the police officers who had not tortured, to the gendarmes who had not committed serious abuses, to the Kurds who had promised to stop attacking us. But for the people we talked about earlier, there is no forgiveness, there is no pity, there is no understanding. Enough now. I'm tired. Enough.»

He seemed irritated, and determined to dismiss me. I tried to keep his attention.

»Please, Imam. I still have many things to ask you. About this chador, for example, that you impose on women, that was imposed on me so that I could come to Qom. Why do you force women to hide under a garment so uncomfortable and absurd, under a sheet that makes it impossible to move, even to blow their noses? I recently discovered that they must even wear the chador swimming. How on earth could anyone swim in a chador?»

Then those terrible eyes that had ignored me, as though I were an object undeserving of any curiosity, turned on me. And they unleashed a gaze that was much angrier than the one that had shocked me at the beginning of the interview. His voice, which up until then had been thin, nearly a whisper, became fuller, more strident.

»This is none of your business. Our customs have nothing to do with you Westerners. If you do not like Islamic dress, you are not obliged to follow it. The chador is only for young and respectable women.»

»Excuse me?»

I thought I had misunderstood. But no, I had understood perfectly.

»I said: if you don't like Islamic dress, you are not obliged to follow it. The chador is only for young and respectable women.»

Then he laughed. A clucking sound, an old man's laugh. And Ahmed laughed. Banisadr laughed. One by one, all the bearded guards laughed; starting up a bit, and then relaxing, contented. It was worse than turning myself over to Khalkhali. All of the torments and the humiliations and the insults that had wounded me over the past few days came rushing back, swirling together into a hard knot in the pit of my stomach: the beer denied me, the drama of the hairdresser, the via Crucis of the Blessed Virgin and Joseph looking for a hotel, a stall to give birth in, right up until the bastardry of the mullah who forced me to sign myself into a temporary marriage. And now, it all began to choke me with a deaf rage; I was swollen with disdain.

»Thank you, Mr. Khomeini. You're so polite, a real gentleman. I'll do as you ask without further delay; I'll take this stupid medieval rag off immediately.« And, with a shrug, I let the chador drop to the floor in an obscene black puddle.

What happened next remains imprinted on my memory, like the shadow of a cat that lies curled up sleeping and suddenly springs forward to devour a mouse. He rose so quickly, so suddenly, that for a moment I thought I had just been struck with a gust of wind. Then, with a jump that was still very feline, he stepped over the chador and he disappeared.

Everyone was shocked by his disappearance, to say nothing of his twenty-year-old gymnast's agility, and everyone remained seated on the mat, interrogating each other with their eyes. Since the only sound now was the bedlam coming from outside the walls, my question exploded like a gunshot in the silence of the room.

»Did he have to go pee?«

I really thought he had. Sometimes elderly people are caught up by a pressing desire to pee, and when this happens no one stands on ceremony. They get up and run to the bathroom. Even without saying anything.

»No,« answered Ahmed. »He went away.«

»Away?! Away where?«

»To his room, to rest.«

»But the interview isn't finished.«

»Yes, it is finished. You have to leave.«

»Not in a million years. I am not leaving here until the interview is finished. Tell him.«

»I'll tell you again: he is resting in his room. He may already be asleep.«

»If he's sleeping he'll wake up eventually. I'll wait.«

»This is not possible. And besides, you've had two hours, which is double what we agreed on. Be polite, get up.« And he stretched out a hand to help me.

»Don't touch me!«

He withdrew his hand, and Salami came forward with a pleading look on his face.

»He's right. Two hours is a lot. He's never spoken for two hours in a row. Not with anyone. Not even with his ministers. Ask Banisadr.«

But Banisadr wasn't there. He had silently slipped from the room after my question about pee. Without saying goodbye, without commenting.

»I don't give a damn about Banisadr. I'm not getting up. Anyway, you can't touch me. Your religion forbids it. And if you touch me I'll tell everyone that we're married.«

»For the love of God! Do you want to ruin me?« whimpered Salami.

»I'm not ruining you. I'm waiting. Sooner or later he'll come back.«

»He won't come back. He's angry.«

»I'm angry too. He called me old and immoral. But I have to finish my job, and I will. Tell Ahmed.«

Sighing with resignation, Salami began to speak with Ahmed, who, at a certain point, threw his hands up and walked away. He reappeared after a few minutes.

»He said he's not coming. Not now, and not later. He said he has nothing to add, that he's tired and he wants to sleep.«

»Then you tell him that I'll sleep too. Right here.«

»Ma'am, you're putting me in a difficult situation. You're forcing me to call women to take you away.«

»Just try it and see what happens. I'll write that Khomeini threw

me out violently, that he had me beaten by his women. It'll be a scandal. International. Tell him.«

Shaken by my threat, Ahmed disappeared again. But he came back after just a few seconds, almost as though his father had kicked him back like a ball.

»I can't convince him. Now he's angry with me, too. Ma'am, please!«

»No.«

It wasn't so much a question of finishing the interview as it was avenging myself for that quip and that laughter. I wouldn't have let them get away with it for anything in the world, I wouldn't have even dreamed of leaving without settling the score. And then, let's be honest, I was having too much fun. That poor Ahmed who shuffled back and forth to wake him up, only to be bounced back like a ball. That lost look in everyone's eyes, even the guards, that sense of impotence that was growing every minute, while under the window the chorus of the faithful was mixing with the clucking of the chicken. And me, sitting there, deaf to Salami's protests, who was pleading with me, his voice choked with tears.

»Do you have any idea what you're doing?«

»Of course. I'm trying to figure out if she laid an egg.«

»Who???»

»The chicken.«

»What chicken?«

»The chicken out in the road.«

»There is no chicken in the road!«

»Yes there is. And I think she laid an egg. Listen.«

»You're crazy, you're crazy!«

In the end, Ahmed decided to ask his mother for help, a little woman with a sweet, discouraged face who looked in the door for just a moment, observed me with disapproval, and then vanished. Together, they woke up my enemy for the third time and everything worked out as I wanted.

»He said that you must get up and go away, and that tomorrow afternoon he'll give you another half hour.«

»Swear it.«

»I swear it.«

»Not you, him. He has to swear it. On the Quran.«

»On the Quran?«

»Of course. We Westerners swear on the Bible. He'll swear on the Quran.«

»Please, let me swear it.«

»On the Quran?«

»Bring me a Quran!«

They brought it to him. He swore; in English, in French, and in Farsi.

»Now will you leave?«

»Yes«

I happily gathered my chador and went out with Salami through the chicken's lane. I didn't know that the two hours I had spent with the diabolical old man had cleansed me of all my sins, vices, and wickedness, that they had transformed me into a kind of sacred talisman or vial of holy water. Whoever went near him entered into his holiness, becoming a vehicle of pureness and grace, an individual capable of delivering fortune, good health, and entry to Paradise: it was enough to touch the affected person to be blessed. In some cases, this kind of touch could even heal a disgrace or an illness. For this reason, the ministers he received avoided contact with the crowd and travelled by helicopter. But I didn't have a helicopter, and news that a foreign lady had been with the Imam had run throughout the city, whipping the women—who, as women, were allowed to touch me—into a frenzy. They were on me almost immediately. And as they surrounded me I had no idea why they were reaching out their hands with such fervor, why they were calling to me with wild joy. Then Salami explained what they were yelling, and I felt myself falling into a nightmare populated by hungry wolves. »Bless me, sainted one! Cure my child! Bring me to Heaven with you!« These poor women reached out greedy fingers to caress me, to probe me, to suck out my angelic powers. And soon the caresses and the probes became more bold, and devolved into a hail of blows that rained down on my head, my shoulders, and my thighs. It was a lynching. I tried to protect myself in vain, to point to Salami, to tell them to touch him,

he was there too, he's better because he's a Muslim, I'm a heretic. They didn't even look at him. And, since he refused to translate my pleas, as soon as we were in the car we began to fight furiously about it, almost like an old married couple. I took him to task for not having defended me, for not having said that his faith in Islam made him more blessed than I was, and I shut myself off in a petulant silence that in turn caused him to lapse into petulant silence, and poisoned the journey back to Tehran. It was late at night when we got back to the hotel, and the stress from all our adventures wouldn't allow me to sleep. That conjugal spat had brought back all my anxiety about the unwanted marriage. I stayed up until dawn, looking through the Blue Book, looking for a loophole to get out of it. But the more I read, the more I realized that the chances of finding one were slim indeed. »Marriage to one's mother, one's sister, or one's mother-in-law is a sin,« said the chapter on divorce and annulment. And I was neither the mother nor the sister nor the mother-in-law to my husband. »A man who has had relations with his own aunt may not marry her daughter,« it continued. And I was not the daughter of any aunt Salami may or may not have been to bed with. I couldn't even take advantage of the commandment which forbid the marriage between a Muslim and a heretic, since it was followed by this clarification: »However, a Muslim may take a Christian or Jewish woman as his concubine, and, if he likes, may take her as a second wife.« The only provision in my favor was the one about virginity: »If the man demands that his wife be a virgin before marriage and later discovers that she is not, the marriage may be annulled.« But my husband had expressed no such demand, and it was probable that the mullah would have testified to the contrary. In any case, the only out was the one we had already considered: admit that I was crazy, an accusation that he had already made after our bickering about the egg, and confess that I was a little lame. I'd think about it tomorrow.

I left the next morning dressed all in black, like a nun. In order to avoid going back to that town hall I would have let myself be followed by hundreds of television camera crews, and regardless, there

were no journalists around that morning. Not even the most suspicious could have anticipated a second hearing. I wasn't wearing my chador. After what had happened the day before, wearing the chador would have been an insult to my dignity. Anyway, it was a symbol of my retaliation. The journey was a sad one. Salami was still angry about the fact that I had given him the silent treatment instead of thanking him for his kindness and his skill at translating. He didn't open his mouth until we reached the gates of Qom, at which point he delivered several warnings. I was not to ask for more than thirty minutes: this message came from Ahmed himself. I was not to ask disrespectful questions, or Khomeini would have left before the time was up. I was not to ask anything about the chador, I was not even to say the word: I should understand that this was a delicate issue that greatly upset him. I promised to respect the first two warnings, but refused to follow the third. Then I gave Salami a warning of my own: not to lose the courage that had allowed him to humiliate Banisadr, since the battle wasn't over. That's why I was returning without my chador.

»You didn't bring the chador?!?«

»No. Whoever does not like Islamic dress is not obliged to wear it.«

»It will be read as an act of hostility!«

»Exactly.«

»But we have to walk across Qom, walk through the streets!«

»My shawl will be sufficient. And my scarf.«

And so, my honor protected only by a scarf and a shawl, I threw myself back into the same chaos I had experienced yesterday, the same touches and caresses and probes from the women who recognized me. Things went more smoothly at the checkpoints, however, the Pasdaran recognized me and I didn't even have to wait in the anti-chamber crammed full of mullah. From the chicken's lane we were taken directly to the awful room, which was nearly empty today. He was arranged on the carpet, protected by Ahmed. I crouched down on the mat and undid my shawl, pushed my scarf back a little: to make myself clear.

»How nice to see you again, Imam. I hope that you are well-rested.«

Like always, he remained immobile, his head bowed. But he raised his terrible eyes and saw that I was not wearing my chador, and stared me down with a long, flashing, gaze that seemed to undress me.

»We will be well-rested until you begin asking questions which tire us. Your questions tire us.«

»The one I'm about to ask you won't tire you out, Imam, it will make you angry. It's about the chador. I was asked not to say the word chador. But I will say it, because we were not able to finish our talk about the chador yesterday.«

His unpleasant lips tweaked upwards in a strange imitation of a smile.

»We are ready to finish it.«

»Good. Here we are, then: yesterday I asked you why you force poor women to hide themselves beneath a garment that is so uncomfortable and absurd, a sheet which prevents them from moving, even from blowing their noses? Today I will add: you do this despite the fact that women have proven themselves to be men's equals here. They fought just like men, were imprisoned and tortured just like men, and brought about the revolution, just like men.«

The strange smile vanished. The unpleasant mouth hardened.

»The women who brought about the revolution were women in Islamic dress, not elegant and made-up women like you, women who go around half-naked, dragging a tail of men behind them. The harlots who paint themselves and go out on the street exposing their neck and hair and their ears and their shape never fought the Shah. They never did anything good, those women. They were never able to make themselves useful, not socially, not politically, and not professionally. And this is because showing their neck and their hair and their ears and their shape is distracting to men. It disturbs them. And it distracts and disturbs other women, as well.«

I hardened too.

»Imam Khomeini, who told you that I go around dragging a tail of men? I see no line of men behind me.«

»But you are distracting, distracting.«

»Dressed like this, like a nun? Imam, yesterday you called me an indecent old woman, or you came close. You said this to me despite

the fact that my hair and my ears were well-covered by the chador, which covered the rest of my body as well. But it's true that this is not usually the case, and it's true that I've always lived alongside men. I've even been in wars with men. And I slept alongside soldiers on the front lines. In your opinion, does this make me an immoral woman?»

»Only your conscience can answer this question. Only you can. I don't know what you did with those soldiers in war. And I don't judge personal cases, I don't know if your life is moral or immoral, if you behave when you are around soldiers or not. But I know that, over the course of my long life, the things I say have always been confirmed. When women expose their neck and their hair and their ears, when they wear clothing that reveals their shape, when they mix with men, and when they are promiscuous with them, they always end up disturbing others and themselves. Islamic dress prevents this disaster. Without Islamic dress women could not work in a healthy and useful way. Neither could men. Our laws are valid laws.«

»Imam, I am not only talking about the garment called chador. I am also, and more importantly, talking about what this garment represents: the segregation that these valid laws impose upon women. They are not allowed to study at University, for example. They cannot engage in a profession or a job like men do, they cannot work alongside men. They are not allowed to enjoy the sun on the beach or swim in the ocean ...«

»I've already told you that this is none of your business. These are our customs, our laws. And they are valid customs, valid laws.«

»They are customs and laws that seem better suited to 1,400 years ago, Imam. Don't you think that, in the meantime, the world has gone forward? Let's talk about the law that allows a man to take four wives.«

»The law of four wives is a very progressive law. It was written for the good of women, since women are more numerous than men: more women are born than men, wars kill more men than women. A woman needs a man, and so what are we to do when there are more women than men in the world? Would you prefer that the leftover women became whores, or would you prefer them to marry a man who already has wives? It doesn't seem right to make women whores

simply because there aren't enough men. And I'll say that this law is better than monogamy. It is, even if it imposes some very difficult conditions on men. A man with two or three wives has to work hard to make sure he treats all his wives equally, to give them the same time and the same affection. This is very difficult because ... you're starting to tire me again. Your questions are tiring.«

Ahmed looked at his watch. Salami pleaded with his eyes. But I pretended not to notice.

»Would you call the laws that you have recently revived which forbid music and alcohol progressive as well, Imam? Please explain, why is drinking a glass of wine or beer a sin? Why is listening to music a sin? In the West, our priests drink and sing. Even the Pope drinks when he's thirsty and sings when he wants to. Does this mean that the Pope is a sinner?«

»I am not interested in the rules that your priests follow. Islam prohibits alcoholic beverages, period. It prohibits them absolutely because they degrade the intellect and prevent people from thinking in a healthy way. Even music clouds the mind, because it carries pleasures and ecstasies within it that are as powerful as drugs. Your music, I mean. Yes, your music does not exalt the spirit, it puts it to sleep. And it distracts our young people, who wind up poisoned and no longer care about their country.«

»Even the music of Bach, Beethoven, and Verdi?«

»I don't know these names. If they do not cloud the mind they will not be forbidden. Some of your music is not forbidden, we allow your marches and the anthems used for marching. We want music that exalts us like marching does, which moves young people instead of paralyzing them, which inspires them to care about their country. Yes, your marches are allowed. If those names wrote marches, we will not prohibit them. And your questions are making me tired. I told you that they are tiring. What else do you want to know?«

»This, Imam Khomeini: you always talk about the West in hard or critical terms. All of your judgments make it seem as though you view us as champions of every ugliness, every perversity. And yet the West took you in when you were in exile, and took in many of your collaborators, many of whom actually studied in the West.

Many studied free of charge, with scholarships. Don't you think that there might be something good in us?»

It was as though he had been hit in the chest, he dropped his head until his chin was resting on his sternum and his turban rolled off and across the carpet, revealing his shiny skull, yellow, like old ivory. He gathered it up immediately and put it back on with an angry gesture. Peevish, even.

»There is something. There is. But when the serpent has bitten us, we stay away even from sticks that look like serpents from a distance. And you are a serpent who has bitten us too often. You've always looked at us and seen a market, nothing more. Good things, like material progress, you kept for yourselves. Yes, we have received a great deal of evil from the West, a great deal of suffering, and now we have every reason to fear you and to prevent our young people from drawing near to you, from letting themselves be influenced even further by the West. I do not like the fact that our young people study in the West, where you corrupt them with alcohol, drugs, and half-naked women. You can keep your scholarships. They do nothing but create ignorance. You don't give your own young people a diploma unless they've studied. You give ours a diploma even if they're ignorant.«

»This is true, Imam. Even with your collaborators we've been too open-handed, we've exaggerated our hospitality. No one can doubt the fact that they learn very little in our universities. Often they don't even learn the language they should be studying. It is not true, however, that we have denied you material progress. The airplane that you came home in is a product of the West, not of Islam. The telephone you use to communicate from Qom is a product of the West, not of Islam. The tapes you used to record your speeches, which you sent to Iran to feed the rebellion against the Shah are products of the West, not of Islam. The television which you use daily to communicate with your country is a product of the West, not of Islam. And the air conditioning that you use to stay cool, despite the heat of the desert, is a product of the West, not of Islam. If we are so corrupt and corrupting, why do you use our instruments of evil?«

I was truly angry. I had even raised my voice, and I began to notice that poor Salami was going to ever more heroic lengths to translate

my words. He hesitated with each phrase, pulled on his moustache to get his courage up. I suddenly felt like apologizing to him, explaining that I hadn't intended to get angry. Returning to Qom, I had simply wanted to offer the old man a rope and let him hang himself with it, and I wanted to do this civilly. But the endless stream of foolishness, of gratuitous insults, of malice that rose from a putrid, blind fanaticism had positively exasperated me. I no longer cared if he said he was tired, that Ahmed was looking at his watch, and that both of them were impatiently waiting to throw me out. I didn't even care about asking him the other questions which had made me so curious before: if he had one or two or three wives, why he had become a priest, what he was like as a child. I only cared about getting out of there, wrenching that face from my memory, that face that had almost seduced me at first, that had inspired tenderness. I understood. And while that strange smile began to return to his lips, he enveloped me in a gaze full of unhopd-for respect. Or was it unhopd-for affection?

»No, the things that you have listed are not your instruments of evil. They are the good things about the West. Actually, we are not afraid of them; we use them. We are not afraid of your science, your technology; we are afraid of your customs. We reject them because we want our country to be our own, because we demand that you not interfere with our politics, our economy, our habits, our affairs. And from this point forward we will go against whoever threatens them again, to the right and the left, here and there. But enough, now, enough. I am tired. Out! Out!«

I refastened my shawl, I pulled my scarf back down on my forehead, ready to withdraw.

»I am leaving, Imam. But I will take with me the image of an unhappy country, caught up in disorder, in chaos, in unhappiness, and in a state discord which some would say is the precursor to a civil war or a coup d'état. I leave with proof that your revolution did not yield the good fruit that people had hoped for, did not bring any of the things that you had promised. Less freedom than ever. You are headed for darker waters, Imam. There is a great deal of darkness in Iran. And it is a darkness with no answer.«

His imperious finger arose, preventing me from rising. The black

turban vibrated, erasing any possible spark of sympathy. The thin whisper became thunder.

»No, there is an answer! We are a six-month-old newborn. Our revolution is only six months old. And it is a revolution in a country destroyed by disgraces like a wheat field infested with crickets. We are only beginning to walk our path. What do you expect from a newborn who comes into the world in an infested wheat field, after 2,500 years of bad harvests and fifty years of poisonous ones? That past cannot be erased in a few months, not even in a few years. We need time. We are asking for time. And we are asking, above all, from those who call themselves democratic. Or communist, or God knows what. Because they are the ones who attack us, they are the ones who slander us, who spread rumors about our civil wars and coup d'états which will not happen! They are the ones who feed the chaos and the discord and the unhappiness! Them! You! And with this sentiment, goodbye. Out, out! Inshallah.«

He leapt up like a cat, and was gone before I could return his goodbye. But this time he wasn't running off to take a nap, but rather to the roof, to bless the multitude who kept invoking him. As a result, the last image I have of him is that of a fragile, black figure, who has somehow managed to get up on a roof and is climbing up on a chair with Ahmed's help, standing up so he can be seen from a distance. He wobbles for a moment, swaying and coming dangerously close to falling headfirst into the lane, and then Ahmed grabs him by the legs, balances him with the help of three guards who hold him by his thighs and his armpits. In this ridiculous position, the same used by children who clamber up on their father's shoulders to watch a parade, he raises his arm weakly and waves his left hand in a gesture that seems to say: »Hi, hello.« Exactly the way that children, on their fathers' shoulders, wave to the parade. In the eyes of the crowd, however, it is a blessing, and the horrible roar becomes feverish and desperate, shaking the sky like a thunderstorm: »Zandeh bad, Imam! Payandeh Ban!« The women who manhandled me yesterday scream, the men who brought their goats with them scream, the mullahs who came here for an audience scream, the Pasdaran who are supposed to prevent any attempt on the Imam's life scream, forgetting their guns, pumping their fists in the air in a victory gesture.

And him, he enjoys himself precisely the way he described when I asked him how it felt to be the object of a such idolatry. He smirks with pleasure, he giggles unabashedly, immodestly, cancelling out the wise words with which he closed the interview. And he resembles the Shah, in a strange way. No, power has no need of muscles or of youth. Or riches or frills.

I observe him with a growing bitterness, and the question that I didn't ask him returns to provoke my curiosity: what was he like as a child? But I already know. He was like little Adolf, Benito, Josef, Mao, Muammar, Fidel, Idi, Napoleon, Genghis, like any of the other despots who have made and are making and will make humanity desperate, always. Round, smooth, adorable when they laugh after having eaten well, annoying when they cry after having soiled themselves. Children just like any other. He was a child just like any other. When he fussed, his mother would take him in her arms and ask him: »Ruhollah, Ruhollah, will you be this rascally when you grow up?« Or she asked him »Ruhollah, Ruhollah, what will you be when you grow up?« And he answered by sucking on his finger, by kicking his fat little feet, staring back at her with innocent eyes. He was a very good child, Ruhollah. Even when he learned to walk, he was still a very good child, even when he learned to talk. He became bad later, when he grew up. Once someone told me that men are not born bad, that they become bad as they grow up, when they understand that life rewards those who find goodness boring. He forgot to tell me that nothing attracts bad people like power, nothing perfects their wickedness quite like power. So the question I should have asked that diabolical old man wasn't a question about his childhood. I should have asked him when he realized that he was bad enough to become Ayatollah Khomeini. But he wouldn't have told me. He wouldn't have been able to. Because, and here's the point: he didn't think he was bad. And in some way, this made him sympathetic.

»Are you satisfied? Did you find out everything you wanted to?« Salami asked as he drove along the road toward Tehran, with the air of someone who has just escaped disaster.

»More or less,« I answered. »Even if most of the things I found

out I already knew. And anyway, the things I didn't find out aren't important.«

»For example?«

»For example, how many wives he has.«

»I can tell you that one: he only has one, Ahmed's mother. He never married anyone else.« This made me remember the conjugal mess I had gotten myself into thanks to the ridiculous laws of power. Good God, we had to turn around, head back to the town hall to declare that I was crazy and lame, to ask for an annulment or a divorce. I told Salami this, agitated. He just kept driving, completely calm.

»We don't need to. I never signed the license.«

»Do you mean to say that I'm not married?«

»Not to me, anyway.«

»Who am I married to, then?«

He looked at me furtively, taking his time.

»Well, something happened ... something that the mullah didn't notice.«

»What?«

»Well, do you remember when he signed it? Well, look, it's like this: he was rushing, and he made a mistake. He signed where the groom was supposed to sign. I realized it, and signed where he should have. Then he closed the registry and we ran out of there, and ... «

»Are you saying that I'm married to the mullah?«

He laughed spitefully.

»Well, yes. In theory. So, if you want an annulment or a divorce you'll have to ask him. I wouldn't if I were you. Because as soon as he figures out the mistake, he'll marry us again, and then we'll be back where we started. And you never know, he might decide he likes being married to you, deny you an annulment, and stake his claim.«

Oh God. I was married to a mullah. To a disgusting mullah who might decide he liked being married to me. It was too much. If I told it to my friends back home, no one would believe me. Goddamn Salami. This was why he seemed so calm afterwards. He hadn't even told me, hadn't even hinted at it, the rogue.

»I didn't want to upset you,« he said. »You needed to get ready, to

concentrate, and the interview was more important, right? Besides, there wasn't time. We arrived in that square almost immediately, and ...«

»But afterwards! Afterwards!«

»The interview wasn't over yet, afterwards. And even if I had wanted to, you were angry because I hadn't protected you from the women who were touching you. You didn't speak to me for twenty-four hours, until we got back to Qom.«

»We need to do something. What is this mullah's name?«

»Honestly, I don't know. I didn't even notice. I was too nervous.«

»And so I'm married to a mullah whose name I don't even know and ...«

»But just a temporary marriage.«

»And how long does a temporary marriage last?«

»As long as the husband wants. A month, six months, a year.«

»And if the husband keeps quiet, if he never says anything?«

»Then it lasts forever. But don't worry. He was only passing through Qom, who knows where he lives, and he'll never check that registry. If I were you I'd forget all about it.«

It was a beautiful night in late September, and the relief of having finished a difficult job protected me from fruitless anxieties. Yes, in some city or village in Iran lived a mullah whose temporary wife I was, probably forever. A disgusting mullah who could exert his conjugal rights at any point, or have me stoned for adultery or who knows what, but all this was not as bad as ending up stabbed to death by a jealous Spaniard, and anyway, it was pointless to dwell on it too much, I'd be gone in a few hours, and soon there'd be a continent and an ocean between me and my husband. Whoever he was. So I let go of all my resentment and anger toward Salami, and decided to look at him with different eyes from this point forward. After all, he was the one who had gotten me the interview, and had treated me generously throughout the whole affair. He had been my secretary, my chauffeur, my interpreter. He had translated my questions with courage and with precision. And when I thought about it, he wasn't even as unlikable as I had thought initially. He was, quite simply, a bigot who refused to see the consequences of fanaticism,

an opportunist who hitched himself to whatever wagon was leading the trail, no worse than any of the many Salamis who live in the West. No worse than the Salamis who lived at the time of the Inquisition. Maybe I had forgotten that for centuries Christian Europe, that cradle of progress and culture and art, that lighthouse of civilization, had burned people at the stake, and no one had dared to protest. From Spain to England, hundreds of millions of human beings had been ground up by a justice that called itself divine, had been sacrificed in trials that made Khalkhali's abuses look like examples of correctness by comparison. Iron jaws had shredded their arms and legs, tongs had pulled out their tongues and genitals, nails had been driven into their eyes. There had been orgies of slaughtered bodies, dismembered, desecrated by every kind of violence, and then brought to the smoking pyre, if they survived. After the Papal bull *Ad Extirpanda*, anyone could be accused of conspiring with the devil, of being a witch or a wizard. William I, King of England, said that a witch could be recognized if she began to cry after having needles inserted under her skin from her head to her toes, or, alternately, by throwing her in a pond. If she was innocent, she would drown. If she was guilty she would float, and then would be ready for torture and then the stake. The king was not the only one who instigated that much fury. Popes weren't the only ones who tore up their victims in those terrifying interrogations, who made them burn on pyres or in ovens, often alongside their children. The Salamis of that time were just as guilty as kings and popes: with their cowardice, their silence, their bigotry, their opportunism, their crucifixes in hand. I had to forgive this young mustachioed man whose faith had not been shaken an inch by the eight years he passed in Florence. I had to thank him for making my confrontation with my own Torquemada possible. I thanked him. I asked him what I could do for him.

»I don't even dare ask you, since it would mean trying to cancel out the blessing that envelops you and brings you nearer to the saints,« he answered. I told him to ask me anyway, not to worry about it. My relationship with the saints was going so badly, I told him, that no blessing could have improved it. Come on, say it: what did he want?

»One of the garments you were wearing in the presence of the

Imam. I would like to give one to my wife. Those garments are miraculous relics, and unfortunately the chador was not hers.« I gave him everything: shawl, shirt, scarf. I even gave him the relic of all relics, the expensive recorder that had recorded that thin voice. And, stripped of every sacrament and washed of every sanctity, we went to the airport and said goodbye like two soldiers who had served in the same trench, swearing eternal friendship and unending gratitude.

But when I published the interview, everything changed. It didn't matter at all that the scoundrel had already sold an invented version to the Tehran newspapers, in which he defined his Imam as »light of my eyes« and »hope for humanity.« The diabolical old man didn't buy it. He procured the original text, he read it, and then he took to the loudspeakers outside of Qom, and read a speech against me which would have made Innocent III, Gregorius IX and Alexander IV—those great enemies of heresy—green with envy. I had gone to him to accuse him of cutting off women's breasts, and in vain he had tried to convince me that he had never cut off a single one, that he had always behaved mercifully. I had gone to him to insult Islamic dress, and in vain he had tried to explain the virtue of the chador, I had ripped mine off and thrown it in his face. This proved that enemies of the revolution were hiding everywhere, even among those who were no friends of the Shah.

Salami was terrified. He forgot the eternal friendship and the unending gratitude, he forgot all the advantages that he had gained by meeting Khomeini and being photographed by his side. He betrayed me in the most unexpected way: he allied himself with the editors of the newspaper >Zane Ruz< and wrote a call for a capital sentence. I had taken advantage of the good faith with which they welcomed me, I had drawn near to the Imam with the sole purpose of promoting the cause of prostitutes, adulterers, homosexuals, and Kurdish rebels. I was an agent of the Shah, a spy for the counter-revolutionaries, a corrupt and corrupting woman. I needed to be punished if I ever set foot back in Iran, and even if I didn't. Next to the editorial, signed with a woman's name, was my photograph, torn down the middle to indicate that I should be cut in two at the first available opportunity. Dismembered like a witch.

Usually indifference and silence are the best weapons against fools. Nothing discourages and humiliates them as effectively. But it's very hard to resist calling a cretin a cretin, and I made that mistake. I replied with a telex that reminded him that the primary characteristic of fascists, be they religious or lay, right or left, is stupidity. The second is ignorance, which appeals to ignorance. The third is the need to beat your fists against whoever disagrees with you. And the article written by that silly sausage who hid his moustache behind a female pseudonym was the fusion of those three elements. Everyone knew that I was on the side of the prostitutes, the adulterers, the homosexuals, and the murdered Kurds in Iran. If that made their murderers hate me, I couldn't help but be happy about that. Being loved by those who don't love freedom is, to me, an offense. As far as the threats were concerned, realizing them would not be difficult. I had no bodyguards, I didn't hide under a chador, and my face was well known, as were my addresses, though they wouldn't need those, as I would be returning to Iran. They were horribly offended. They took the photograph torn down the middle and printed it up on hundreds of posters and handbills, glued them all over the walls of the city. And that's where I would have found them in March, the month I would have fulfilled my thoughtless challenge: a kind of poster similar to the ones that we plastered up in saloons in the Far West, bearing the face of Calamity Jane or other outlaws to be captured or shot on sight.

About a month after I sent my telex, Khomeini's squads stormed the American embassy in Tehran and kidnapped the diplomats that they had been holding hostage for over a year, in what they claimed was an attempt to get back the Shah and the billions of dollars he had deposited in Chase Manhattan Bank. As a result, Bazargan finally stopped presiding over a government that didn't exist, and three characters who, in my movie, had been secondary, found themselves suddenly catapulted onto the stage of history. Gotzadeq was nominated to be Foreign Minister, Salami became his right-hand man and ambassador to Italy. Banisadr was elected President of the Islamic Republic. It doesn't matter that these laurel crowns would soon transform into nooses that would strangle all three of them,

pulling them into tragedies or shame. In the moment the hostages were captured, the world encountered a turning-point that would double its unhappiness. And the journey that I had undertaken to clear the fog from my mind, to shake off my pain, became another tunnel, a trap with no exits and no hope. Wherever I looked I saw war or the threat of war, the mob ruled and freedom died. That year ended with the invasion of Afghanistan, and was also the year that kicked off the campaign against the West, which was suddenly the source of all evil and all disgrace, the symbol of every sin and every infamy. From Syria to Iraq, Kuwait to Qatar, North Yemen and South Yemen, India to Bangladesh, Turkey to Pakistan, American embassies were attacked or burned or devastated. The hate extended to anyone who spoke English or French or German or Italian or Spanish or Flemish. You would have said that our culture and our civilization were in the process of being swept away, in a sort of reverse crusade, by the children of Allah.

And this crusade triumphed, as did the diabolical old man, the presumptuous impostor who has been extorting us for years with his billions, with his oil, instigating and financing and training international terrorists, provoking and feeding conflicts all over the world, protecting any idiot who he defined a revolutionary. In one case, he even protected his rival: the then thirty-eight-year-old leader of Libya, Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi. So I decided to go and look for him in the terrible fog I'd thrown myself into while attempting to escape from another fog. It would help me, above all, to better understand two of the words that sustain the trick called Power: the word Leader and the word Revolution.

Indira Gandhi

New Delhi, February 1972

ORIANA FALLACI Mrs. Gandhi, I have so many questions to ask you, both personal and political. The personal ones, however, I'll leave for later, once I've understood why many people are afraid of you and call you cold, indeed, icy, hard ...

INDIRA GANDHI They say that because I'm sincere. Even too sincere. And because I don't waste time in flowery small talk, as people do in India, where the first half hour is spent in compliments: »How are you, how are your children, how are your grandchildren, and so forth.« I refuse to indulge in small talk. And compliments, if at all, I save for after the job is done. But in India people can't stomach this attitude of mine, and when I say, »Hurry up, let's get to the point,« they feel hurt. And think I'm cold, indeed icy, hard. Then there's another reason, one that goes with my frankness: I don't put on an act. I don't know how to put on an act; I always show myself for what I am, in whatever mood I'm in. If I'm happy, I look happy; if I'm angry, I show it. Without worrying about how others may react. When one has had a life as difficult as mine, one doesn't worry about how others will react. And now go ahead. You can ask anything you like.

OF Fine. I'll begin with the most brutal question. You have won, more than won, a war. But quite a few of us consider this victory a dangerous one. Do you really think that Bangladesh will be the ally you hoped for? Aren't you afraid it may turn out instead to be a most uncomfortable burden?

IG Look, life is always full of dangers and I don't think one should avoid dangers. I think one should do what seems right. And if what seems right involves danger ... well, one must risk the danger. That's always been my philosophy—I've never thought of the consequences of a necessary action. I examine the consequences later, when a new

situation arises, and I then face the new situation. And that's it. You say this new victory is dangerous. I say that today no one can tell you if it's dangerous, that today, I don't see the risks you mention. If, however, those risks should become reality ... I'll act in accordance with the new reality. I hope that sounds like a positive statement. I want to answer you in a positive way. I want to state that there will be friendship between Bangladesh and ourselves. And not a one-sided friendship, of course—no one does anything for nothing; each has something to give and something to take. If we offer something to Bangladesh, it's obvious that Bangladesh is offering something to us. And why shouldn't Bangladesh be able to keep its promises? Economically it's full of resources and can stand on its feet. Politically it seems to me led by trained people. The refugees who took shelter here are going home ...

OF Are they really going home?

IG Yes, two million have already gone back.

OF Two million out of ten. That's not much.

IG No, but give them time. They're going back fast. Fast enough. I'm satisfied. More than I expected.

OF Mrs. Gandhi, in mentioning the dangers of your victory, I wasn't referring only to Bangladesh. I was also referring to West Bengal, which is India, and which is now clamoring for its independence. I've heard the Naxalites in Calcutta ... And there's a sentence of Lenin's that says, »The world revolution will pass through Shanghai and Calcutta.«

IG No. That's not possible. And you know why? Because a revolution is already taking place in India. Things are changing here already—peacefully and democratically. There's no danger of communism. There would be if we had a rightist government instead of mine. In fact the communists gained strength in India when the people thought my party was moving to the right. And they were correct. In the face of such a threat, they had no other choice but to throw themselves to the far left. But now that the people are conscious of our efforts, now that they see us resolving problems, the communists are losing strength. As for the Naxalites in West Bengal, they are completely under control, and I'm sure that the ones in

Bangladesh will also be brought under control. No, I don't expect trouble.

OF They've already given you some trouble, in Bangladesh. I saw fearful lynchings in Dacca after the liberation.

IG They happened in the first five days and were few in comparison with the massacres that the others carried out, in comparison with the million the others killed. There were some unfortunate incidents, it's true, and we tried to prevent them. If you only knew how many people we saved! But we couldn't be everywhere, we couldn't see everything, and it was inevitable that some things would escape us. In all communities you find groups that behave badly. But you must understand them too. They were so enraged, blinded by resentment. To be just, one should not consider what you saw in a few days but what they saw and suffered for many months.

OF Mrs. Gandhi, you know the accusation that it was you Indians who provoked this war and attacked first. What do you say to that?

IG I'd answer by admitting that, if you want to go way back, we helped the Mukti Bahini. So, if you consider it all as beginning with that aid and from that moment, yes—we were the ones to start it. But we couldn't do otherwise. We couldn't keep ten million refugees on our soil; we couldn't tolerate such an unstable situation for who knows how long. That influx of refugees would have stopped—on the contrary. It would have gone on and on and on, until there would have been an explosion. We were no longer able to control the arrival of those people, in our own interest we had to stop it! That's what I said to Mr. Nixon, to all the other leaders I visited in an attempt to avert the war.

However, when you look at the beginning of the actual war, it's hard not to recognize that the Pakistanis were the ones to attack. They were the ones who descended on us with their planes, at five o'clock that afternoon when the first bombs fell on Agra. I can prove it to you by the fact that we were taken completely by surprise. The weekend is the only time when we in the government can leave Delhi, and, well, almost no one was in Delhi. I had gone to Calcutta. The defense minister had gone to Patna and from there he was going to go to Bangalore in the south. The finance minister had gone to

Bombay and was about to go to Poona. The head of the armed forces was somewhere else; I don't remember where. We all had to rush back to Delhi, and for this reason our troops went on the counteroffensive only the next day, instead of in a few hours. For this reason the Pakistanis succeeded in occupying some areas. Naturally, we were prepared; we knew that something would happen. But we were only really ready for air attacks. If it hadn't been for that, they would have knocked us out.

OF Mrs. Gandhi, you mentioned the trip you took to Europe and America to avert the conflict. Can you tell the truth today about what happened? How did things go with Nixon?

IG I made the trip knowing I was like the child putting his finger into the hole in the dike. And there are things that ... I don't know ... one can't ... oh, why not! The truth is that I spoke clearly to Mr. Nixon. And I told him what I had already told Mr. Heath, Mr. Pompidou, Mr. Brandt. I told him without mincing words that we couldn't go on with ten million refugees on our backs, we couldn't tolerate the fuse of such and explosive situation any longer. Well, Mr. Heath, Mr. Pompidou, and Mr. Brandt had understood very well. But not Mr. Nixon. The fact is that when the others understand one thing, Mr. Nixon understands another. I suspected he was very pro-Pakistan. Or rather I knew that the Americans had always been in favor of Pakistan—not so much because they were in favor of Pakistan, but because they were against India.

However, I had recently had the impression they were changing—not so much by becoming less pro-Pakistan as by becoming less anti-India. I was wrong. My visit to Nixon did anything but avert the war. It was useful only to me. The experience taught me that when people do something against you, that something always turns out in your favor. At least you can use it to your advantage. It's a law of life—check it and you'll see it holds true in every situation of life. Do you know why I won the last elections? It was because the people liked me, yes, because I had worked hard, yes, but also because the opposition had behaved badly toward me. And do you know why I won this war? Because my army was able to do it, yes, but also because the Americans were on the side of Pakistan.

OF I don't understand.

IG Let me explain. America always thought it was helping Pakistan. But if hadn't helped Pakistan, Pakistan would have been a stronger country. You don't help a country by supporting a military regime that denies any sign of democracy, and what defeated Pakistan was its military regime. That regime supported by the Americans. Sometimes friends are dangerous. We must be very careful about the help friends give us.

OF And the Chinese? The Chinese too were on Pakistan's side, and unless I'm mistaken, China is the largest potential enemy of India.

IG No. I don't see why we and the Chinese should have to be enemies. We don't want to be their enemies, If that's what they want, we can't do anything about it, but I don't think they really want it because I don't think that in the final analysis it would do them any good. As for the position they held in this war ... well, I think they've been more skillful than the Americans. Certainly they've had a lighter touch—had they wanted to, they could have done more for Pakistan. Isn't that so? It was the Americans who sent the Seventh Fleet into the Bay of Bengal, not the Chinese. So as to take no chances, I didn't remove our troops from the Chinese border, but I never believed the Chinese would intervene by making a false move. In other words, I never believed in the danger of a third world war. Naturally, if the Americans had fired a shot, if the Seventh Fleet had done something more than sit there in the Bay of Bengal ... yes, the Third World War would have exploded. But, in all honesty, not even that fear occurred to me.

OF It feels so strange to talk about war with you who were brought up in the cult of nonviolence, Mrs. Gandhi! I wonder how you've felt in these days of conflict.

IG You must keep in mind that it wasn't my first war; I've had to face others. And anyway I'll tell you a little story about nonviolence. India had barely become independent, in 1947, when Pakistan invaded Kashmir, which at the time was ruled by a maharajah. The maharajah fled, and the people of Kashmir, led by Sheikh Abdullah, asked for Indian help. Lord Mountbatten, who was still governor general, replied that he wouldn't be able to supply aid to Kashmir unless

Pakistan declared war, and he didn't seem bothered by the fact that the Pakistanis were slaughtering the population. So our leaders decided to sign a document by which they bound themselves to go to war with Pakistan. And Mahatma Gandhi, apostle of nonviolence, signed along with them. Yes, he chose war. He said there was nothing else to do. War is inevitable when one must defend somebody or defend oneself.

OF The point is I persist in seeing this war as a war between brothers. I even said so to General Aurora and General Niazi. And both of them answered, »Basically we are brothers.«

IG Not basically—entirely. The Indians and Pakistanis are literally brothers. I know you were surprised when, after the fall of Dacca, Pakistani and Indian officers shook hands. But do you realize that, up until 1965, in our army and the Pakistani one you could come across generals who were brothers? Blood brothers, sons of the same father and the same mother. Or you found an uncle on one side and a nephew on the other, a cousin here and a cousin there. Besides it's still true today. I'll tell you something else. There was a time when even two ambassadors to Switzerland, the one from India and the one from Pakistan, were two blood brothers. Oh, the Partition imposed on us by the British was so unnatural! It served only to divide families, to break them up. I remember harrowing episodes. People who emigrated, people who didn't want to emigrate. Many Muslims didn't want to leave India to go to live in Pakistan, but the propaganda was that there they'd have greater opportunities and so they left. Many Hindus, on the other hand, didn't want to stay in Pakistan, but they had ties there or property and so they stayed.

To become our enemies—what an absurdity. A crazy absurdity when you stop to think that we, Muslims and Hindus, have conducted the struggle for independence together. Yes, even under the British there were hostile groups. There were clashes. But, as we found out later, these were clashes provoked by those who had no wish to let us live together. Yes, even under the British there were hostile groups. There were clashes. But, as we found out later, these were clashes provoked by those who had no wish to let us live together—on the eve of the Partition. The policy of keeping us divided was always followed

by foreigners, even after the Partition. If Indians and Pakistanis had been together ... I don't say as confederated countries but as neighboring and friendly countries ... like Italy and France, for example ... believe me, both of us would have progressed much further. But, it would seem that it was not in the interest of »someone« for us to make progress. It was in »someone's« interest that we be always at war, that we tear each other to pieces. Yes, I'm inclined to absolve the Pakistanis. How should they have behaved? Someone encouraged them to attack us, someone gave them weapons to attack us. And they attacked us.

OF Bhutto says that he would be ready to set up a confederation with India. What do you think of that, Mrs. Gandhi?

IG You know ... Bhutto is not a very balanced man. When he talks, you never understand what he means. What does he mean this time? That he wants to be friends with us? We've wanted to be friends with him for some time; I've always wanted to. Here's something that Westerners don't know. The Western press has always insisted that India was Pakistan's enemy and vice versa, that the Hindus were against the Muslims and vice versa. They've never said, for instance, that my party has been fighting this attitude ever since we were dismembered into two countries. Since then we have maintained that religious hostilities are wrong and absurd, that minorities cannot be eliminated from a country, that people of different religions must live together.

But how is it possible for people in the modern world to go on killing each other for religion? The problems we should be concerned with nowadays are quite different! They're the problems of poverty, of the rights of the individual, of the changes brought about by technology. They're the ones that count, more than religion! Because they're universal problems, because they pertain in equal measure to Pakistan and ourselves. I can't take it seriously when people get excited and scream that religion is in danger, and similar stupidities. Unfortunately there are people who talk like that. And they're the same ones who say, »We should never have accepted the existence of Pakistan. Now that it exists, it ought to be destroyed. But these are only a few madmen who have no following among the masses.

In India, you don't find propaganda against Pakistan. During the war there was little of it, naturally, but even during the war we were able to control it. In fact the Pakistanis were astonished by this. There were prisoners in the camp hospitals who exclaimed, »What? You're a Hindu doctor and you want to cure me?» Look, I can only reply to Bhutto that, if he knows what he's saying, he's saying the only thing to be said. And if he didn't say that, what would his future be? I'm told Bhutto is ambitious. I hope he's very ambitious; ambition may help him see reality.

OF To digress a moment, Mrs. Gandhi, You're not religious, are you?

IG Well ... it depends on what you mean by the word religion. Certainly I don't go to temples and pray to the gods or anything like that. But if by religion we mean a belief in humanity rather than the gods, an effort to make man better and a little happier, then yes, I'm very religious.

OF I hope that wasn't an embarrassing question, Mrs. Gandhi.

IG No, why?

OF This one is embarrassing, however. You've always proclaimed a policy of nonalignment, then last August you signed the Indo-Soviet friendship pact. Isn't there a conflict between the two things?

IG No, I wouldn't say so. Because what does nonalignment mean? It means we don't belong to any military bloc and that we reserve the right to be friends with any country, independently of the influence of any country. All this has remained unchanged after the signing of the Indo-Soviet treaty, and others can say or think what they like—our policy won't change because of the Soviet Union. We know very well that India's destiny is linked to world peace. However, the treaty exists, you say, and it puts us in a different position towards the Soviet Union than the one we have toward other countries. Yes, the treaty exists. Nor does it exist only on one side. Look how we're situated geographically and you'll see that India is very important for the Soviet Union. Still, in international matters, the treaty changes nothing. That is, it doesn't prevent us from being friends with other countries, which indeed we are. It doesn't prohibit us from practicing the same nonalignment, as indeed we do. And I assure you we'll go on making our decisions without worrying whether it pleases or

displeases the Soviet Union, China, America, France, or anyone else. Do you want to know something else? A month after the signing someone asked Chou En-lai what he thought of it. And Chou En-lai answered, »It makes no difference. I don't see why it should make any difference.«

OF Opening an Indian embassy in Hanoi in the near future does make a difference, however. In fact, you are head of the International Control Commission for Vietnam. What does this mean? That you'll give up membership on the commission and your chairmanship?

IG I don't know ... Obviously the problem arises ... But I still hadn't thought about how to resolve it. And to talk about this ... Let's talk about it anyway. Listen, the International Control Commission isn't doing anything, it's never done anything. What good does it do to be on it or not? Before opening the embassy in Hanoi, I gave it a lot of thought, but it wasn't really a painful decision. American policy in Vietnam is what it is, in Saigon the situation is anything but normal, and I'm happy to have done what I did.

OF So are people right to think you're ore on the left than your father was?

IG Look, I don't see the world as something divided between right and left. And I don't at all care who's on the right or left or in the center. Even though we use them, even though I use them myself, these expressions have lost all meaning. I'm not interested in one label or the other—I'm only interested in solving certain problems, in getting where I want to go. I have certain objectives. They're the same objectives my father had: to give people a higher standard of living, to do away with the cancer of poverty, to eliminate the consequences of economic backwardness. I want to succeed. And I want to succeed in the best way possible, without caring whether people call my actions leftist or rightist.

It's the same story s when we nationalized the banks. I'm not for nationalization because of the rhetoric of nationalization, or because I see in nationalization the cure-all for every injustice. I'm for nationalization in cases where it's necessary. When we were first considering it, my party was disturbed by one trend in favor and one against. So as not to split the party, I suggested a compromise:

to give the banks a year's time and see if they succeed in showing us that nationalization wasn't necessary. The year went by and we realized it hadn't done any good, that the money still ended up in the hands of the rich industrialists or friends of the bankers. So I concluded that it was necessary to nationalize the banks. And we did. Without considering it a socialist gesture or an antisocialist gesture, just a necessary one. Anyone who nationalizes only so as to be considered on the left to me is a fool.

OF However, you've used the word socialist on various occasions.

IG Yes, because it's the closest to what I want to do. And in all societies that have applied a form of socialism, a certain degree of social and economic equality has been achieved. But by now even the word socialism has so many meanings and interpretations. The Russians call themselves socialists, the Swedes call themselves socialists. And let's not forget that in Germany there was also a national socialism.

OF Mrs. Gandhi, what does the word »socialism« mean to you?

IG Justice. Yes, it means justice. It means trying to work in a more egalitarian society.

OF But in the pragmatic sense, free of ideologies.

IG Yes. Because what good does it do to remain tied to an ideology if you don't achieve anything by it? I have an ideology myself—you can't work in a vacuum, you have to have faith in something. As my father said, you have to keep an open mind, but you have to pour something into it, otherwise ideas slip away like sand between your fingers. The fact that I have an ideology, however, doesn't mean I'm indoctrinated. Nowadays you can no longer let yourself be indoctrinated—the world is changing so fast! Even what you wanted twenty years ago is no longer relevant today; it's outdated.

Look, for me the only point that has remained unchanged through the years is that in India there is still so much poverty. A great part of the people still don't enjoy the benefits they should have derived from independence—and then so what good does it do to be free? After all, why did we want to become free? Not just to throw out the British. About this we were always clear. We always said that our struggle was not only against the British as representatives of colonialism, it was against all the evil that existed in India.

The evil of the feudal system, the evil of the system based on caste, the evil of economic injustice. Well, that evil has not been uprooted. After twenty years, we're politically free, yes, but very far from having reached the objective we set for ourselves.

OF So then what point have you reached?

IG That's difficult to say because the point of arrival is continually shifting. Have you ever climbed a mountain? You see, once you arrive at the top of a mountain, you think you've reached the highest point. But it's only an impression that doesn't last long. You soon realize that the peak you've climbed was one of the lowest, that the mountain was part of a chain of mountains, that there are still so many, so many mountains to climb ... And the more you climb, the more you want to climb—even though you're dead tired.

I mean, poverty assumes so many aspects here in India. There aren't only the poor that you see in the cities, there are the poor among the tribes, the poor who live in the forest, the poor who live in the mountains. Should we ignore them as long as the poor in the cities are better off? And better off with reference to what? To what people wanted ten years ago? Then it seemed like so much. Today it's no longer so much. So look, when you govern a country, and especially a country so vast and complex as India, you never arrive at anything. Just when you think you've achieved something, you realize you've achieved nothing. And still you have to forward just the same—toward a dream so distant that your road has neither beginning nor end.

OF And you, Mrs. Gandhi—at what point have you arrived on this road?

IG At no point, at a very important point: that of having convinced the Indians that they can do things. At first people asked us, »Can you do it?« And we kept silent because we didn't believe in ourselves, we didn't believe that we could do things. Today people no longer say to us, »Can you?« They say, »When can you?« Because the Indians finally believe in themselves, they believe they can do things. Oh, the word »when« is so important for a people, for an individual! If an individual thinks he won't do it, he'll never do it. Even if he's highly intelligent, even if he has countless talents. To become

capable, one must have faith in oneself. Well, as a nation, I believe we've acquired faith in ourselves. And I like to think I've provided this faith. I also like to think that by providing faith, I've focused their pride. I say focused because pride isn't something you give. It doesn't even break out suddenly; it's a feeling that grows very slowly, very confusedly. Our pride has grown in the last twenty-five years, though others don't understand it and understand it and underestimate it. You've never been very generous, you Westerners, toward us Indians. You should have seen that things were changing, albeit slowly. You should have seen that something was happening. Not much, but something.

OF Have you really not also given your people pride, Mrs. Gandhi? You yourself are so proud.

IG No. On the contrary, I'm not. No.

OF Of course you are. Wasn't it an act of pride to refuse the aid the world offered you during the famine of 1966? I remember a ship loaded with grain, with food, that never left the port of Naples. And everything spoiled, while the people of India were dying.

IG I never heard about it. No, I didn't know that the ship was loaded and ready to sail—otherwise I wouldn't have refused it. But it's true that I refused foreign aid. It's true. It wasn't my personal decision, however—it was the whole country that said no. And, believe me, it happened by itself, all of a sudden. Yes, all of a sudden inscriptions appeared on walls. Signs appeared. And that »no« exploded all over India, in an act of pride that surprised even me. Then even the political parties, all of them, even the deputies in Parliament, said no, it's better to die of hunger than be taken for a nation of beggars. I had to make myself the interpreter of that no, repeat it to those who wanted to help us. And it was hard for you, I understand. I think you were hurt by it. Sometimes we hurt one another without realizing it.

OF We didn't want to hurt you.

IG I know. I repeat, I understand. But you must also understand us—always undervalued, underestimated, not believed. Even when we believed, you didn't believe us. You said, »How is it possible to fight without violence?« But without violence we obtained our freedom. You said, »How is it possible for democracy to work with an illiterate

people who are dying of hunger?» But with that people we made a democracy work. You said, »Planning is something for communist countries; democracy and planning don't go together!« But, with all the errors we committed, our plans succeeded. Then we announced that there'd be no more starvation in India. And you responded, »Impossible. You'll never succeed!« Instead we succeeded; today in India no one dies of hunger any more; food production far exceeds consumption. Finally we promised to limit the birth rate. And this you really didn't believe; you smiled scornfully. Well, even in this things have gone well. The fact is that we have grown over seventy million in ten years, but it's also true that we have grown less than many other countries, including the countries of Europe.

OF Often through dreadful methods, like the sterilization of men. Do you approve of that, Mrs. Gandhi?

IG In India's past, when the population was low, the blessing given a woman was, »May you have many children.« Most of our epics and literature stress this wish, and the idea that a woman should have many children has declined. I myself, in my heart, say that people should have all the children they want. But it's a mistaken idea, like many of our ideas that go back thousands of years, and it must be rooted out. We must protect families, we must protect children, who have inalienable rights and should be loved, should be taken care of physically and mentally, and should not be brought into the world only to suffer. Do you know that, until recently, poor people brought children into the world for the sole purpose of making use of them? But how can you change, by force or all of a sudden, an age-old habit? The only way is to plan births, by one means or another. And the sterilization of men is one method of birth control. The surest, most radical method. To you, it seems dreadful. To me it seems that, properly applied, it's by no means dreadful. I see nothing wrong with sterilizing a man who has brought eight or ten children into the world. Especially if it helps those eight or ten children to live better.

OF Have you ever been a feminist, Mrs. Gandhi?

IG No, never. I've never had the need to; I've always been able to do what I wanted. On the other hand, my mother was. She considered the fact of being a woman a great disadvantage. She had her reasons.

In her day women lived in seclusion—in almost all Indian states they couldn't even show themselves on the street. Muslim women had to go out in *purdah*, that heavy sheet that covers even the eyes. Hindu woman had to go out in the *doli*, a kind of closed sedan chair like a *catalfaque*. My mother always told me about these things with bitterness and rage. She was the oldest of two sisters and two brothers, and she grew up with her brothers, who were about her age. She grew up, to the age of ten, like a wild colt, and then all of a sudden that was over. They had forced on her her »women's destiny« by saying, »This isn't done, this isn't good, this isn't worthy of a lady.«

At a certain point the family moved to Jaipur, where no woman could avoid the *doli* or *purdah*. They kept her in the house from morning to night, either cooking or doing nothing. She hated doing nothing, she hated to cook. So she became pale and ill, and far from being concerned about her health, my grandfather said, »Who's going to marry her now?' So my grandmother waited for my grandfather to go out, and then she dressed my mother as a man and let her go out riding with her brothers. My grandfather never knew about it, and my mother told me the story without a smile. The memory of these injustices never left her. Until the day she died, my mother continued to fight for the rights of women. She joined all the women's movements of the time; she stirred up a lot of revolts. She was a great woman, a great figure. Women today would like her immensely.

OF And what do you think of them, Mrs. Gandhi? Of their liberation movement, I mean.

IG I think it's good. Good. Because, you see, until today the rights of people have always been put forward by a few individuals acting in the name of the masses. Today instead people no longer want to be represented; each wants to speak for himself and participate directly—it's the same for the Negroes, for the Jews, for women. So not only Negroes and Jews, but also women are part of a great revolt of which one can only approve. Women sometimes go too far, it's true. But it's only when you go too far that others listen. This is also something that I've learned from experience. Didn't they perhaps give us the vote because we went too far? Yes, in the Western world, women have no other choice. In India, no. And I'll explain the reason.

It's a reason that also has to do with my own case. In India, women have never been in hostile competition with men—even in the most distant past, every time a woman emerged as a leader, perhaps as a queen, the people accepted her. As something normal and not exceptional. Let's not forget that in India the symbol of strength is a woman; the goddess Shakti. Not only that—the struggle for independence here has been conducted in equal measure by men and by women. And when we got our independence, no one forgot that. In the Western world, on the other hand, nothing of the kind has ever happened—women have participated, yes, but revolutions have always been made by men alone.

OF Now we come to the personal questions, Mrs. Gandhi. Now I'm ready to ask them. And here's the first: Does a woman like you find herself more at ease with men or with women?

IG For me it's absolutely the same—I treat one and the other in exactly the same way. As persons, that is, not as men and women. But, even here, you have to consider the fact that I've had a very special education, that I'm the daughter of a man like my father and a woman like my mother. I grew up like a boy, also because most of the children who came to our house were boys. With boys, I climbed trees, ran races, and wrestled. I had no complexes of envy or inferiority toward boys. At the same time, however, I liked dolls. I had many dolls. And you know how I played with them? By performing insurrections, assemblies, scenes of arrest. My dolls were almost never babies to be nursed, but men and women who attacked barracks and ended up in prison. Let me explain. Not only my parents, but the whole family was involved in the resistance—my grandfather and grandmother, my uncles and aunts, my cousins of both sexes. So ever so often the police came and took them away, indiscriminately. Well, the fact that they arrested both my father and mother, both my grandfather and grandmother, both an uncle and an aunt, made me accustomed to looking on men and women with the same eyes, on an absolute plane of equality.

OF And then there's that story about Joan of Arc, isn't there?

IG Yes, it's true. It's true that Joan of Arc was my dream as a little girl. I discovered her toward the age of ten or twelve, when I went

to France. I don't remember where I read about her, but I recall that she immediately took on a definite importance for me. I wanted to sacrifice my life for my country. It seems like foolishness and yet ... what happens when we're children is engraved forever in our lives.

OF Yes indeed. And I'd like to understand what it is that's made you what you are, Mrs. Gandhi.

IG The life I've had, the difficulties, the hardships, the pain I've suffered since I was a child. It's a great privilege to have led a difficult life, and many people in my generation have had this privilege—I sometimes wonder if young people today aren't deprived of the dramas that shaped us ... If you only knew what it did to me to have lived in that house where the police were bursting in to take everyone away! I certainly didn't have a happy and serene childhood. I was a thin, nervous, sickly, nervous, little girl. And after the police came, I'd be left alone for weeks, months, to get along as best I could. I learned very soon to get along myself. I began to travel by myself, in Europe, when I was eight years old. At that age I was already on the move between India and Switzerland, Switzerland and France, France and England. Administering my own finances like an adult.

People often ask me: Who has influenced you the most? Your father? Mahatma Gandhi? Yes, my choices were fundamentally influenced by them, by the spirit of equality they infused in me—my obsession for justice comes from my father who, in turn, got it from Mahatma Gandhi. But it's not right to say that my father influenced me more than others, and I wouldn't be able to say whether my personality was formed by my father or my mother or the Mahatma or the friends who were with us. It was all of them; it was a complete thing. It was the very fact that no one ever imposed anything on me or tried to impose himself on the others. No one ever indoctrinated me. I've always discovered things for myself, in marvelous freedom. For instance, my father cared very much about courage, physical courage as well. He despised those who didn't have it. But he never said to me, »I want you to be courageous.« He just smiled with pride every time I did something difficult or won a race with the boys.

OF How much you must have loved that father!

IG Oh, yes! My father was a saint. He was the closest thing to a saint that you can find in a normal man. Because he was so good. So incredibly, unbearably good. I always defended him, as a child, and I think I'm still defending him—his policies at least. Oh, he wasn't at all a politician, in no sense of the word. He was sustained in his work only by a blind faith in India—he was preoccupied in such an obsessive way by the future of India. We understood each other.

OF And Mahatma Gandhi?

IG A lot of mythology arose after his death. But the fact remains that he was an exceptional man, terribly intelligent, with tremendous intuition for people, and a great instinct for what was right. He said that the first president of India ought to be a *harijan* girl, an untouchable. He was so against the class system and the oppression of women that an untouchable woman became for the epitome of purity and benediction. I began to associate with him when he came and went in our house—together with my father and mother he was on the executive committee. After independence I worked with him a lot—in the period when there were the troubles between Hindus and Muslims, he assigned me to take care of the Muslims. To protect them. Ah, yes, he was a great man. However ... between me and Gandhi there was never the understanding there was between me and my father. He was always talking of religion ... He was convinced that was right ... The fact is, we young people didn't agree with him on many things.

OF Let's go back to you, Mrs. Gandhi, to your history as an unusual woman. Is it true that you didn't want to get married?

IG Yes. Until I was about eighteen, yes. But not because I felt like a suffragette, but because I wanted to devote all my energies to the struggle to free India. Marriage, I thought, would have distracted me from the duties I'd imposed on myself. But little, by little I changed my mind, and when I was about eighteen I began to consider the possibility of getting married. Not to have a husband, but to have children. I always wanted to have children—if it had been up to me. I would have had eleven. It was my husband who wanted only two.

And I'll tell you something else. The doctors advised me not to have even one. My health was still not good, and they said that pregnancy might be fatal. If they hadn't said that to me, maybe I wouldn't

have got married. But that diagnosis provoked me, it infuriated me. I answered, »Why do you think I'm getting married if not to have children? I don't want to hear that I can't have children; I want you to tell me what I have to do in order to have children!« They shrugged their shoulders and grumbled that perhaps if I were to put on weight that would protect me a little—being so thin, I would never succeed in remaining pregnant. All right I said, I'll put on weight. And I started having massages, taking cod-liver oil, made up my mind that on the day the engagement was announced I'd be fatter, and I didn't gain an ounce. Then I went to Mussoorie, which is a health resort, and I ignored the doctors' instructions; I invented my own regime and gained weight. Just the opposite of what I'd like now. Now I have the problem of keeping slim. Still I manage. I don't know if you realize I'm a determined woman.

OF Yes, I've realized that. And, if I'm not mistaken, you even showed it by getting married.

IG Yes, indeed. No one wanted that marriage, no one. Even Mahatma Gandhi wasn't happy about it. As for my father ... it's not true that he opposed it, as people say, but he wasn't eager for it. I suppose because the fathers of only daughters would prefer to see them get married as late as possible. Anyway, I like to think it was for that reason. My fiance you see belonged to another religion. He was a Parsi. And this was something nobody could stand—all of India was against us. They wrote to my father, to Gandhi, to me. Insults, death threats. Every day the postman arrived with an enormous sack and dumped the letters on the floor. We even stopped reading them: we let a couple of frids read them and tell us what was in them. »There's a fellow who wants to chop you both into little pieces. There's someone who's ready to marry you even though he already has a wife. He says at least he's a Hindu.« At a certain point the Mahatma got into the controversy—I've just found an article he wrote in his newspaper imploring people to leave him in peace and not be so narrow minded. In any case, I married Mr. Feroze Gandhi. Once I get an idea in my head no one in the world can make me change it.

OF Let's hope the same thing didn't happen when your son Rajiv married an Italian girl.

IG Times have changed: the two of them didn't have to go through the same anguish I did. One day in 1965 Rajiv wrote me from London, where he was studying, and informed me: »You're always asking me about girl, whether I have a special girl, and so forth. Well, I've met a special girl. I haven't proposed yet, but she's the girl I want to marry.« A year later, when I went to England, I met her. And when Rajiv returned to India, I asked him, »Do you still think about her in the same way?« And he said yes. But she couldn't get married until she was twenty-one, and until she was sure she'd like to live in India. So we waited for her to be twenty-one, and she came to India, and said she liked India, and we announced the engagement, and two months later they were husband and wife. Sonia is almost completely an Indian by now, even though she doesn't always wear saris. But even I, when I was a student in London, often wore Western clothes, and yet I'm the most Indian Indian I know. If you only knew, for instance, how much I enjoy being a grandmother! Do you know I'm twice a grandmother? Rajiv and Sonia have had a boy and a girl. The girl was just born.

OF Mrs. Gandhi, your husband has now been dead for some years. Have you ever thought of remarrying?

IG No, no. Maybe I would have considered the problem if I'd met someone with whom I'd have liked to live. But I never met this someone and ... No, even if I had met him, I'm sure I wouldn't have got married again. Why should I get married now that my life is so full? No, no it's out of the question.

OF Besides I can't imagine you as a housewife.

IG You're wrong! Oh, you're wrong! I was a perfect housewife. Being a mother has always been the job I liked best. Absolutely. To be a mother, a housewife, never cost me any sacrifice—I savored every minute of those years. My sons ... I was crazy about my sons and I think I've done a super job in bringing them up. Today in fact they're two fine and serious men. No, I've never understood women who, because of their children pose as victims and don't allow themselves any other activities. It's not at all hard to reconcile the two things if you organize your time intelligently. Even when my sons were little, I was working. I was the welfare worker for the Indian Council for

Child Welfare. I'll tell you a story. Rajiv was only four years old at that time, and was going to kindergarten. One day the mother of one of his little friends came to see us and said in a sugary voice, »Oh it must be so sad for you to have no time to spend with your little boy!« Rajiv roared like a lion: »My mother spends more time with me than you spend with your little boy! Your little boy says you always leave home alone so you can play bridge.

OF So there was a long period in your life when you stayed out of politics. Didn't you believe in it any more?

IG Politics ... You see, it depends on what kind of politics. What we did during my father's generation was a duty. And it was beautiful because its goal was the conquest of freedom. What we do now, on the other hand ... Don't think I'm crazy about this kind of politics. Don't think I'm crazy about this kind of politics. It's no accident that I've done everything to keep my sons out of it, and so far I've succeeded. After independence I retired immediately from politics. My children needed me, and I liked my job as a social worker. I said, »I've done my share. Leave the rest to the others.« I went back into politics when it was clear that things weren't going as they should have in my party. I was always arguing. I argued with everyone—with my father, with the leaders I had known since I was a child ... and one day, it was in 1955, one of them exclaimed, »You do nothing but criticize! If you think you can correct things, correct them. Go ahead, why don't you try? Well, I could never resist a challenge, so I tried. But I thought it was something temporary, and my father who had never tried to involve me in his activities thought so too. People who say it was her father who prepared for the post of prime minister, it was her father who launched her, are wrong. When he asked me to help him, I really didn't suspect the consequences.

OF And yet everything began because of him.

IG Obviously. He was prime minister, and to take care of his home, to be his hostess, automatically meant to have my hands in politics—to meet people, to know their games, their secrets. It also meant to fall sooner or later into the trap of experience. And this came in 1957, a weekend when my father had to go north for a rally. I went with him, as always, and when we got to Chamba, we discovered that the lady

who had charge of his schedule had also set up a meeting for him someplace else—for Monday morning. So if my father had given up the rally in Chamba, we'd have lost the elections in Chamba; if he gave up the one in the other city which was near Pathankot, we'd lose the elections there. »And if I went? I suggested. »If I spoke and suggested that you couldn't be in two places at once? He answered it was impossible. I'd have had to cover three hundred miles of bad roads through the hills. And it was already two o'clock Monday morning. So I said good night and murmured, »A pity, it seemed to me a good idea.« At five-thirty when I woke up I found a note under the door. It was from my father. It said, »A plane will take you to Pathankot. From there it's only three hours by car. You'll arrive in time. Good luck.« I arrived in time and held the rally. It was a success and I was asked for others. That was the beginning of ... everything.

OF Were you still married at that time, or were you already separated?

IG But I always stayed married to my husband! Always, until the day he died! It's not true that we were separated! Look, the truth is otherwise and ... why not say it for once and for all? My husband lived in Lucknow. My father lived in Delhi, of course. So I shuttled between Delhi and Lucknow and ... naturally, if my husband needed me on days when I was in Delhi, I ran back to Lucknow. But if it was my father who needed me, on days when I was in Lucknow, I ran back to Delhi. No, it wasn't a comfortable situation. After all there's quite a distance between Delhi and Lucknow. And ... yes, my husband got angry. And he quarreled. We quarreled. We quarreled a lot. It's true. We were two equally strong types, equally pigheaded—neither of us wanted to give in. And

... I like to think those quarrels made us better, that they enlivened our life, because without them we would have had a normal life, yes, but banal and boring. We didn't deserve a normal, banal, and boring life. After all, ours had not been a forced marriage and he had chosen me ... I mean he was the one to choose me rather than I choosing him ... I don't know if I loved him as much as he loved me when we became engaged but ... Then love grew, in me as well, it became something great and ... well, you must understand him!

It wasn't easy for him to be my father's son-in-law! It wouldn't

have been easy for anybody. Let's not forget that he too was a deputy in Parliament! At a certain point, he gave in. He decided to leave Lucknow and live in Delhi, in my father's house with him and me. But, being a deputy in Parliament, how could he meet people in the house of the prime minister? He realized that right away, and so he had to find himself another small house, and this wasn't convenient either. To be a little here and a little there, a little with us and a little alone ... No, life wasn't easy for him either.

OF Mrs. Gandhi, have you ever had regrets? Were you ever afraid of giving in?

IG No. Never. Fear, any fear, is a waste of time. Like regrets. And everything I've done, I've done because I wanted to do it. In doing it, I've plunged in headlong, always believing in it. Whether when I was a child and fought the British in the Monkey Brigade, or when I was a girl and wanted to have children, or when I was a woman and devoted myself to my father, making my husband angry. Each time I stayed involved all the way in my decision, and took the consequences. Even if I was fighting for things that didn't concern India. Oh, I remember how angry I was when Japan invaded China! I immediately joined a committee to collect money and medicines, I immediately signed up for the International Brigade, I plunged headlong into propaganda against Japan ... A person like me doesn't have fear first and regrets afterward.

OF Besides, you haven't made mistakes. There are those who say that, having won this war, no one will be able to dislodge you and you'll stay in power for at least twenty years.

IG I instead haven't the slightest idea how long I'll stay, and I don't even care to know, because I don't care if I remain prime minister. I'm only interested in doing a good job as long as I'm capable and as for as long as I don't get tired. I'm certainly not tired—work doesn't tire people, it's getting bored that's tiring. But nothing lasts forever, and no one can predict what will happen to me in the near or distant future. I'm not ambitious. Not a bit. I know I'll astonish everyone by talking like this, but it's God's truth. Honors have never tempted me and I've never sought them. As for the job of prime minister, I like it, yes. But no more than I've liked other work I've done as an

adult. A little while ago I said that my father was not a politician. I, instead, think I am. But not in the case of being interested in a political career—rather in the sense that I think it necessary to strive to build a certain India, the India I want. The India I want, I'll never tire of repeating, is a more just and less poor India, one entirely free of foreign influences. If I thought the country was already marching toward these objectives, I'd give up politics immediately and retire as prime minister.

OF To do what?

IG Anything. As I told you, I fall in love with anything I do and I always try to do it well. And so? Being prime minister isn't the only job in life! As far as I'm concerned, I could live in a village and be satisfied. When I'm not governing my country any more, I'll go back to taking care of children. Or else I'll start studying anthropology—it's a science that's always interested me very much, also in relation to the problem of poverty. Or else I'll go back to studying history—at Oxford I took my degree in history. Or else ... I don't know, I'm fascinated by the tribal communities. I might bust myself with them.

Listen, I certainly won't have an empty life! And the future doesn't frighten me, even if it threatens to be full of other difficulties. I'm trained to difficulties; difficulties can't be eliminated from life. Individuals will always have them, countries will always have them ... The only thing is to accept them, if possible overcome them, otherwise to come to terms with them. It's all right to fight, yes, but only when it's possible. When it's possible, it's better to stoop to compromise, without resisting and without complaining. People who complain are selfish. When I was young, I was very selfish, now not any more. Now I don't get upset by unpleasant things, I don't play the victim, and I'm always ready to come to terms with life.

OF Mrs. Gandhi, are you a happy woman?

IG I don't know. Happiness is such a fleeting point of view—there's no such thing as continual happiness. There are only moments of happiness—from contentment to ecstasy. And if by happiness you mean ecstasy ... Yes, I've known ecstasy, and it's a blessing to be able to say it because those who can say it are very few. But ecstasy doesn't last long and is seldom ever repeated. If by happiness you

mean an ordinary contentment, then yes—I'm fairly contented. Not satisfied—contented. Satisfied is a word I use only in reference to my country, and I'll never be satisfied for my country. For this reason I go on taking difficult paths, and between a paved road and a footpath that goes up the mountain, I choose the footpath. To the great irritation of my bodyguards.

OF Thank you, Mrs. Gandhi.

IG Thank you. And best wishes. As I always say, I do not wish you an easy time, but I wish you that whatever difficulty you may have, you will overcome it.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

Karachi, April 1972

ZULFIKAR ALI BHUTTO I must tell you why I was so eager to meet you. First of all, because you're the only journalist who has written the truth about Mujib Rahman. I enjoyed your article very much. And then because ... look, it was much less enjoyable to read that I had something to do with the March suppression in Dacca.

ORIANA FALLACI Something to do with it? Mr. President, in Dacca they come right out and say it was you who wanted the massacre. You who wanted the arrest of Mujib. And that for this reason you stayed in the city until the morning of March 26.

ZAB To enjoy the spectacle from the windows of my suite on the top floor of the Hotel Intercontinental, drinking whiskey and perhaps playing the lyre like Nero. But how dare they try to discredit me by an incident so barbarous and stupid? The whole business was conducted in such a stupid way. They let all the leaders escape to India and then they took it out on the poor wretches who counted for nothing. Only Mujib was arrested. Let's be logical. I would have done it with more intelligence, more scientifically, less brutally. Tear gas, rubber bullets, and I would have arrested all the leaders. Oh, only a disgusting drunkard like ex-President Yahya Khan could have sullied himself with an operation carried out so badly and bloodily.

Anyway, what interest would I have had in wanting such madness? Do you know that Yahya Khan's first victim was not to have been Mujib but myself? Many people in my party were in prison, and at the end of 1970, November 5, 1970, to be exact, he had said to Mujib, »Should I arrest Bhutto or not?« Look, the only reason why he reversed his schedule was that in West Pakistan he couldn't control the situation as in East Pakistan. Besides Mujib has never been intelligent—he let himself be backed into a corner.

But, to conclude, the tragedy of March 25 caught me by surprise. Yahya Khan fooled even me. He had given me an appointment for the following day. And, days later, General Mohd Umar revealed to me that he'd resorted to this stratagem so that I'd stay in Dacca and »see the efficiency of the army.« I give you my word of honor that all this is true.

OF All right, Mr. President. But I wonder if history will ever have the exact version of what happened that terrible night and in the months that followed. Mujib Rahman ...

ZAB Mujib, as you've seen, is a congenital liar. He can't help telling lies—it's something stronger than he. Mujib talks at random, depending on his mood and the disorders of his sick mind. For instance, he says there were three million dead. He's mad, mad! And, they're all mad, the press included, who repeat after him, »Three million dead, three million dead!« The Indians had let out the figure of one million. He came along and doubled it. Then tripled it. It's a characteristic of the man—he'd done the same for the hurricane. Look, according to Indian journalists, the dead that night were between sixty and seventy thousand. According to certain missionaries, there were thirty thousand. According to what I've been able to find out so far, there must have been something like fifty thousand. Mind you, too many. Even if the action was morally justified. I'm not trying to minimize things; I'm trying to bring them back to reality—there's quite a difference between fifty thousand and three million.

The same goes for the refugees. Mrs. Gandhi says ten million. It's obvious she started with that figure in order to legalize her offensive and invade East Pakistan. But when we invited the United Nations to check, the Indians were opposed. Why were they opposed? If the figure were exact, they shouldn't have been afraid of its being verified. The fact is, it's not a question of ten million but of two. On the number of dead I may even be wrong, but now on the number of refugees. We know who left the country. And many were Bengalis from West Bengal, sent from Calcutta. It was she who sent them—Mrs. Gandhi. Since the Bengalis all look alike, who was to know?

And now let's talk about the other story: the women raped and killed. I don't believe it. Certainly there was no lack of excesses, but

General Tikka Khan says that in those months he often invited the population to report abuses to him directly. He made his appeal with loudspeakers, and still he came to know of only four cases. Shall we multiply by ten and make it forty? We're still far from the senseless figures spread around by Mujib and la Gandhi.

OF No, Mr. President. Go ahead and multiply by a thousand and even by ten thousand, and you'll come closer. If Mujib is talking at random when he says three million dead, Tikka Khan is joking when he says four cases. Mass atrocities took place, and how! I'm speaking as one who saw the corpses in Dacca. And by the way, you just used an awful expression, Mr. President. You said, »Morally justifiable.« Or rather, »justified.« Did I understand you? Did you really mean to say that this massacre was morally justified?

ZAB Every government, every country, has the right to exercise force when necessary. For instance, in the name of unity. You can't build without destroying. To build a country, Stalin was obliged to use force and kill. Mao Tse-tung was obliged to use force and kill. To mention only two recent cases, without raking over the whole history of the world. Yes, there are circumstances where a bloody suppression is justifiable and justified. In March the unity of Pakistan depended on the suppression of the secessionists. But to carry it out with such brutality on the people instead of on those responsible wasn't necessary. That's not the way to convince poor people who've been told that with the Six Points there'll be no more hurricanes, no more floods, no more hunger. I spoke out against such methods more emphatically than anyone else, and when no one dared do so. Nevertheless you've now put Tikka Khan, the general who directed the massacre, at the head of the army. Right?

ZAB Tikka Khan was a soldier doing a soldier's job. He went to East Pakistan with precise orders and came back by precise orders. He did what he was ordered to do, though he wasn't always in agreement, and I picked him because I know he'll follow my orders with the same discipline. And he won't try to stick his nose in politics. I can't destroy the whole army, and anyway his bad reputation for the events in Dacca is exaggerated. There's only one man really responsible for those events—Yahya Khan. Both he and his advisers were

so drunk with power and corruption they'd even forgotten the honor of the army. They thought of nothing but acquiring beautiful cars, building beautiful homes, making friends with bankers, and sending money abroad. Yahya Khan wasn't interested in the government of the country, he was interested in power for its own sake and nothing else. What can you say of a leader who starts drinking as soon as he wakes up and doesn't stop until he goes to bed? You've no idea how painful it was to deal with him. He was really Jack the Ripper.

OF Where is he now, Yahya Khan? What do you intend to do with him?

ZAB He's under house arrest in a bungalow near Rawalpindi, a bungalow that belongs to the government. Yes, I have a big problem on my hands with him. I've set up a war commission to study the responsibilities inherent in the recent conflict. I'm waiting to see the results, and that'll help me to decide. If the commission finds him guilty, I think there'll be a trial. The defeat we suffered is his—Mrs. Gandhi can rightly boast of having won a war, but if she won it, she should first of all thank Yahya Khan and his gang of illiterate psychopaths. Even to get him to reason was an impossible task—it only made you lose your temper.

In April, after that fine business in Dacca, he sent for me. He looked satisfied, sure of himself, by now convinced he had the situation in hand. He offered me a drink. »Well, you politicians are really finished,« he said. Then he said that not only Mujib but I too was considered an agitator, I too was preaching against the unity of Pakistan. »I'm always under pressure to arrest you, Bhutto.« I got so angry I lost all control. I answered that I would not let myself be intimidated by him, that his methods had led us to disaster; I threw away the glass of whiskey and left the room. There I was stopped by General Pirzada, who took me by the arm. »No, come on, calm down, have a seat, go back in.« I calmed down and went back. I tried to explain to him that there was a great difference between me and Mujib; he was a secessionist and I wasn't. A useless task. Instead of listening to me, he went on drinking, drinking. Then he got nasty and ...

OF Mr. President, can we go back a moment and try to understand how you arrived at that terrible March, morally justifiable or not?

ZAB Look here. On January 27 I had gone to Dacca to confer with Mujib. If you wanted to discuss matters with him, you had to make a pilgrimage to Dacca—he never condescended to come to Rawalpindi. I went even though it was just that day that my sister's husband had died; he was to be buried in the ancestral tomb in Lakarna. And my sister was offended. In the elections, Mujib had obtained a majority in East Pakistan and I had obtained one in West Pakistan. But now he was insisting on the Six Points and we had to come to an agreement—Yahya Kahn was demanding that within four months we work out the Constitution, otherwise the Assembly would be dissolved and new elections called. To make Mujib understand this was a desperate undertaking—you can't expect brains from someone who doesn't have them. I argued, I explained, and he kept repeating dully and monotonously: »The Six Points. Do you accept the Six Points?« Good Lord, on the first, on the second, on the third, I was even ready to negotiate. But the fourth anticipated that each province would make its own foreign trade and foreign aid arrangements any way it liked. What would happen to the sovereignty of the state, the unity of the country? Besides that, it was known that Mujib wanted to separate East Pakistan from West Pakistan and that he had been keeping up connections with the Indians since 1966. So in January our talks had been interrupted and we come to March.

In the middle of March, Yahya Khan came to Karachi and told me he was going to Dacca—did I want to go too? Yes, I answered, if Mujib were ready to talk to me. The telegram informing me that Mujib was ready to talk to me was sent from Dacca by Yahya Khan himself. I left on March 19. On the twentieth I met Yahya and on the twenty-first I met Mujib, together with Yahya. A surprise: Mujib was all sweetness and light with Yahya. »I've come to reach an agreement with you, Mr. President, and I want nothing to do with Mr. Bhutto. I'll tell the press that I have met with the president and that Mr. Bhutto was there by chance,« he said in a ceremonious tone. And Yahya: »No, no, Mujib. You must speak for yourself.« And Mujib: »So many people are dead in the hurricane, so many people are dead.« That's the way he is. All of a sudden a sentence engraves itself on his sick mind, even a sentence that has nothing to do with what you're talking

about, and he goes on repeating it like an obsession. At a certain point I lost patience. How was I responsible for the hurricane? Had I been the one to send the hurricane? Mujib's answer was to get up and say that he had to leave to go to a funeral. And ... oh, it's not worth the trouble.

OF Yes, it is. Please Mr. President, go on.

ZAB The fact is that when you talk about Mujib, everything seems so incredible. I don't understand how the world can take him seriously. Well, I got up too, to escort him to the anteroom, though he didn't want me to. In the anteroom there were three people: Yahya's aide-de-camp, his military secretary, and his political butcher, General Umar. Mujib began screaming, »Go away, everybody go away! I have to talk to Mr. Bhutto!« The three of them went out. He sat down and then: »Brother, brother! We must come to an agreement, brother! For the love of God, I implore you!« Astonished, I took him outside so no one would hear him. Outside, and in a particularly excited tone, he declared that I must take West Pakistan for myself, he East Pakistan, and that he had set up everything for a secret meeting. After dark he would send for me. I told him I didn't like this business. I hadn't come to Dacca to meet him like a thief under a banana tree and in the dark, I didn't intend to dismember Pakistan, and if he wanted secession, he had only to propose it to the Assembly, counting on his absolute majority. But it was like talking to a wall. I had to accept the compromise of resuming talks through our spokesmen. Which is what happened—without leading to anything, of course. In these days he was more deranged than ever—he lost his head over nothing. And so we arrived at the twenty-fifth.

OF You didn't notice anything suspicious on March 25?

ZAB Yes. I felt a certain uneasiness, a strange sensation, which had come to a head. Every evening I went to Yahya to report that Mujib and I weren't making any progress, and Yahya showed no interest. He looked away or complained about the television or grumbled because he couldn't listen to his favorite songs—his records hadn't arrived from Rawalpindi. Then the morning of the twenty-fifth he said something that left me disconcerted: There's no need to meet Mujib today. We'll see him tomorrow, you and I.« Still, I said, »All

right« and at eight in the evening I reported everything to Mujib's envoy. And he exclaimed, »That son of a bitch has already left.« I didn't believe it. I telephoned the presidential residence and asked to speak with Yahya. They told me he couldn't be disturbed; he was at supper with General Tikka Khan. I telephoned Tikka Khan. They told me he couldn't be disturbed; he was at supper with Yahya Khan. Only then did I begin to worry and, suspecting a trick, I went to supper. Then to sleep. I was awakened by gunfire and by friends running in from other rooms. I ran to the window, and as God is my witness, I wept. I wept and said, »My country is finished.«

OF Why? What did you see from that window?

ZAB I didn't see an indiscriminate killing, but the soldiers were trying to demolish the offices of *People*, an opposition newspaper that had its offices right in front of the Intercontinental. With their loudspeakers they were ordering people to leave. Those who came out were put to one side under the threat of machine guns. Other groups, on the sidewalk, were being kept at bay with machine guns and the hotel was surrounded by tanks. Anyone who tried to take shelter in it fell into the hands of soldiers. That's all. That Mujib had been arrested I found out at eight in the morning, when I left. How did I take it? I was glad he was alive and I thought they might have mistreated him a little. Then I thought that his arrest might help to reach a compromise. They wouldn't keep him in prison more than a month or two, and in the meantime we'd be able to bring back law and order.

OF Mr. President, Mujib told you, »You take West Pakistan and I'll take East Pakistan.« That's just how it's turned out. Do you hate him for this?

ZAB Not at all. And I don't say it in the Indian fashion, that is, hypocritically. I say it sincerely because, instead of hatred, I feel great compassion for him. He is so incapable, conceited, lacking in culture, common sense, everything. He's in no position to resolve any problem: either politically, or socially, or economically, or internationally. He only knows how to shout and put on a lot of airs. I've known him since 1954 and I've never taken him seriously—I understood from the very first moment that there was no depth to him, no preparation, that he was an agitator breathing a lot of fire and with an absolute lack of

ideas. The only idea he's ever had in his head is the idea of secession. Toward someone like that, how can you feel anything except pity?

In 1961, during a trip to Dacca, I saw him again. He was in the lobby of my hotel; I went up to him and said, »Hello, Mujib, let's have a cup of tea.« He was just out of prison, he seemed full of bitterness, and this time we were almost able to talk quietly. He said how East Pakistan was exploited by West Pakistan, treated like a colony, sucked of its blood—and it was very true; I'd even written the same thing in a book. But he didn't draw any conclusions, he didn't explain that the fault was in the economic system and in the regime, he didn't speak of socialism and struggle. On the contrary, he declared that the people weren't prepared for struggle, that no one could oppose the military, that it was the military that had to resolve the injustices. He had no courage. He never has had. Does he really call himself, to journalists, the »Tiger of the Bengal«?

OF He even says that at his trial he refused to defend himself and that his behavior after his arrest was heroic. He was in a cell where there wasn't even a mattress to sleep on.

ZAB Come on now! He wasn't in a cell, he was in an apartment that's put at the disposal of important political detainees. In Lyallpur, near Mianwali, the Punjab prison. True, he wasn't allowed to read the newspapers and listen to the radio, but he had the entire library of the governor of Punjab at his disposal and he lived quite well indeed. At a certain point they even gave him a Bengali cook because he wanted to eat Bengali dishes. At his trial he defended himself, and how! He asked for the services of two eminent lawyers: Kamal Hussain and A. K. Brohi, his legal adviser and friend. Kamal Hussain was in prison but not Brohi, and to have Brohi means to have the best of the best. I'll tell you something else. At first Brohi didn't want to accept but Yahya Khan forced him, and he then presented himself at the trial with four assistants, four other lawyers. Paid for by the state, naturally. It cost a fortune, that trial. Well, Brohi has only one fault: he's a bit of a chatterbox. So every time he came back to Karachi from Lyallpur, he told about the conversations he'd had with Mujib and said it would be difficult to find him guilty—Mujib had put things in such a convincing way as regards his respect for the unity

of Pakistan and his devotion to Yahya Khan. Mujib never tired of repeating that Yahya Khan was a fine man, a great patriot, and that he had been led astray by me—the only one responsible for his arrest. This was confirmed to me by General Pirzada, to whom I said, »Give him to me and you'll see that he'll call me a fine man, a great patriot, and insult you.« Just what was to happen.

OF But he was convicted and sentenced.

ZAB No. The special tribunal found him guilty and from then on it was up to Yahya Khan, as administrator of martial law, to decide on the sentence, which could have been five years or life imprisonment or the death penalty. Yahya decided nothing—the war had broken out and he had plenty of other things on his mind.

OF Mujib told me they had dug his grave.

ZAB Do you know what the grave was? An air-raid shelter. They had dug it all around the walls of the prison. Poor Mujib. Being so fearful, he mistakes everything for a death notice. But I don't believe that Yahya was thinking of killing him. On December 27, when I was sworn in as the new president of the Republic, I met with Yahya Khan. He was desperate, drunk, he looked like the portrait of Dorian Gray. He told me: »The greatest mistake of my life has been not to execute Mujib Rahman. Do it yourself, if you like.

OF And you?

ZAB I said that I wouldn't, and after thinking it over, I got ready to free Mujib. Having been condemned by everyone for the supposed atrocities of the army, Pakistan needed some sympathy—I thought the act of clemency would get much sympathy. Besides I thought the gesture would accelerate the return of war prisoners. So I immediately sent an order to Lyallpur to bring Mujib to me in Rawalpindi. When the order arrived, Mujib got frightened. He began moaning that they'd come to take him out and execute him; he didn't calm down even during the journey or when he entered the bungalow I'd put at his disposal. A beautiful bungalow for important guests. When I arrived with a radio, a television set, and a bundle of clothes, he assailed me: »What are you doing here?« I explained I'd become president and he immediately changed his tone. He threw his arms around my neck, he told me this was the most wonderful news he'd

ever had in his life, that God was always sending me to save him ... (The other time too I'd been the one to get him out.) Then just as I'd foreseen, he began attacking Yahya, pausing only to ask me if he could consider himself free. I saw him again twice before he went to Dacca by way of London. And both times he took out his book of the Koran, he swore on the Koran that he'd keep up relations with West Pakistan. He swore it also on the plane, when I saw him off at three in the morning, and I almost succeeded in being moved. He swore and embraced me, he thanked me, he repeated his eternal gratitude: »Don't worry, Mr. President, I'll be back soon. I want to know your beautiful country better, and you'll see me again soon, soon.«

OF Are you ever sorry you freed him?

ZAB No, never. He's a Pakistani like myself, whatever he may say. And more than once we've suffered the same accusations, the same persecutions—underneath it all there's a bond between us. I always remember him as I saw him one day in January, when he clutched my arm and sobbed and begged, »Save me, save me.« I feel genuine pity for him. Besides, poor Mujib, he won't last long. Eight months, at most a year—then he'll be swallowed up by the chaos he himself wanted. You see, Bangladesh today is a satellite of India. But it will soon become a satellite of Russia, and Mujib isn't a communist. Even if he were to manage all right, which is most unlikely, at that point he'd find the Maoists on his back, who are the real victors in this war. He has them on his back already.

Politically the Mukti Bahini count for nothing, lacking as they do any ideological preparation, any indoctrination, any discipline. Then socially speaking, they're a disturbance—they only know how to fire in the air, frighten people, steal, yell *Joi Bangla*. And you can't run a country by yelling *Joi Bangla*. The Bengali Maoists, on the other hand ... well, they certainly don't represent a very refined product—at most they've read half of Mao's little red book. But they're an articulate force and don't let themselves be used by the Indians, and I don't even think they're against the unity of Pakistan. They'll end up having the upper hand. Good Lord, it would take a genius to cope with such complex and frightful problems—just imagine Mujib coping with them. And then that's such an unfortunate land. Hurricanes,

floods, storms. One would say it's born under an unlucky star, and let's not forget it's always been the dregs of the world. You should have seen Dacca in 1947 and even in 1954! A dirty village where there weren't even streets. Now that everything is destroyed, thanks also to the dynamite of the Mukti Bahini, Bangladesh ...

OF I'm surprised you say Bangladesh.

ZAB Obviously I say it with anger and scorn, Obviously for me it's still East Pakistan. But, rightly or wrongly, and even though it's a result of a military action by the Indians, fifty countries have recognized it. I must accept it. I'm even ready to recognize it, if India gives us back our prisoners, if the massacre of the Biharis ends, if the federalists aren't persecuted. If we're to reunite ourselves in a federation, we must first establish diplomatic relations. And I think that within ten or fifteen years Pakistan and Bangladesh can be reunited in a federation. Can and should, otherwise who will fill the vacuum? West Bengal, which wants to separate from India? There's nothing in common between the East Bengalis and the West Bengalis. Between us and the East Bengalis, on the other hand, there's religion in common. The Partition of 1947 was a very good thing.

OF Very good! To create a country with two stumps two thousand kilometers apart and with India in the middle?

ZAB Those two stumps stayed together for twenty-five years, despite all the mistakes that were made. A state isn't only a territorial or geographical concept. When the flag is the same, the national anthem the same, the religion the same, distance is no problem. At the time when the Mongols unified India, the Muslims of this part took a hundred days to reach the other part. Now all they needed were two hours by air. Do you see what I mean?

OF No, Mr. President. I understand Indira Gandhi better when she says that the Partition of 1947 was wrong and that wars of religion are ridiculous in the 1970s.

ZAB Mrs. Gandhi has only one dream: to take over the whole sub-continent, to subjugate us. She'd like a confederation so as to make Pakistan disappear from the face of the earth, and that's why she says we're brothers, and so forth. We're not brothers. We never have been. Our religions go too deep into our souls, into our ways of life. Our cultures are different, our attitudes are different. From the day

they're born, to the day they die, a Hindu and a Muslim are subject to laws and customs that have no points of contact. Even their ways of eating and drinking are different. They're two strong and irreconcilable faiths. It's shown by the fact that neither of the two has ever succeeded in reaching a compromise with the other, a *modus vivendi*. Only dictatorial monarchies, foreign invasions, from the Mongols to the British, have succeeded in holding us together by a kind of Pax Romana. We've never arrived at a harmonious relationship.

You see, the Hindus are not the mild creatures that Mrs. Gandhi would like you to think. They have respect for their sacred cows, but not for Muslims. They've always mistreated and humiliated us. I'll never forget an episode that happened to me in 1944. I was on holiday with my parents in Kashmir, I was running up and down a hill, as boys do, and at a certain point I got very thirsty. So I went up to a man who was selling water and asked him for a drink. The man filled the cup, started to hand it to me, then stopped and said, »Are you a Hindu or a Muslim?« I hesitated to answer—I desperately wanted that water. Finally I said, »I'm a Muslim.« Then the man poured the water on the ground. Tell that to Mrs. Gandhi.

OF You two really can't stand each other, can you?

ZAB I don't even respect her. To me she's a mediocre woman with a mediocre intelligence. There's nothing great about her; only the country she governs is great. I mean, it's that throne that makes her seem tall, though actually she's very small. And also the name she bears. Believe me, if she were prime minister of Ceylon, she'd be nothing but another Mrs. Bandaranaike. And if she were prime minister of Israel ... Come now, I wouldn't dare compare her to Golda Meir. Golda is far too superior. She has an acute mind, sound judgment, and she goes through much more difficult crises than those of Mrs. Gandhi. Also she came to power by her own talent. Mrs. Bandaranaike, instead, got there by the simple fact of being Bandaranaike's widow, and Mrs. Gandhi by the simple fact of being Nehru's daughter. Without having Nehru's light. With all her saris, the red spot on her forehead, her little smile, she'll never succeed in impressing me.

She's never impressed me, ever since the day I met her in London. We were both attending a lecture and she was taking notes

so insistently and pedantically that I said to her, »Are you taking notes or writing a thesis?« And speaking of theses, you know I can't believe she succeeded in getting that degree in history at Oxford. I completed the three-year course at Oxford in two years. And in three years she wasn't able to finish the course.

OF Aren't you being a little excessive, a little unjust? Do you really think she could last so long if she wasn't worth something? Or are you obliged to think she's worth nothing because she's a woman?

ZAB No, no. I have nothing against women as heads of state, though I don't think women make better heads of state than men. My opinion of Mrs. Gandhi is impersonal and objective. It's not even influenced by the fact that she behaves so deplorably by not returning our war prisoners and not respecting the Geneva Convention. That's how I've always seen her: a diligent drudge of a schoolgirl, a woman devoid of initiative and imagination. All right, she's better today than when she was studying at Oxford or taking notes in London. Power has given her self-confidence and nothing succeeds like success. But it's a question of success out of proportion to her merits; if India and Pakistan were to become confederated countries, I'd have no trouble in carrying off the post from Mrs. Gandhi. I'm not afraid of intellectual confrontations with her. Having said that, I'm ready to meet her when and where she likes. Even in New Delhi. Yes, I'm even ready to go to New Delhi, like Talleyrand after the Congress of Vienna. The only idea that bothers me is that of being escorted by an honor guard from the Indian army and physical contact with the lady herself. It irritates me. God! Don't make me think of it. Tell me instead: what did Mrs. Gandhi say about me?

OF She told me you're an unbalanced man, that today you say one thing and tomorrow another, that one never understands what's on your mind.

ZAB Ah, yes? I'll answer that right away. The only thing I accept from the philosopher John Locke is this statement: »Consistency is a virtue of small minds.«¹ In other words, I think a basic concept should

1. Actually, it was Emerson who said it: »A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.« (Translator's note.)

remain firm but, within that basic concept, one should be able to move back and forth. Now to one pole, now to the other. An intellectual should never cling to a single and precise idea—he should be elastic. Otherwise he sinks into a monologue, into fanaticism. A politician, the same. Politics is movement per se—a politician should be mobile. He should sway now to right and now to left; he should come up with contradictions, doubts. He should change continually, test things, attack from every side so as to single out his opponent's weak point and strike at it. Woe to him if he focuses immediately on his basic concept, woe if he reveals and crystallizes it. Woe if he blocks the maneuver by which to throw his opponent on the carpet. Apparent inconsistency is the prime virtue of the intelligent man and astute politician. If Mrs. Gandhi doesn't understand that, she doesn't understand the beauty of her profession. Now her father understood it.

OF Indira Gandhi says her father wasn't a politician, he was a saint.

ZAB Oh, Mrs. Gandhi is wrong about her father! Nehru instead was a great politician—she should have half her father's talent! Look, even though he was against the principle of Pakistan, I've always admired that man. When I was young I was actually enthralled by him. Only later did I understand that he was a spellbinder with many faults, vain, ruthless, and that he didn't have the class of a Stalin or a Churchill or a Mao Tse-tung. And what else, what else did Mrs. Gandhi say?

OF She said it was you Pakistanis who started the war.

ZAB Ridiculous. Everyone knows they were the ones to attack us. November 26, on the eastern front. East Pakistan was perhaps not Pakistan? Let's be serious. If someone invades Palermo, don't you conclude that Italy has been attacked? If someone invades Marseilles, don't you conclude that France has been attacked? Mrs. Gandhi pretends to forget that our counterattack in Kashmir, disputed territory, took place only on December 3. I remember seeing Yahya on November 29 and reproaching him for our failure to counterattack. »You're behaving as though nothing has happened in the east. By delaying action, you're playing India's game, you're making people believe that East Pakistan and West Pakistan aren't the

same country,« I told him. But he didn't listen to me. Four times he changed his orders for a counterattack. The fourth time our officers and soldiers were beating their heads against the tanks in desperation. And Dacca? Let's withdraw into Dacca, I said; we'll make a fortress out of it and hold out for ten months, a year—the whole world will be on our side. But he was only concerned that the Indians not conquer a little territory and plant the flag of Bangladesh. And when he ordered Niaza to surrender ... God! I could have died a thousand times and felt better. I was in New York, I remember. He'd sent me there as a tourist and I'd found myself at that incredible session of the UN ...

OF And you'd made that scene.

ZAB A real scene, I admit. But I was convulsed with rage, with disgust. The arrogance of the Indians. The fear shown by the great powers, who wanted only to placate India. I wasn't able to control my passion, and I made that speech in which I told them all to go to hell. I wept, too. Yes, I often weep. I always weep when I discover something disgraceful, unjust. I'm very emotional.

OF Emotional, unpredictable, complicated, and ... much talked about. It seems to me the moment has come to take up your personality, Mr. President. Let's talk a little about this man who is very rich and yet a socialist, lives like a Westerner and yet has two wives ...

ZAB There are many conflicts in me—I'm aware of that. I try to reconcile them, to overcome them, but I don't succeed and I remain this strange mixture of Asia and Europe. I have a layman's education and a Muslim's upbringing. My mind is Western and my soul Eastern. As for my two wives, what can I do about it? They married me off at thirteen, to my cousin. I was thirteen and she was twenty-three. I didn't even know what it meant to have a wife, and when they tried to explain it to me, I went out of my mind with rage. With fury. I didn't want a wife, I wanted to play cricket. I was very fond of cricket. To calm me down, they had to give me two new cricket bags. When the ceremony was over, I ran off to play cricket. There are so many things I must change in my country! And I was fortunate. They married my playmate off at the age of eleven to a woman of thirty-two. He always said to me, »Lucky you!«

When I fell in love with my second wife, I was twenty-three. She was also studying in England, and though she was an Iranian, that is, from a country where polygamy is the custom, it was hard for me to persuade her to marry me. I didn't have many arguments except for the two words, »So what, dammit!« No, the idea of divorcing my first wife never went through my head. Not only because she's my cousin, but because I have a responsibility toward her. Her whole life has been ruined by this absurd marriage to a boy, by the absurd custom in which we've been raised. She lives in my house in Larkana; we see each other every so often. She's almost always alone. She hasn't even had children—my four children are born of my second marriage. I've spent little time with her—as soon as I was an adolescent I went to the West to study. A story of injustice. I'll do everything I can to discourage polygamy—besides it causes no small economic problem. Often the wives are separated in different houses or cities, as in my case. And not everyone can afford it, as I can. Though I'm not so rich as you say.

OF No?

ZAB No. To you, to be rich means to be a du Pont or a Rockefeller. To us, it means much less. Here anyone who's rich owns a lot of land, but actually he's no richer than those European barons who own splendid crumbling villas and play the gigolo in order to live. Our land is dry and produces little. So let's say that instead of rich, I'm relatively rich, that I live well, that my sister lives well, that we've been to good schools but never wasted a penny. I've never been a playboy. When I was a student in America and at Oxford, I never bought a car. I've always handled money wisely, for instance in order to go to Europe to meet interesting people and buy books. If you take a look at my library, you'll see where I put a good part of my money: in books. I have thousands of them, many of them old and beautiful—I've always immensely enjoyed reading. Like sports. Some people accuse me of being well dressed. It's true. But not because I squander my money on clothes—because I'm clean. I love to bathe and change my clothes; I've never been able to stand Pakistani princes who are dirty and stink. I own beautiful and comfortable houses. That's true too. But for a long time I didn't even have air-conditioning. I like to

entertain, but never silly or stupid people. I know how to dance, but only because I like music and because I hate to be a wallflower when others are dancing. Finally ...

OF Finally you have the reputation of being a lady-killer, a Don Juan. Is it true, Mr. President?

ZAB That's also very exaggerated. I'm a romantic—I don't think you can be a politician without being romantic—and as a romantic I think there's nothing so inspiring as a love affair. There's nothing wrong with falling in love and conquering a woman's heart—woe to men who don't fall in love. You can even fall in love a hundred times, and I do fall in love. But I'm a very, very moral man. And I respect women. People think that Muslims don't respect women. What a mistake. To respect and protect them is one of the first teachings of the prophet Mohammed. I, who don't call myself a champion of physical violence, once whipped a man. I whipped him ferociously, till the blood came. Do you know why? Because he had raped a little girl. And I was blind with rage this morning, when I read that some students had attacked and stripped some girls students on the beach in Karachi. Scoundrels! I'll make them subject to martial law. And I say something else. If I were to ascertain that our soldiers really used violence on the women of Bangladesh, I'd insist on being the one to try them and punish them.

OF Let's go on to something else, Mr. President. Let's go on to your Marxism and to how you can reconcile it with your privileges, even with your Muslim faith.

ZAB I call myself a Marxist in the economic sense; that is, I confine myself to accepting Marxist doctrine so far as it concerns economics. What I reject in Marxism is its dialectical interpretation of history, its theories of life, the question whether God exists or not. As a good Muslim I believe in God. Rightly or wrongly, I believe—faith is either something that exists or it doesn't. If it does, it's useless to discuss it. It's in me, and I'm not ready to renounce it in the name of the ecclesiastical or philosophical aspects of Marxism. At the same time I'm convinced that to call oneself a Marxist and call oneself a Muslim are two things that can go together—especially in an underdeveloped country like Pakistan where I don't see any solution except scientific socialism.

I said Pakistan—I'm not raising any banners for international crusades; I'm not sticking my nose in the affairs of others. I concentrate on the reality of my country and that's all. No, not by a process of revolution—I recognize that. I would like to, since I can look you in the eye and swear I'm a revolutionary. But I can't afford sudden and bloody revolutions. Pakistan wouldn't be able to stand it; it would be a disaster. So I must proceed with patience, by reforms, measures that will gradually lead to socialism—nationalizing when possible, refraining from it when necessary, respecting the foreign capital of which we have need. I must take my time, be a surgeon who doesn't plunge his knife too deeply into the fabric of society. This is a very sick society, and if it's not to die under the knife, you have to operate with caution, waiting slowly for a wound to heal, for a reform to be consolidated. We've been asleep for so many centuries, we can't violently wake ourselves up with an earthquake. Besides, even Lenin, in the beginning, stooped to compromises.

OF Mr. President, many people don't believe you. They say you're a demagogue seeking power and nothing else, that you'll do anything to hold onto your power.

ZAB No? By the agrarian reforms I've made in these three months, my family has lost forty-five thousand acres of land. I personally have lost six to seven thousand. And I'll lose still more, my children will lose still more. God is my witness that I'm not playing with socialism, that I don't proceed slowly out of selfishness. I've felt no fear of giving up what I own ever since the day I read Marx. I can even tell you the time and place: Bombay, 1945. As for the accusation that I'm only out for power, well, this would be a good time to understand what we mean by the word power. By power I don't mean the kind Yahya Khan had. By power I mean the kind you exercise to level mountains, make deserts bloom, build a society where people don't die of hunger and humiliation. I have no evil platforms. I don't want to become a dictator. But so far I can say that I'll have to be very tough, even authoritarian. The broken windows that I'm setting out to mend are often in splinters. I'll have to throw away the splinters. And if I throw them away too carelessly, I won't have a country, I'll have a bazaar.

Anyway, look, you don't go into politics just for the fun of it. You go into it to take power in your hands and keep it. Anyone who

says the opposite is a liar. Politicians are always trying to make you believe that they're good, moral, consistent. Don't ever fall in their trap. There's no such thing as a good, moral, consistent politician. Politics is give-and-take, as my father taught me when he said, »Never hit a man unless you're ready to be hit twice by him.« The rest is boy-scout stuff, and I've forgotten the boy-scout virtues ever since I went to school.

OF They say, Mr. President, you're a great reader of books about Mussolini, Hitler, Napoleon.

ZAB Of course. And also books about de Gaulle, Churchill, Stalin. Do you want to make me confess I'm a fascist? I'm not. A fascist is first of all an enemy of culture, and I'm an intellectual enamored of culture. A fascist is a man of the right, and I'm a man of the left. A fascist is a *petit bourgeois*, and I come from the aristocracy. To read about a person doesn't mean to make him your hero. I've had some heroes, yes, but when I was a student. Heroes, you know, are like chewing gum—they get chewed, spit out, changed, and you like them especially when you're young. Anyway, if you care to know whom I've chewed the longest, here they are: Genghis Khan, Alexander, Hannibal, Napoleon. Napoleon most of all. But I've also chewed a little of Mazzini, a little of Cavour, a little of Garibaldi. And a lot of Rousseau. You see how many contradictions there are in me?

OF I see. And so, to try to understand you a little better, let me ask you who are the figures of our time to whom you've felt or feel close: those you've liked or who liked you the most.

ZAB One is Sukarno. He said I was cut from the same cloth. He worshipped me. And I worshipped him. He was an exceptional man despite his weaknesses—for instance his vulgarity with women. It's neither necessary nor dignified to continually show your own virility, but he didn't understand that. Furthermore he didn't even understand economics. The other is Nasser. Nasser too was a first-rate man, with Nasser too I got along very well. He loved me and I loved him. In 1966, when I was forced to leave the government, Nasser invited me to Egypt and received me with the honors of a head of state, then he said I could stay there as long as I needed.

Then, let's see ... Stalin. Yes, Stalin. My respect for Stalin has

always been deep, a gut feeling I'd say, just as much as my antipathy for Khrushchev. You may understand me better when I say I never liked Khrushchev, that I always thought him a braggart. Always swaggering, yelling, pointing his finger at ambassadors, drinking ... And always ready to give in to the Americans. He did a lot of harm to Asia, Khrushchev. And finally

... I know, you're waiting for me to say something about Mao Tse-tung. But what do you want me to say about a giant like Mao Tse-tung? It's easier for me to talk about Chou En-lai. He's the one I know better, the one I've talked and discussed things with longer. Endless discussions, from dawn to dusk, for days, at least once a year. It's since 1962 that I've been going to China and meeting Chou En-lai. And ... him, simply I admire him.

OF Mr. President, all these men have had to struggle a lot to gain power. But not you.

ZAB You're wrong. It hasn't been easy for me to get here. I've been put in prison, I've risked my life plenty of times. With Ayub Khan, with Yahya Khan. They tried to kill me by poisoning my food, by shooting at me. Twice in 1968, once in 1970. In Sanghar, two years ago, I was kept for an hour under the crossfire of assassins sent by Yahya Khan. One man died while shielding me, others were seriously wounded ... And let's not forget moral suffering; when you're born rich and become a socialist, no one believes you. Neither friends in your own circle, who in fact make fun of you, nor the poor, who aren't enlightened enough to believe in your sincerity. The hardest thing for me hasn't been to escape the bullets and the poison, it's been to get myself taken seriously by those who didn't believe me. The privileges in which I was born didn't put me on Aladdin's flying carpet. And if I hadn't had this vocation for politics ...

OF And how did this vocation start, how was it manifested?

ZAB I've always had it, ever since I was a boy. But if we want to play at being psychoanalysts, we must say I owe it to my parents. My father was a brilliant politician—a pity he retired so very early, after having lost certain elections. He had a very high conception of politics, that of an aristocrat who's aristocratic to his finger tips, and he talked to me in such an inspired way. He took me around Larkana, he showed

me the ancient temples, the splendid houses, the vestiges of our civilization, and he said to me: »Look, politics is like building a temple, a house. Or else he said it was like writing music, or poetry. And he mentioned Brahms, Michelangelo ... My mother was different. She came from a poor family and was haunted by other people's poverty. She did nothing but repeat to me: »We must take care of the poor, we must help the poor, the poor shall inherit the earth,« and so forth.

When I went to America, her message had so sunk into my ears that I became a radical. I went to America to study at the University of California, where a jurist of international law was teaching. I wanted to take my degree in international law. And that was the period of McCarthyism, of the communist witch hunts—my choices were laid out. To get away from Sunset Boulevard, from the girls with red nail polish, I ran off to Maxwell Street and lived among the Negroes. A week, a month. I felt good with them—they were real, they knew how to laugh. And the day in San Diego when I wasn't able to get a hotel room because I have olive skin and looked like a Mexican ... well, that helped. Then, from America, I went to England. And those were the years of Algeria, so I immediately took the side of the Algerians. But not by shouting slogans in front of 10 Downing Street. Maybe because I'm secretly a little shy, I've never liked to mix in the crowd and participate in turmoil. I've always preferred a discussion by writing, a struggle by the game of politics. It's more intelligent, more subtle, more refined.

OF One last question, Mr. President, and excuse the brutality of it. Do you think you can last?

ZAB Let's put it this way. I could be finished tomorrow, but I think I'll last longer than anyone else who's governed Pakistan. First of all because I'm healthy and full of energy—I can work, as I do, even eighteen hours a day. Then because I'm young—I'm barely forty-four, ten years younger than Mrs. Gandhi. Finally because I know what I want. I'm the only leader in the Third World who has gone back into politics despite the opposition of two great powers—in 1966 the United States and the Soviet Union were both very happy to see me in trouble. And the reason I've been able to overcome that trouble is that I know the fundamental rule of this profession. What is the rule?

Well, in politics you sometimes have to pretend to be stupid and make others believe they're the only intelligent ones. But to do this you have to have light and flexible fingers, and ... Have you ever seen a bird sitting on its eggs in the nest? Well, a politician must have fairly light, fairly flexible fingers, to insinuate them under the bird and take away the eggs. One by one. Without the bird realizing it.

Ariel Sharon

Tel Aviv, September 1982

ORIANA FALLACI The first phase of the war—or, rather, of your war—is finished, General Sharon. Arafat's Palestinians are leaving Beirut. But they're leaving with their heads held high, after having resisted Israeli military power for nearly two and a half months; they're also surrounded by sympathy, which didn't exist before, at least not to the same degree. Even if they don't deny that they invaded Lebanon first, they're now all in agreement that their people must have a home—a homeland. Arafat is not incorrect when he speaks of »political victory.« And many people are not incorrect when they say that you gave him a gift. Is this what you wanted?

ARIEL SHARON I wanted them to leave Beirut, to leave Lebanon, and I got what I wanted. Arafat can say what he likes; it doesn't matter. Only facts matter, and the developments, the consequences, these facts will have in the future. Maybe he truly believes that he's won politically, but time will show that his defeat is, above all, political. Political, and not military. From a military standpoint, you know ... if I had to analyze this war from Arafat's perspective, I wouldn't judge it a military defeat. The Israeli army is very powerful, and there were no more than ten thousand PLO terrorists, Syrians included, and we managed to put an impressive amount of pressure on them. From a political standpoint, on the other hand, his defeat is complete. Absolute. Complete. And I'll tell you why. The PLO was strong because it was an international center for terrorism, and such a center could only exist if it had a country where it could install another state within a state. This country was Lebanon. They were using Lebanon as a starting point to begin action all over the world; they had their military and political power concentrated in Lebanon. But now that they're scattered into eight far-off countries, from Algeria

to Yemen, from Iraq to the Sudan, they have no hope of restarting what they had begun. None. We're about to see an entirely new situation in the Middle East, something that will allow us to arrive at a peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians. The other day, I spoke to Henry Kissinger on the phone, and he told me that a new era was beginning in this region—that new answers to the Palestinian question were emerging. Israel, he told me, will have between twelve and eighteen months to find a solution before the PLO recovers.

OF So even Kissinger admits that the PLO hasn't been totally destroyed. It hasn't. And in exchange Arafat has had his own little Stalingrad; he's been able to move the people of the world to the same degree that you've offended them. You've ravaged a city into nonexistence; you've spoiled relations between the United States and Israel ... You may have won, General Sharon, but it seems to be a Pyrrhic victory.

AS You're wrong. A recent poll shows that sympathy for Israel is on the rise. And it goes without saying that public opinion is not all that important; even though we care about the world's sympathy, when it's a matter of security and a matter of our own existence we can do very well without it. As far as the relationship between the U.S. and Israel is concerned, it's not spoiled. It's true, we've had some very difficult conflicts with the Americans—very bitter arguments. The Americans also put a lot of psychological pressure on us, and, even before the war began, I wasn't able to find a common interest, common ground. Now, on the other hand, they agree with our plans, and, anyway, you know what I say? I would rather put up with those pressures, those arguments, those conflicts, than I would escape by helicopter from the roof of the American embassy in Saigon. The American withdrawal from Saigon was an offense—an offense I didn't suffer. I made others suffer it.

OF That doesn't seem quite right to me, General Sharon. The PLO's departure from Beirut has been relatively dignified up until now. Tears, yes; foolish shootings, yes; but, in essence, they are an army departing—with their uniforms, their AK-47s, their flags. Why are you so ruthless, General Sharon? When you were looking down on

them from the hills of Bab'da with that powerful telescope, did you really feel nothing but contempt for them?

AS No, I was feeling the words of the Bible: »Do not rejoice when your enemy falls.« Because even if they were killers—and they are; even if they were murderers—and they are; even if they were rapists—and they are; even if they were bloodthirsty terrorists ... no, don't interrupt me! Let me respond in my own way! Even if they were bloodthirsty terrorists, I was saying—and they are—they were still human beings. And I didn't rejoice. Regarding the spectacle they put on, acting out their victory play, we knew very well that it would happen. We had our informants in West Beirut; we knew what they were planning. We knew that they had received very strict orders about how to behave in front of the journalists and the television cameras—that everyone had received a new, clean uniform. They were even advised to show their guns, seeing as how Begin had not objected to them taking the guns away with them. However, it's useless for you to continue using the word »departure.« It wasn't even a retreat, not even an evacuation. It was an expulsion. The PLO terrorists could have talked about »evacuation« if we had agreed to their demands, if we had left Beirut. Instead, they were forced to bend to our will, to accept our presence; they've been thrown out—expelled.

OF As you like. But before we continue, I need to open a parenthesis. Why do you call them terrorists? A terrorist is someone who provokes terror among the harmless and the defenseless, killing a citizen walking down the street, for example, or blowing up a car, a train, a building. And there's no doubt that the PLO has pulled nasty, filthy stunts like this many times. I said as much years ago, when I interviewed Arafat and Habbash. But in Beirut they weren't terrorists. In Beirut they were soldiers, and they met you as soldiers: artillery against artillery, machine gun against machine gun.

AS You remind me of Habib; every time he pronounced or read the word »combatants,« he would glance my way and stifle a smile. Because he knew how I would react. Combatants, soldiers? No madam, those were not combatants or soldiers. Not even in Beirut. Whoever enters an operating room in a hospital, where doctors are operating on a wounded man; whoever disconnects the oxygen

tubes and demands that the patient be thrown aside in favor of whoever they've brought; whoever does that is not a soldier. He is a terrorist—a murderer. Whoever hijacks a Red Cross convoy and steals the powdered milk meant for children, all the while sniggering; whoever does that is not a soldier. He's a terrorist—a thief. That's how Arafat's rabble behaved in Beirut. The Syrians don't behave that way; the Jordanians don't behave that way. Arafat's men do. Always, and they always have. At the border between Lebanon and Israel, we have several military bases, and they never attacked them. Never! They always attacked the kibbutzim; they always killed defenseless people, children, old people, women. They are not an army. They are a band of cowards, of terrorists. Ask me anything, but don't ask me not to call them terrorists.

OF The fact is that you are using that word »terrorist« as an insult, and rightly so. But what were you when you were fighting the Arabs and the English to found Israel? Irgun, the Stern Group, Haganah—weren't they all terrorist organizations? When Begin killed seventy-nine people in the bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, wasn't that a terrorist act? He admits as much. Some time ago in New York, during a lunch in his honor, he began his speech with the phrase: »I am an ex-terrorist.«

AS Mr. Begin's organization did not attack civilians. And Mr. Begin was honorable in telling his men not to hit civilians. The bomb at the King David Hotel was directed at the English military, and the guilt for that episode falls squarely on the shoulders of the English High Commissioner, who had been warned a half hour beforehand but who escaped, rather than evacuating the hotel. We were not terrorists; we were freedom fighters. We were fighting the English occupation.

OF But Arafat's men also call themselves freedom fighters; they also claim that they are fighting the Israeli occupation. I'll close that parenthesis. Now tell me, General Sharon: aren't you sorry that you didn't go into Beirut and get rid of all of them—kill all of your enemies? As a general, don't you feel robbed of something—unsatisfied?

AS Listen, it's no secret that last January—to be exact, January 18—I went to Beirut in secret to study the situation. I always do this; I prepare myself, because I hate improvisation. It was quite an

adventurous journey, moreover, both coming and going I went; I stayed two days and one night; I went around the city, as far as the port. There I talked with people, and then, from the skyscraper that divides the Christian and the Muslim areas, I closely observed the city. There was someone with me, and I told this person exactly what I told Prime Minister Begin when I returned to Jerusalem: »If and when we have to go into Lebanon, I would like to avoid entering Beirut.« Do you know why? Because even if it was occupied by Syrians, even if it had been invaded by terrorists, Beirut was still the capital—a capital inhabited by hundreds of thousands of civilians. I admit that I always thought it would be better not to enter Beirut if not absolutely necessary. And listen well: if I had been truly convinced that it was necessary to enter Beirut, no one could have stopped me. Democracy or no, I would have gone in even if my government had thought otherwise. I would have persuaded them that I had to do it, and I would have done it.

OF If that's the case, why did you try so hard to go in? During the last part of the siege, I was in Beirut, General Sharon. I went precisely to see what was happening, to prepare for this interview. And, like everyone else there, I can testify that you were trying to get in, every day. Every day, there was a battle at the museum, at the hippodrome, in the pine forest. To get from East Beirut to West Beirut, I crossed that pine forest, where Israelis and Palestinians were practically face to face; I saw them. For goodness sake, you were fighting for possession of one hundred meters, fifty meters. Twenty-five! And you were unable to advance.

AS Miss Fallaci ... please believe me. From a military standpoint, we could have entered at any time. If it had become necessary, we would have prepared to go in. Don't forget that we have one of the best armies in the world, that we've been fighting for thirty-five years, that we've been at war with every Arab country, that we have a great deal of experience.

OF But perhaps not the experience of combat within a city, house to house. General Sharon, correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't one of the reasons you didn't enter West Beirut that this type of combat would have cost you too many soldiers: at least a thousand?

AS I'll look you in the eyes and I'll answer: no, no, no. First of all, we wouldn't have suffered the losses you describe—not even a fraction of the number you said. We would have managed with a few dozen dead in house-to-house combat, and this is what the chief of staff told Prime Minister Begin. We waited all those weeks because we knew the PLO would have found out it couldn't go on and would have ended up leaving. Miss Fallaci, Beirut is not Stalingrad, and the PLO is not the Red Army; let's not blow things out of proportion. A while ago you mentioned a little Stalingrad. Were you at Stalingrad?

OF I wasn't, were you?

AS Neither was I. But I know everything about Stalingrad; I have read everything about Stalingrad. I'm telling you that Beirut is not even proportionally comparable to Stalingrad. First of all, in Stalingrad the people and the Red Army were fighting side by side against the Germans. In Beirut, on the other hand, the population was being held hostage by terrorists. In Stalingrad, the Red Army and the population fought heroic—fought to the death. Arafat's terrorists, on the other hand, fought as little as they could, while still giving the impression of fighting. They never really fought as hard as they could have. Never! Often, they didn't fight at all. In fact, it took us only four days to get from the border to the Beirut suburbs. They fought very little, even in the airport and in the fields. It's surprising how little loss of life we had occupying Ouzai, Bouj, Hagshalum. And this is another reason I don't respect Arafat. I respect the Egyptians for how they fought in all those wars against us; I respect the Jordanians for how they fought in Jerusalem in 1967; I respect the Syrians for how they've fought on many occasions, this one included. But I don't respect Arafat's terrorists, because they never really fought in Lebanon and in Beirut. And I say again: if they had been the only thing holding us back, we would have easily entered Beirut.

OF But you didn't. And if it's not for the reason I said, there must be another. Correct me if I'm wrong, but might this other reason go by the name President Reagan? Correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't the Americans—didn't President Reagan—want you to stay out of Beirut? Am I wrong in thinking that you couldn't ignore the anger and the condemnation of your protectors and allies? The Americans were

angry from the very beginning, you know. You need only remember Reagan's coldness toward Begin when he insisted on visiting Washington.

AS First of all, Begin did not insist on visiting Washington. You don't know Begin. And furthermore, we didn't need anyone's permission to wage this war, let alone the Americans. Have we ever asked their permission to do anything we've done in the past thirty-five years? Did we ask their permission to proclaim the State of Israel, to declare Jerusalem the capital of Israel, to bring the government and the parliament to Jerusalem, to cross the Suez canal in 1973, to make the raid on Entebbe, to bomb the Iraqi nuclear reactor? We are an independent state; we make our own decisions freely, of our own free will. Finally, we have allies, not protectors. We don't need protectors. I'm not saying that we can ignore the opinion of our allies, but I maintain that we do not take orders from anyone. I have already told you why I didn't enter Beirut. To put it simply, I did not want to hit the civilian population.

OF Oh, no, General Sharon! No! What on earth are you saying? You bombed that civilian population furiously, for weeks. Furiously! I can tell you that I have covered nearly all of the wars of our time, and for eight years I covered Vietnam. Not even at Hue, not even in Hanoi, have I seen bombings as ferocious as those in Beirut. And now you want me to swallow the idea that you didn't enter Beirut in order to spare those poor people a few more bullets?

AS You're hard. You're too hard. Yes, I know that you were there; I know what you saw. But I also know that we never intentionally bombed the civilian population. We never bombed to hit the civilian population. Never! Most of the bombings—and I say »most« because war is war—happened in areas which contained terrorist bases and headquarters, south of Mazra Boulevard, in the Fakhani area. I'm talking about Sabra, Chatila, Ouzai, Bouj Baranje ...

OF Or perhaps Coventry 1941, or Berlin 1945? But you weren't only bombing there, you were also bombing the center. The houses, the hospitals, newspaper offices, hotels, embassies. Ask those who were inside. Ask the journalists at the Hotel Commodore.

AS We didn't bomb those places, we bombed the military postings

installed next to those places. We bombed military targets maintained illegally by terrorists in the center of the city hiding behind the population, holding the population hostage! Look at these photographs, taken by our planes. Look here: one hundred and twenty meters from the Vatican embassy, there's a battery of 82mm mortars. Three hundred meters from the Soviet embassy, a great deal of heavy and mid-range artillery. A few dozen meters from the embassies of Japan and Chile, a 130mm cannon. Tanks all around the American embassy. Do you really believe that we wanted to strike the Vatican embassy, the Egyptian embassy, the embassies of the Soviet Union, Japan, Chile, Spain, the United States? Look where their tanks are: here, here, here, here, here ...

OF Fine. I could reply that in the last days of combat, in East Beirut, you also kept your tanks a few meters away from the Hotel Alexandre and the Hotel Dieu Hospital. As a result, every night and every morning it rained Palestinian Katyushas; it was hell. But I'd rather say: all right, you're right about this. In some cases, the PLO did worse: they once put anti-aircraft on the roof of a hospital. But that's not the point. I repeat, the point is the exaggeration, the disproportionate response, the ferocity of your bombings. If a mosquito flew over Beirut, you responded with a firestorm. If this isn't the case, how do you explain Reagan's indignation?

AS With the same exaggeration you are using to describe our exaggeration. The same exaggeration, or inaccuracy, was communicated to Reagan. Yes, because at one point President Reagan said that the symbol of this war was a little girl with her arms amputated. Someone put this photo of a little girl wrapped up like a mummy on his desk, and he came up with this story about the symbol. Well, we looked for that little girl, and we found her. First of all, it wasn't a little girl; it was a little boy, and he didn't even have his arms amputated; he had a wounded arm. It had been wrapped up like that because ...

OF General Sharon, if we want to fight this out with photos, I can drown you in photos, I can suffocate you with photos of children killed and wounded in those bombings. I have one in my purse that I wanted to show you, but that I no longer want to show you ...

AS Show me.

OF No, because now I don't want to see it again. It hurts me. And it makes me too angry.

AS I want to see it anyway.

OF I told you no, it's not necessary.

AS It is. I have to see it.

OF Fine.

(I open my purse and pull out a photo. It shows a group of dead children. Their ages are, more or less, one year, three years, five years. The most frightening thing, however, is not that they are dead; it is that they are reduced to pieces, mangled. Here there's a foot missing from the cadaver of the youngest; here there's an arm missing from the corpse of the oldest; over there a small, open hand that almost seems to ask for mercy. Ariel Sharon takes the photo with a steady hand, then he looks at it, and for a fraction of a second his face contracts, his eyes harden. He composes himself immediately and hands the photo back to me, a little embarrassed).

AS I'm sorry ... I'm very sorry. Very ... I'm very sorry. I'm so sorry that I almost don't care to tell you that your photograph is very similar to the photos of our children, killed by Arafat's terrorists in the kibbutzim. And for what? No matter what side of the barricade you're on, every death is a tragedy, and the death of a child is always an intolerable tragedy. But you must believe me when I tell you that we tried to avoid these things as much as possible. No one, in recent wars, has tried as hard as we have. Not the Americans, not the French, not the English, not the Russians, and let's not even talk about the Germans. And I won't remind you of Hiroshima, that moment when a democratic country ended a war by causing hundreds of thousands of deaths among the civilian population. But it's one thing to kill civilians on purpose, and another altogether to kill them without wanting to. In a meeting with my officials on June 6, right before we went into Lebanon, I gave precise orders that civilians be spared. Two days later, I went to the front, and I learned that the majority of our losses were due to my orders. So I met with my officials again and I said: »We have two options. Either we continue like this, or we begin bombing.« The debate lasted from midnight to dawn, dramatically, and it concluded with a unanimous decision: to continue in the

same way. We only turned to bombing when we understood that in order to provoke the Palestinians to leave Beirut we had to put heavy pressure on them.

OF Yes, but then why continue to bomb even after they had announced that they were leaving? There were days when Habib's emissaries couldn't go from East to West, and vice versa, because of the bombings. Habib himself said that you were the one who sabotaged the negotiations: »All my problems come from Sharon.« And why, when an accord had nearly been reached, on August 11, did you unleash the most brutal bombing of all—twelve uninterrupted hours, from land, sea, and air?

AS Because Arafat continued to play games, to play tricks. Because he kept on lying to us and tricking us, that coward, that liar. You can never trust him, or them. They live on cunning; they betray all their promises, all their duties—even now. Before leaving, for example, they were supposed to give us their names. They didn't. They were not supposed to take their tanks and their jeeps, yet they tried to take them. And on August 11, they were still demanding our withdrawal from Beirut, the substitution of our troops with international forces. So we bombed them, yes. And how ... and how ... but it worked. The following night, between the 12th and the 13th, they met our conditions. And I stopped bombing.

OF Or you stopped bombing because your own government demanded it?

AS Miss Fallaci, those bombings were not Sharon's personal project; they were decided and approved by the government. However, when the prime minister and the entire cabinet decided to stop them, the government put a stop to things just as I would have wanted, would have approved, would have signed off on.

OF Are you denying that this is your war—Ariel Sharon's war?

AS Exactly. This is not my war; it is Israel's war.

OF But Sharon conceived it, dreamed it, desired it, wanted it, prepared for it, and managed it in all its details; that is, in your own way. And in order to do things your own way you didn't worry about offending your allies. General Sharon, how do you explain the fact that the new secretary of state, George Shultz, has recently refused

to receive you in Washington? How do you explain the fact that one of his staff members said, loud and clear, »Defense Minister Sharon's presence is not desired in Washington«?

AS This rumor was circulating, yes, but a few hours later Shultz's spokesman said that it wasn't true, that Defense Minister Sharon was always well liked in Washington, but that it was better to continue contacts with Habib in Beirut. Moreover, I've never asked to be invited to Washington; I haven't asked Reagan—or Weinberger or Shultz—though I'd very much like to meet him. It is true, however, that Begin has requested a meeting through our embassy in Washington. The prime minister wanted to send me to Washington, not to go over Habib's head but because he felt it would be useful for me to tell the American government about what is happening in this part of the world in person.

OF I understand. How do you explain the fact that the Americans sulked for the duration of the war?

AS They were afraid of compromising the success of the project. The length of the war worried the Americans. They couldn't understand that it was dragging on because I had no intention of entering Beirut, and they were afraid that time was being wasted. You know, Lebanon is complicated; there aren't just Lebanese and PLO terrorists. There are also Syrians, Soviets ... even without counting those of you involved with the press or television. You've all become a decisive element in the way people evaluate events, especially wars. The way you interpret things—the things you write and the images you show—are very often determining factors. What I mean to say is, in democratic countries you are the ones who create public opinion. So a democratic president has to keep track of public opinion, and when you consider the fact that the elections in America are in November ... anyway, I wouldn't dramatize the Americans' irritation too much. Our alliance with the Americans is based on reciprocal interests, and the Americans know it. Israel has contributed greatly to the United States' security, as much as the United States has contributed to Israel's security. One disagreement doesn't change anything.

OF In other words, you need them as much as they need you. When did you inform them, exactly, that you were about to invade Lebanon?

AS Besides the fact that I prefer the word »operation« to the word »invasion,« I never informed the Americans that I would be invading Lebanon. I never spoke with them about my plans, really, or about dates or timing. But, for nearly a year—since September 1981—I spoke with them about the possibility that the operation would occur. I discussed it several times with Secretary of State Alexander Haig when he came here; I spoke about it with Secretary of Defense Weinberger when I went to Washington in November; and I discussed it several times with Ambassador Habib. Look, I only met with Haig, Weinberger, and Habib to discuss the terrorism problem—the PLO. And, though I was careful not to reveal my plan to them, I never kept secrets or concocted mysteries. To the contrary. Since the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor had surprised them and they had complained about it—»Please don't catch us by surprise«—when we were talking about Lebanon I just kept repeating, »Don't say you've been caught by surprise, if and when we decide. The situation is such that we cannot go back.« This was particularly true after I heard what their diplomats in Saudi Arabia were saying—diplomats in a country that had always supported and financed PLO terrorism more than any other, apart from the Soviet Union. Those diplomats were saying that the terrorist activity along the border with Israel should be considered violations of the cease-fire, but that the others should not. So I went to the American embassy in Israel, and I updated him on the situation, and I said again, »Don't be surprised when this happens.«

OF And what did they say to you? How did they judge your »project«? Didn't they tell you, »With this project, you run the risk of starting World War III«? Did you ever ask yourself if this war would set World War III in motion?

AS Naturally, we considered the various possibilities presented by a Soviet intervention, even when we were talking with the Americans. We know that, should World War III begin, it won't only touch the United States and the Soviet Union; it would pull everyone in, us first of all. But you know ... we also have a Secret Service, and an excellent one, at that. We also know how to collect news, assess it, absorb it. We had also put together a lot of information, and we

examined it carefully, prudently, and we concluded that the Soviet Union wouldn't have lifted a finger.

OF Nonetheless, according to one of his staff, Alexander Haig called the whole affair »insane.«

AS I don't remember this word. Insane? No, no one ever said this word to me. But, yes, they were against it. Absolutely against it, I'll admit it. Even though they didn't understand the situation, the degree to which it had deteriorated, they still wouldn't agree with me. They kept repeating the following phrase: »Why do you need this war?« Then they would say that if it was indeed necessary to respond, that response had to be proportionate to the terrorist acts, and nothing more.

OF I'll ask you the same question, General Sharon. »Why did you need this war?« Where was the imminent threat, where was the new intelligence that revealed a danger to your existence? No one understands this.

AS Your reasoning is just like Haig's; I remember he once said to me, »Stop, don't respond to their provocation,« or, »It needs to be a response to a specific threat.« One day I got impatient with him, and I asked Haig what I'd already asked Habib: »What exactly constitutes a specific threat to the Jews? Is one Jew dead on a field or in the street a specific threat? Is it sufficient? Or do we need two—or three or five or ten? If a Jew loses his legs or his eyes in a terrorist attack, is that enough, or no?« We have been tormented and killed for years. That, for me, is more than sufficient and more than specific.

OF General Sharon, I've spoken with many young people here in Israel, and with kids from Beirut, and the majority have told me that this war, if not entirely unjust, is at least unjustified.

AS If you had spoken with all of them, you would discover that almost all, actually, have accepted this war and believe it is more than justified.

OF It's possible. You've all become so combative—always talking about war, always ready to go to war, to expand. You are no longer the nation of a great dream, the country we all wept for. You've changed; that's all there is to it. One of these kids remarked, »We're becoming the Prussia of the Middle East.«

AS That's not true. We have many things to do, apart from fighting. For example, we are developing our educational system, our culture, our agriculture, our industry, and our science. We need to work constantly to absorb all the Jews who arrive from more than seventy countries; we need to attempt to build a nation with them. And we are not participating in any kind of arms race; we are only trying to improve our defenses and to be ready to react when we need to.

OF That kid has his doubts. His hero was Colonel Gheva, who refused to lead his men in the siege of Beirut.

AS Poor Eli, I know him well. I've known him since he was a child, and I'm sorry for him. He didn't want to go into Beirut. Well, now he's lost his command, he's lost a brilliant military career, and we didn't even go into Beirut. A hero? Hardly. It was his fault the war lasted so long and that we lost even more lives. All of this talk about him ... all those pacifist protests the opposition staged in his honor ... for a while the whole affair was actually giving more strength to the terrorists. And he didn't listen when I told him, »Eli, Eli, this is a moral issue! Your troops are fighting, thousands of soldiers believe in you! Do you realize what you're doing, Eli? Even if you don't want to, you're helping the enemy!« Even the prime minister told him this—the chief of staff. Because this is truly a democracy, for goodness sake! You can't get any more democratic. What other army could this have happened in? But there was nothing to be done about it. He just kept repeating that he didn't want to enter Beirut, that it would have killed too many people on both sides. The extraordinary thing is that in the first few days of the war he was causing a fuss because we weren't bombing enough. He wanted more bombs, more artillery, more fire ...

OF Oh, God! Are you saying that Sadat was right when he said that there are no hawks and doves in Israel, only hawks and superhawks?

AS When it's a question of our national security, we are united; there is no doubt about that. We are neither hawks, nor doves; we are Jews. We aren't Laborites or Likudists; we are Jews. That is my answer.

OF General Sharon, sometimes a suspicion arises—a suspicion that, instead of security or defense, you are actually concerned with much more ambitious ambitions. I say this thinking of the speech

you wrote for the conference at the Institute of Strategic Studies last December in Tel Aviv. In this speech, after addressing the problem of Soviet expansionism and moving onto Israeli strategic interests, you said that these interests »are not limited to the Arab countries of the Middle East, of the Mediterranean, of the Red Sea. For security reasons, in the 1980s they must be expanded to include regions like the Persian Gulf and Africa, particularly the countries of central and northern Africa.« Chilling.

AS Huh. I see you came well-prepared. The fact is that Israel is a very unique country. And for unique reasons—reasons that can be summed up in the word *persecutions*—it has to face global problems of global security. These problems exist within three circles. The first circle is Palestinian terrorism. The second circle is the confrontation with Arab countries which are currently pointing thirteen thousand tanks in our direction. The third circle is Soviet expansionism, which has broadened its scope in recent years, spreading to the Middle East and Africa. The question is how to defend our right to existence in those three circles without becoming the Prussia of the Middle East, as you said.

OF But who is threatening you in Africa, in Turkey, in Iran, in Pakistan? And what are you really trying to accomplish? I don't understand. I wouldn't want the invasion of Lebanon to be the beginning of a vast operation that will not stop in Lebanon. I wouldn't want the expulsion of the PLO from Beirut to be part of a more complicated, let's say Napoleonic, plan.

AS The answer is no. Definitely, no. You're talking as though we wanted to occupy territories where we have strategic interests. You're talking like the Turks when they accuse us of including Turkey in the sphere of our strategic interest only because we want to invade them. The situation is quite different; I can explain it to you with a question. If the Russians arrived on the shores of the Persian Gulf, would that fall into Israel's strategic interests? If the Russians took control of the oil resources in the Persian Gulf, would that fall into the area of our strategic interests, or not? If Turkey became a Soviet-controlled country, would that have an effect on us or not? Don't we have the right to worry? Worrying certainly isn't the same thing as

wanting to conquer Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf, central and northern Africa!

OF General Sharon, who is your real enemy? Arafat or the Soviet Union?

AS Miss Fallaci, get it into your head that without the help of the Soviet Union, Arab countries wouldn't have made war on Israel in 1948. They came at us because they had the Soviet Union behind them, in both political and military terms. As far as the PLO is concerned, the Soviet Union supports them because the Soviet Union understands that, in the atomic age, terrorism is the only way to wage war without risking nuclear conflict. In order to develop its expansionism, the Soviet Union needs the PLO and Arafat. And if you respond that Arafat isn't a Communist, I would answer, What do the Soviets care? They only care that he is an instrument in their game, an instrument under their control. Is Syria Communist? No, and yet the Soviet Union gave Syria twelve hundred tanks, hundreds of artillery pieces, and many modern jets. Is Libya Communist? No, and yet the Soviet Union gave Libya nineteen hundred tanks, artillery, jets. Everyone talks about the Americans, about American weapons. I assure you that the weapons distributed by the Soviet Union in this part of the world far outnumber those that Israel buys from the Americans.

OF Yes, I believe it. Let's return to Lebanon.

AS We don't want even one square inch of Lebanon!

OF Not even in the south, in the Litani region? I bring up the Litani because in 1955, as you well know, Ben Gurion had a plan, later developed by Moshe Dayan, according to which Israel would invade Lebanon, buy itself a Maronite Lebanese to elect as president, install a Christian regime, ally itself with that regime, and then withdraw after annexing the region within the Litani River.

AS Look, there are two branches of Zionism: the political one of Weizmann and the practical one of Ben Gurion, Gold Meir, Moshe Dayan—the old generation, in other words. In fact, if you ask my eighty-two-year-old mother, who lives alone on her avocado farm, you'll discover that she believes in action above all else. I, however, belong to the political branch, which believes in treaties, agreements,

and legal terms. And since this branch is that of the current government, I can assure you that we have no intention of keeping even one square inch of Lebanon.

OF But you don't need to keep anything. All you need to do is to »elect« a young president—for example, a thirty-four-year-old Phalangist called Bachir Gemayel—and keep your military there for »security reasons.« All you need to do is establish a de facto colony, just like the Soviets have in Afghanistan.

AS You're a very nice woman, and I want to be polite. I don't want to shout, I don't want to yell, but for the love of God! I have never heard such slander, so many insults! You are slandering me; you are insulting me!

OF Why? Everyone knows that the election of Bachir Gemayel was the card you would play. Everyone knows that you'll stay in Lebanon at least through winter. You've even given your soldiers winter boots. General Sharon, you certainly won't end up staying there fifteen years as you did in the Sinai, or will you?

AS No, I really believe that this will be a much shorter stay.

OF Despite the necessity of protecting the new allied government?

AS I'll answer that in miniskirt style; in other words, long enough to cover the subject and short enough to remain interesting. We do not want to interfere with the internal politics of Lebanon, but it would be hypocritical of us to say that we would accept another government willing to foster terrorists and Syrians. As of today, the Lebanese army is not strong enough for us to leave it on its own. Syria is still occupying nearly half of Lebanon; there are still terrorists and Syrians in Tripoli and in the Al Bekaa valley; and the new government is a newborn baby, born by Caesarean section. Can a newborn baby manage the current situation in Lebanon? No, and I'll say no more. If the Syrians remain close to Beirut; if we abandon the Beirut-Damascus road, the newborn will not survive.

OF And if, staying on that road, you wind up in Damascus?

AS It isn't necessary to go to Damascus. There should be no need to go to Damascus. We don't want to go to Damascus. It's not important to us; it never has been. I actually think that we should avoid the conflict in the Al Bekaa valley entirely. But if the Syrians don't leave,

neither will we. And then things become difficult, because our troops in the Al Bekaa valley are, as the crow flies, twenty-five kilometers from Damascus. And this means that Damascus is, even now, within our artillery range. The roles have been reversed: at the beginning of the war, the Syrian artillery, with their 180-degree cannons with a forty-two-kilometer range, could bomb the Haifa suburbs. Now, with less powerful cannons, we can bomb Damascus. And we don't like this idea. Why should we always fall back on war to work things out?

OF That's strange; I always thought that you liked war, that you were comfortable waging war.

AS This is the biggest misconception that people have of me. They paint me as a warrior, an obsessed person who relaxes by shooting. I hate war. Only someone who had seen as many wars as I have, who has seen as many horrors as I have—only someone who has lost friends and been wounded as I have been wounded—can hate war as much as I do. And if you want to know what the happiest years of my life were, I'll tell you: the three years I spend here on my farm, driving my tractor and raising my sheep.

OF Hearing you talk like this, few people would believe the things they say about you.

AS What things?

OF Well, you should know that you certainly don't have the reputation of an angel, General Sharon. If I named all the bad things I've heard about you, you might lose that extraordinary self-control that, so far, has allowed you to be so polite and patient with me.

AS Tell me.

OF Well, for example ... a killer, a brute, a bulldozer, a rube, a power-hungry ...

AS Other people call me totally different things.

OF I know. The soldiers devoted to you call you the King of Israel-King Ariel. And they say that you're a great leader, a courageous man, loyal. But the most common image is the first one I described. Why is that? There must be a reason. Could it be the Qibia episode?

AS Miss Fallaci, you are so skilled at painting a hateful picture of me that, for a moment, I thought you were the one who was giving an interview on Sharon, not I. But you know that the image of the

man rarely corresponds to the one given by newspapers. You know that as soon as slander is thrown around, as soon as a lie is invented, that it is repeated and copied so often that it finally comes to be accepted as truth. Do you want to talk about Qibia? Let's talk about Qibia. October 15, 1950, Operation Susanna: named for the Israeli child killed with her brother and her mother by Arab terrorists hiding out in Qibia. Operation Susanna consisted in blowing up the house that was sheltering the terrorists, and I was in command. I entered every house personally before we set up the explosive, to ensure that everyone was evacuated. We began at eleven at night and we continued until four in the morning, when I collapsed from exhaustion. In the afternoon, when I awoke, the Jordanian radio was reporting seventy-nine deaths: all women and children. I didn't believe my ears, because before leaving I had counted the enemy's losses, which amounted to no more than a dozen Jordanian soldiers. Where had these seventy-nine corpses of women and children been found? In the ruins of a house, someone told me—in the basement. Evidently they had hidden there, and I had not seen them. I ... I was very sorry. I was so sorry that, after another raid in the village of Mahlin, the year after, I couldn't do it anymore. What's more, I recommended that that type of operation be terminated. What else?

OF All right, let's talk about the incident in Gaza—the one where you killed thirty-seven Egyptian soldiers in their sleep.

AS I assure you that they were not sleeping. Regardless. Gaza, 1955, Operation Black Arrow. I was also commanding this raid, with the famed Unit 101. Those Egyptians were so completely not asleep that we actually fought hand-to-hand, in a long and bloody battle. We left with eight dead and twelve wounded. Each one of us was carrying a dead or wounded man. There's no need for me to say anything more. There are people who hate me, I know, and people who fear me, I know—politicians especially. They hate me because I always say what I think and do what I want, because I don't tread lightly, because I refuse to associate with groups that seek reciprocal protection. In fact, I've changed parties five times. But if those who hate me and fear me were the majority, how would I have managed to exert so much influence in my country for so many years? How would I

have been able to found a new party, the Likud, which won two elections and has brought about a historic turning point in our country? Where would all the power I have, come from? I told you: Israel is a democracy.

OF A deputy named Ayer Maur, I believe, once said, »If Sharon becomes prime minister, I wonder what will become of democracy in Israel« Yet another added: »Concentration camps will start emerging.«

AS Listen, we are attempting to have a serious discussion. Don't degrade it by using that name.

OF Okay, let's try another name—Golda Meir, who said, »If Sharon gets close to the Defense Ministry, I'll picket to stop him from entering.«

AS Eh! My relationship with Golda was good when I was a member of her party, the Laborites. But I when I left to found the Likud—an undertaking she considered to be politically infantile—she never forgave me. She began to hate me with incredible fervor, with all her strength. And God knows that Golda was strong, like everyone of her generation. What else do you want to know?

OF I want to know if its true that you are planning to become prime minister, as everyone says.

AS First of all, I believe that Mr. Begin will remain prime minister for many years, because I'm convinced that he'll win the next elections. The country, as I've already suggested, is with him. If the elections were today, he would win without lifting a finger. I don't really have that strong a desire to become prime minister; what I do right now is more than fine with me; there are plenty of things to do in the Defense Ministry. To start with, whether you believe me or not, we have to politically—and pacifically—deal with the Palestinians. We haven't waged war against the Palestinians; we've waged war against the PLO terrorists, and the fact that we've resolved that problem only means that we've completed one part of the job.

OF Resolved it? Are you quite sure you've resolved it, General Sharon? What if, instead of resolving it, you've only made it worse? A whole generation of hate is being born among the men who were expelled, pulled from their families, and dispersed among different

countries. And from now on, terrorism will occur everywhere, the hatred blinder, the situation murkier. The men you think you've defeated are very angry. They are not at all resigned. Arafat has just said that the struggle will continue as before.

AS I wouldn't talk about these hypotheses, these disastrous theories. In fact, I don't think that the Palestinians will be able to do what they did in Beirut in the countries they've been moved to. They haven't succeeded in Syria or Egypt or Jordan so far, and, actually, they've been kept far away from the Israeli border. And besides, none of these eight countries has a government as susceptible to overthrow as Beirut's was. On top of which, Israel will remain vigilant. Arafat said that they'll go on like before? If I were him, I wouldn't try it. I gave those murderers a gift; I gave them their lives. They are alive because I chose to leave them alive. But their good fortune does not, of course, constitute any kind of guarantee for the future. Woe to them if they take up their bloody activities again, even in countries far from Israel. Woe to them.

OF And the four million Palestinians who do not belong to the PLO—who live scattered throughout the world or huddled together in tents or concrete hovels in the so-called camps in Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank, and Gaza? What would you do with them, these new Jews of the earth, condemned to wander in a cruel diaspora like the one you suffered? Is it possible that you are unable to understand their tragedy? Is it possible that you are the only people who refuse to acknowledge their right to a home—their right to a homeland?

AS But they have a homeland. It's in Palestine, which is now called Jordan—actually, Transjordan.

OF King Hussein's Jordan?

AS Of course. Listen, I've been thinking about this for twelve years, and the more I think about it, the more sure I am that this is the only solution. I said the same thing to Sadat. I'll explain. Until 1922, the land that makes up Israel, which the English called Palestine, was divided into two parts: Cisjordan—what you call the West Bank, the land that extends from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean—and Transjordan, the land that Churchill gave to Hussein's father to settle the Hashemite kingdom. In Transjordan, seventy percent

of the population is Palestinian; the majority of Parliament members are Palestinian; almost all the Ministers and Prime Ministers are Palestinian. The rest, less than thirty percent, are Bedouin—Hussein's Bedouins. It's truly a perfect solution.

OF So all Palestinians should pack up their bags and move to Jordan.

AS But they already live there!

OF No, I'm talking about the refugees living in Lebanon, Syria, Gaza, on the West Bank ...

AS Some could continue to live in the countries they're in right now, and some could move south.

OF And what should we do with King Hussein? Should we kill him, or perhaps send him to Monte Carlo to manage a casino?

AS Personal cases don't interest me. Hussein has nothing to do with me. He can stay where he is, why not? The Greeks chose a British and German king; why shouldn't the Palestinians keep a Hashemite king?

OF I understand. And the Bedouins? Where should we put them? Should we exterminate them, throw them into the sea like the unlucky Vietnamese in Hanoi? That way, newspapers could start talking about »boat people« again. Or maybe we should split them up just like we do with Palestinians today, so that they can form the Bedouin Liberation Organization—BLO instead of PLO?

AS The Bedouins are part of the Jordanian population—or, rather, Transjordanian. Like Hussein, they could stay where they are. I'll say it again: personal cases don't interest me. I am only interested in the fact that Palestine already exists, that a Palestinian state already exists, and that, consequently, there's no need to create another. And I'll tell you this: we would never allow a second Palestinian state. Never. Because this is exactly what they're trying to do. They're trying to constitute a second Palestinian state, a second Palestine, in Judea and Samaria—what you call Cisjordan, or the West Bank. And I'll tell you this: it will never happen. No one will lay a hand on Judea and Samaria, not even on Gaza.

OF But they're occupied lands, General Sharon. The areas that you've rebaptized Samaria and Judea were conquered by Hussein and are currently inhabited by nearly half a million Palestinians, aside from

the thirty thousand Israelis who moved there as colonizers after 1967. Everyone says that you should give them back—even the Americans!

AS We will not give back what belongs to us. And Judea and Samaria belong to us, for thousands and thousands of years. Forever. Judea and Samaria *are* Israel! And so is the Gaza strip. Even if we ignore the Bible, even if we ignore the sentiment, we have to consider the question of our security and our survival. It is a crucial question, because two-thirds of Israel's population lives in that region. Without Judea, without Samaria, we would be cast aside. No, I'll say it again: we will never allow the installation of a second Palestinian state. Never! Don't delude yourselves.

OF General Sharon, do you believe in God?

AS Well, I'm not religious. I never have been, even if I do follow certain rules of the Jewish religion, like not eating pork. I don't eat pork. But I believe in God. Yes, I think I could say that I believe in God.

OF Well, then, pray to Him—even for those who don't believe. Because I am truly afraid that you are about to pull all of us into an apocalyptic mess.

Lech Walesa

Danzig, March 1981

I met with Lech Walesa as Brezhnev was preparing to inaugurate the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, where he would maintain that enemies of socialism in Poland were attempting a counter-revolution, threatening the pillars of the state, but that Polish communists could count on their friends and allies in the Soviet Union, and that they would never abandon Socialist Poland. Walesa told me: »We are not hostile to Jaruzelski's government, we intend to let him do his job. But if he fails, if he is incapable, if he resigns, then Solidarity should govern. And I should be the one to take control of the situation.« Thinking I had heard him wrong, I asked to see him again the next day so that I could confirm his statements. Walesa gave his confirmation and added that it was a fantastically unlikely possibility, but that, as a possibility, it existed. Indeed, if such a situation were to occur, there would be no other choice but to govern. This was the start of a discussion that the leader of Solidarity had never completely entered into before: a discussion about the threat of Soviet intervention. Here it is, a coda to the long interview which took place in Danzig over the course of two three-hour sessions.

ORIANA FALLACI Lech, there has been an armistice between Solidarity and the government for the past three months. But not all armistices finish in peace treaties, and people want to know: what will happen next?

LECH WALESZA First of all, Solidarity has by no means signed an armistice. We only said that we had not assumed a hostile position toward the new government. We need a strong government

in Poland, a government actually able to govern, and it is possible that Jaruzelski will be up to the challenge. He's a soldier, after all, a general, and so he's accustomed to giving orders and securing the respect of others—with an army, if necessary. Furthermore, as a soldier, he has a habit of discipline and self-discipline. He needs to have clean hands if he hopes to clean up the mess that those dirty crooks left behind. However, if we sense any hostility from him or his government, we will fight. And what a fight it will be! The overwhelming majority of the Polish people have had enough, and things must change. Regardless of whether or not some people like it.

OF You mean the Soviets. What will happen if, despite his best intentions and yours, Jaruzelski fails?

LW If he fails and our *brothers* don't *help* us, he fails and our *allies* don't intervene, then Solidarity will govern. This situation is, of course, so improbable that it seems like fantasy, but it is a possibility. Yes, it exists as a possibility. Let's be clear, though: I do not want to govern, and neither does Solidarity. We simply want to ensure that the poor are given more to eat and are more satisfied with their lives. We want to safeguard, not to govern. I'll say it again: we have no interest in politics. But if there were no other choice, we would choose to govern. If at some point the government says to us: »This is a nightmare, it's impossible to govern here, we give up,« we would have to assume responsibility of government. And I would have to take control. I can say this confidently, and I will add that Poland will never again be what it was before August of 1980. Never.

OF Excuse me, Lech, I want to be sure that I've understood you, because I don't want to damage you, even involuntarily. You said that, if this government fails, that Solidarity will have to replace it and that you will take charge of the government?

LW Yes, that is what I said.

OF So you weren't kidding. So, do you think ... do you think you'd be able to do it?

LW Yes, I think I would.

OF Do you think that the Party, the Communist Party of a Communist regime would allow for a surrender of power like that? Yesterday, in Warsaw, one of the more liberal officials in the new government told

me firmly: »We are in no way prepared to divide power and even less disposed to give it up.«

LW But what other solution would there be if the Jaruzelski government were to fail? Hmm? They talk like that now, but let's see how things go. Great Empires have fallen before.

OF But what would be the consequences with your »brothers,« your allies, the Soviets? How can you delude yourself that they would allow you to take control of the government? Don't you think that they would intervene and stop you?

LW That's the point. That's the problem. This is why I spoke about an unbelievable possibility, a fantasy.

OF It's less of a fantasy than a Soviet intervention, Lech. The time has come to talk about it, to say these two words that you Poles never say, or never pronounce clearly—it's almost as though not saying these words was some agreed-upon custom, like knocking wood. Soviet intervention, Soviet intervention. Brezhnev is talking about it, on the other hand. So is Pravda, and TASS, and Izvestia. Kania has talked about it publicly many times.

LW Eh! How often do people raise their voices to frighten others? Don't we, the opposition, do the same thing? I don't believe that a violent conflict would solve anything, and I think the Soviets share this belief. So I don't think they will. Or rather ... listen, some time ago someone told me that everything would begin here, in Poland. That we would get everything we wanted, or almost everything, but that we would almost immediately lose it. But from this we would rise up, one day, and rediscover our humanity. Well, while I may not accept certain predictions, I admit that intervention is another possibility. Because this possibility exists, I will tell you that we do not want to pay such a high price. It is precisely because we do not want to pay such a high price that we are following such a difficult path; it is precisely because we do not want to pay such a high price that I am fighting so fervidly against the hotheads who want to change Solidarity's moderate nature, that I talk about political patience when I fight with intellectuals and farmers who lead dangerous and useless strikes. It is precisely because we do not want to pay such a high price that I am expressing myself so carefully with you.

OF Do you really think Brezhnev cares about the tenor of our conversation? Words don't count, Lech, deeds do! And when Kania and Jaruzelski are forced to negotiate with you, when ...

LW How many Soviet tanks have you seen in Poland? How many tanks have arrived since August?

OF What does that have to do with anything, what does it matter? They waited almost eight months in Czechoslovakia.

LW It matters because that solution has never been applied to Poland. We have found ourselves in at least four tragic situations—in 1956, in 1968, in 1970, and in 1976—and we have always resolved things without the help of Soviet tanks. The same will be true this time around. Czechoslovakia is not Poland.

OF Nor is it Hungary, but the Soviet tanks arrived in Hungary, too. It's not Afghanistan, but Afghanistan was also invaded by the Soviets. Let's put it like this: Lech, is true or not that many Party newspapers have accused you and Solidarity of practicing politics rather than unionizing, of wanting to overthrow the country and the system by demanding the abolishment of censorship and the freeing of political prisoners?

LW Heh! Yes, it's true.

OF Is it true or not that Polish students have asked and then obtained, at least on paper, the abolishment of obligatory Russian language and Marxism classes in the universities?

LW It's true.

OF Is it true or not that if the agreement is not respected and the striking students are not considered, that the workers of Solidarity will strike with them?

LW It's true. Solidarity approves of what these students are doing and will support them all the way. We are with them, I am with them. The only reason I was not at Lodz University during the strike is that I had to stay with the farmers in Rzeszow. The farmers' problems were more urgent. They had been striking for fifty-three days, and they had occupied those places ... but I had all my experts in Lodz and I was calling every two hours to hear the news and give advice. Moreover, it was I who set up the meeting between the students and Vice Premier Rakowski.

OF Alright. How do you think the Russians will react to this rejection of their language and their ideology? How long will they allow such heresy to go unpunished?

LW Nie, nie, nie! What do you want from us? Do you want us to give up? Do you want us to stop? To go back to what we were before, to say »sorry, it was all a joke, we won't do it anymore«? What other possible solution is there aside from continuing on, even if we do so carefully, toward being men? We do not want to pay the price that comes with a violent conflict, I'll say it again. But if we had to pay it, no one could call us cowards. Personally, I am more than ready to die. I'll add, however, that I am much less ready to kill. I don't even know how to kill a chicken for dinner, and I get queasy just watching someone else do it. But if it came down to defending my country, my home, my children, my comrades, I wouldn't hesitate. Oh, why have you made me say this? I don't want to talk about this, it gives me a headache. I have a headache now.

OF So do I, Lech. I have a headache too, Lech. But let's try to get through it and face this last difficult question: will Soviet tanks really be necessary? Won't Polish tanks be sufficient?

LW Nie, nie, nie! I don't even want to think about them for a moment. I refuse to believe that we will be unable to find a peaceful solution, and I refuse to believe that our soldiers would kill our workers! We will resolve everything painlessly, in a way that is beneficial to both sides! Why would you say such a horrible thing to me?

OF Because that high-ranking government official in Warsaw told me something else yesterday: »The Polish army is one thousand per cent devoted to the party.«

LW This is the only topic I cannot discuss. There are too many microphones in this house. Yes, microphones. They've been listening to me since 1972, God knows how many of them, with their damn gadgets. I saw them take the bugs out of my old house two weeks after I moved, and now they've been installed here.

It's Sunday afternoon and Danzig is cold, blanketed with snow and anxiety. Lech Walesa has just returned from a tiring visit to the

South of Poland, where he was working like a fireman to put out the blazes Bielsko Biala and Rzeszow—in other words, to calm the striking workers and farmers deaf to the threat of Soviet intervention. In the rooms on either side of the living room in which he receives me, his six children run, cry, make a racket, and his wife's voice rings out imperiously: »Enough!« Walesa is shaky with fatigue, exhaustion, and bad humor, and he doesn't trust this foreigner, the one they say threw her chador in Khomeini's face.

We squabble a bit at first, but then we settle into an understanding full of mutual respect and great friendship. When we part the following day, he tells me: »Thank you. If I get to Heaven, I'll save you a seat.« I will always remember this pure, sincere man—a little crazy, sure—and his pleasant idea of judgment in the shadow of tragedy.

LECH WALESA One moment please: before we begin, I'd like to make a few things clear. I am not a diplomat, I am not a master of ceremonies, and I am certainly not an intellectual. I'm a coarse kind of man, I've never read a book in my life, and I'm a man with a goal. I don't care at all about certain things. I don't care about books, or interviews, or your interview, or the Nobel Prize, or you. I'm not intimidated by these things. Not by generals, or prime ministers, or against you. I can pound my fists against a prime minister's table or give a general the brush-off in the middle of the street, and as far as you're concerned, I want to ask you: what do I have to lose, how much will I lose by doing this interview? And why are you looking at me like that, what are you looking at?

ORIANA FALLACI I'm looking at you because you resemble Stalin. Has anyone ever told you that you look like Stalin? Physically, I mean. Yes, yes: the same nose, the same profile, the same features, the same moustache. And I think you're the same height, certainly the same build.

LW Nie, nie, nie! No, no, no! No one has ever, ever told me this, and I'd rather not know. I don't want to know that, it doesn't interest me, and you still haven't answered my question. I'll ask another one: how will the interview be written? Question and answer, question and answer,

or like a narrative with your comments throughout? Because I don't like the idea of the comments at all. It's not honest, the reader should be making the comments, deciding if I'm an idiot or not.

OF Listen, Walesa, I write my interviews out as questions and answers, always. If you'll benefit from this is not for me to say, I don't know what you're intending to say here today. And I ask the questions here, so let's get started. Seven months ago no one outside of Poland, and only a handful of people in Poland, knew your name. Today you are one of the most famous men in the world: your Solidarity is driving the Kremlin crazy, you've gotten Gierek fired, you're making Kania toss and turn in his bed at night. When you come to Italy you're received like a head of state or a movie star ...

LW Stop, stop, stop, stop!

OF Why, what's wrong?

LW What's wrong is your authoritarian style: you're so dictatorial. Seeing as how I am too, we've got a problem. We need to find a *modus vivendi*, we need to figure out a way to proceed. Let's make a deal: from here on out I'll be nice to you, and you'll be nice to me. If not we'll beat each other's heads in, okay?

OF Okay. I'll continue: faced with all this glory and all the power that has come to rest on your shoulders, do you ever say to yourself, my God, this is too much, I can't do it?

LW Ye, ye, ye! Yes, all the time. I am tired, unbelievably tired, and not just physically, I never rest and my heart doesn't work the way it should anymore, it hurts me and makes me catch my breath. I'm tired inside, in my soul. This is not the life for me. Meeting people who require you to wear a tie, knowing good manners, listening to advice: don't do that, don't do that either, smile ... Ties strangle me, and why should I have to smile if I don't want to, if I don't feel like it? And I'm not allowed to do anything, anymore. I can't have a drink, I can't touch a girl, the world will fall apart if I misbehave. They say that it's gone to my head. It's not fair. You have to write that it's not fair, that men are still men even when they go into politics, and that all men are sinners and commit their little sins.

OF Yes, but I was thinking more of something else, Walesa. I was thinking of the responsibility that you now have to your country and

to history. Are you ever frightened, do you ever feel that you're not up to the challenge?

LW Nie, nie, nie! No, because I am a man of faith and because I know that I am needed in this moment. The people need someone like me, who can make reasoned decisions and solve problems in a prudent way. I'm not a hothead. I understand that too many injustices have accumulated over the past thirty-six years here in Poland to expect that things will change overnight. I understand the need for patience and wisdom, the need to control the hard-earned rage that the people would like to hurl like a bomb. And I know how to make them control their rage, because I know how to reason with them. Even if I'm not educated, I know how to say things and I always find the right words. Like a few days ago, during the strike in Jelenia Gora, when I yelled: »Idiots, you're doing the wrong thing, you're acting like fools, you're idiots, record-holders of idiocy, I stand against you!« And three hundred people fell silent, they calmed down. Eh! Talking to crowds doesn't always mean going along with them ... do I seem conceited?

OF No, why?

LW Because sometimes I give that impression. But I'm not conceited, you know, I'm a guy who wants to help people. For example, if you asked me a favor, »bring me here or take me there,« I'd do it immediately. And I'd do it even if it brought me a lot of trouble, even if my friends said: »Why are you doing this, you're hanging yourself!« I like to hang myself. That was the case in December of 1970 and August of 1980, when I did what I did because no one else wanted to. When I was working for the opposition, if someone didn't want to go to a meeting I went, if someone didn't want to talk I talked. It's the same thing today. Because I know how much we can overstep with our requests and our demands, I know what country we live in, I know our reality, and I know what path we need to walk along. There's a danger that we'll stop following this path, that the spirit of the movement will be guided by people who don't understand, by hotheads. And I need to stay here to make sure this doesn't happen, to explain that getting things is never easy, that requests should be made at the right moment, without being impatient. Just look at the monument

we erected in Danzig for our workers who were killed by the police in 1970. If we had built it then, or two years after the fact, it would be like a weak tree branch, easy to cut off. Instead, today it's a strong, healthy tree, with roots that go so deep that no one can pull them up. And even if you cut it down, it would grow back.

OF Where did you learn to see things this way, Lech? Who taught you?

LW I don't know. I told you that I've never read a book, I've never read anything. Sometimes I try but I get bored after the fifth page, I stop. I haven't even had teachers, examples to emulate. I've always solved problems on my own. Even technical problems, like fixing a television or a sink. I think about it and then I fix it in my own way. Politics is the same thing: I think about it and then I find the solution. Or at least I find a solution. But I can tell you that I came up with this method after the defeats of 1968 and 1970. It was then that I understood the need to work carefully, to avoid hurting ourselves in the process. I figured it out in prison, I concluded: Lech, you can't knock down a wall with your head. You have to move slowly, in small increments, scientifically, otherwise you split your own head open and the wall stays standing. You know, I've been arrested about a hundred times, and I'm almost always kept for about forty-eight hours. It's easy to think in prison because you're alone and it's quiet. It was in prison that I learned to plant a seed of doubt in the jailers' minds, to make them nervous and make them understand that they were acting badly toward me and toward themselves. It was in prison that I learned the best way of letting people know that I had been arrested, because it's pointless to be arrested if no one knows about it.

OF What was your system?

LW Well, when they let me loose I would go to a bus stop or a train station to get home. Even if I had money to buy a ticket, I would claim that I didn't. And I asked the people waiting in line for money, explaining that I had been arrested and the reasons for my arrest. People were interested, they would buy my ticket. Then I'd get on the bus or the train and I'd keep the conversation going, I'd give a kind of speech to warm the passengers' hearts. I did this for years. Wherever I went I said something and I made something happen.

OF This is a masterful political move, Lech.

LW Nie, nie, nie! What politics? I'm not a politician, and I never have been. Maybe one day I will be. I've just started looking around me and trying to figure out their thought processes, their little tricks, but here and now I'm not a politician, and I can prove it. If I were a politician I would enjoy what I'm doing right now, I wouldn't be able to get enough of it. But I've got too much on my plate, and I can tell you what I am. I'm a very angry man. I've always had this anger inside, ever since I was a child, ever since I was a young man. And when you accumulate as much anger as I've accumulated over the years, you end up knowing how to manage it. With your brain. This explains how I know how to control the crowds and the strikes. Eh! You have to be very, very angry to know how to control the hard-earned rage of the people. You have to know how to live with anger. Look, I could have held onto my anger for at least another five years, I could have made it till 1985. I let my anger explode last August because I realized that I might not ever have another chance like it. So I climbed the gates of the Lenin Shipyard.

OF Let's talk about that, Lech, about the day you scaled the gates.

LW Look, long before it happened, long before free unions existed, we had considered the possibility that something like what happened in August might happen in Danzig. We talked about it in the secret workers' meetings, when we were studying the history of Poland and the rules about unionizing. Nothing subversive, mind you. We had good teachers, we were talking to informed people. In fact, I had prepared myself to avoid a excessive situation, and I said that in case of chaos inside the shipyards I wanted to be notified immediately. When they notified me I understood that chaos had broken out early because the time was right, and so I had to get in there. The only problem was that four policemen were watching me day and night. I shook them, and I won't say how because it's best to keep some things to yourself, and I reached the shipyard and scaled the gates. I got there at a crucial moment. A meeting of two thousand workers was in progress, and the director was there, promising to meet their demands and asking them how to end the strike so they could get back to work. No one was standing up to him. All the blood rushed

to my head. I squared my shoulders, I planted myself in front of him, and—do you know anything about boxing? Well, with a right and then a left hook I laid Mr. Director out on the mat; he almost tumbled out of the ring. I yelled at him that the workers weren't about to end anything, that they didn't believe his lies, that they wouldn't move until they were sure that they weren't being tricked again. The workers took courage and I became their leader. I still am.

OF Lech, what does it mean to be a leader?

LW It means having determination, being decisive both inside and outside, with yourself and with others. I have always been like this, even when I was a boy, when I was just a poor peasant who wanted to be a pilot. I was always the gang leader, like the ram who leads around a flock, the bull who leads the herd. That ram is necessary, that bull is necessary, otherwise the flock or the herd just wander around, here and there, wherever there's a little bit of grass to eat. And no one goes in the right direction. A herd without a guiding animal is a senseless thing, it has no future. But I don't know if I'm a real leader. I only know that I intuit things, I sniff them out, and when the crowd falls silent I know what they want to say. And so I say it, in the right words. I charge myself like a battery. Now I want to know something about you. You travel so much and meet so many people that you should be able to satisfy a curiosity of mine. What do people say about me, what do they say? In the West, what do they think of me?

OF Well, they ask themselves who this Walesa is.

LW Eh! They ask themselves the same thing in the East: who is this guy who's been making our soldiers sleep with their boots on for the past six months? Is he a general? It goes without saying that they've already figured out an answer.

OF Yes. Pravda calls you an anarchist. A counter-revolutionary, an enemy of socialism.

LW And I reply that I am only a man, an man who wants a little justice, a guy who wants to make himself useful, even to them, beyond borders, and colors, and ideologies. A hungry rabbit knows no borders and follows no ideologies. He goes where he finds food and other rabbits do not block his path with tanks. But we're not talking

about the East, we're talking about the West. What do they say about me in the West?

OF Some say that Walesa is a Christian Democrat, others say that he is the nephew of Rosa Luxemburg, and others still stay that he is a Social Democrat bigot. There are even some who say you are a Eurocommunist. What should we tell them?

LW Nothing, because I refuse to express myself with their terms, their labels, left and right, capitalist and communist, Christian Democrat and Luxemburgian. I express myself with my terms: good, bad, better, worse. And I say: if it helps the people, it is good; if it doesn't, it is bad. Of course, you need to see how and why it helps them. Once I split a crust of bread with a nice girl, and I felt happy. Once my wife threw a nice plate of sausage down in front of me, but she did it so rudely that I couldn't even eat it. I mean that having enough to eat isn't enough, and sometimes a crust of bread happily eaten is better than a plate of sausage rudely delivered. At the same time, we need to admit that if there's no crust of bread at all, no one can be happy. So we need to build a system that combines two things: food and happiness. And I'll say this, too: we live on this Earth for fifty or sixty years, more or less, and on one side we have the rich getting richer, while on the other side the poor get poorer. This is not okay. We need to divide things up. Why don't rich people want to share what they have? Anyway, they end up dying and they have to leave everything to their heirs, who just say terrible things about them!

OF Socialists and communists say more or less the same things.

LW Nie, nie, nie! I told you and I'll tell you again: I don't want to use those words, those slogans that they invented.

OF Lech, are you trying to say that Communism has failed?

LW Eh! It depends on the yardstick you use to measure the concepts of good, evil, better, and worse. If you measure it by what we Poles have in our pockets and in our stores, then I would say that Communism has done very little for us. If, on the other hand, you measure it by what we Poles have in our souls, I would tell you that Communism has done a great deal for us, because our souls are full of everything they don't want for us. They wanted us not to believe in God, and yet our churches are full. They wanted us to be materialists,

incapable of making sacrifices, and yet we are anti-materialists, extremely good at making sacrifices. They wanted us to be afraid of guns and tanks and yet we are not afraid.

OF And freedom? Let's talk a little bit about freedom, about how sausages taste without freedom.

LW Freedom is obtained little by little, by degrees. Freedom is a food that should be prepared with great caution, especially when people are very hungry. For example, let's assume that Solidarity were to gain access to the television stations, that we began yelling »Down with the thieves, the crooks, the bandits who have robbed us and oppressed us all our lives!« What would people do? They would almost certainly react by demanding beheadings, flooding the streets with blood. It would be chaos, anarchy. Something similar has already happened in the countryside, I've seen it with my own eyes. All of a sudden the government began selling a lot of televisions to the farmers, TV entered their homes and the programs they watched made them doubt their religious faith. The consequences were disastrous. Many farmers lost their faith and became atheists. Nie, nie, nie! Things can't change all of a sudden. It's too dangerous. What do you think?

OF I think that people should never be afraid of freedom, because there's only one thing which educates people about freedom, and that is freedom itself. It's a mistake to sip it slowly, like a sick man sips broth.

LW Hmm ... on the other hand, it's a mistake to exaggerate like you Westerners do, with so many political parties that nobody knows what they want, since the Socialists hate the Communists, and the Communists hate the Christian Democrats, and the Christian Democrats hate the Liberals, and everyone annoys everyone else, no one is able to get anything done, because they are all dependent on each other ... what kind of system is that? To me it just seems like chaos, I don't understand it at all. Not to mention the fact that it would be impossible to have so many parties here in Poland because of our situation. Here, control needs to come from the unions. If we succeed, we'll serve the people better than your parties who spend all their time fighting amongst themselves, making fun of each other,

insulting, accusing, gossiping about who went to bed with who, etc. I don't think that political parties have been able to get much accomplished, in the rest of the world. In the midst of all that chaos, they've made just one thing clear: they say they want one thing and then they do the opposite, they define themselves one way and then they behave in a completely different manner. Have I explained myself?

OF Beautifully. But, if unions substitute parties, there will be no pluralism: there will be a simple division of power between the single party and the unions. You don't want pluralism?

LW Nie, nie, nie! Of course we want it! Every person, every group, our whole society should have the right to express itself! But do we really need to imitate the parties and use the word »party»? Can't we say association, society, club? The Canary Breeders Club, for example, or the Society of Rosary-Sayers! Anyway, you can't plant grain in concrete: there can be no other political parties in Poland, so people need to adapt. Let's let the canary enthusiasts gather together and gain status of association, regulations which would allow for other clubs, the Rabbit Breeders Club, the Pheasant Breeders Club, and we'll all start raising canaries, and rabbits, and pheasants, and geese, and chickens, and who knows what else! The important thing is that these different groups have to exist freely, they have to serve society, and their good will must be dependent on the boss's good will, and vice versa. This is how I see it. And how I say it. Do you think it's stupid?

OF No, Lech, I don't think it's stupid at all.

LW Maybe it is, a little bit. I'm not an expert in these matters, I never have time to reflect on these concepts, and I always have a lot of things on my mind. Really, I'm thinking aloud here. But I like it, I really like it! I so rarely talk to someone who asks me questions that make me think. And it's talking to someone, a lot of the time, that ideas come to me, that I find myself saying »Good God, why didn't I think of that sooner?» Yes, this is how ideas are born. This canary idea could be a great one.

OF But I also like the idea about planting grain in the concrete.

LW Ye, ye, ye ... the problem is that we'd have to tear up the concrete first. And then, who knows if the land underneath is right for growing grain? What if the grain that grows is stunted and deformed?

OF It's better than nothing.

LW I don't know. Maybe you're right, and maybe you aren't. But I think that you're wrong, and I'll prove it to you with a nasty metaphor. If you want a child, and if you want it so badly, so desperately, with your whole heart, would you rather have a stunted, deformed child, or no child at all? Oh, if I weren't so tired I could express myself better. I'd like ... you have to understand that I did three years of trade school, nothing more. I've never had time to think about the things the way you have. The only time I ever had a moment to think was in prison, in fact, sometimes I miss prison, I say to myself: »Ah, if only I could be held for forty-eight hours every two weeks! I could rest, I could think!« But let's forget about it, let's move on. But please ask me some easier questions, these last ones have given me a headache. What else do you want to know?

OF I would like to know why you always have the image of the Black Madonna on your jacket. Isn't that another kind of label?

LW Nie, nie, nie! It's not a label, it's a habit. Or rather, a blessing. For Poes, the Black Madonna is a kind of blessing, and this ... I can't even remember who gave it to me, or when. I know it won't be easy for you Westerners to understand. The Church has never been to you what it has been to us, a symbol of struggle, the only institution that has never bowed its head in the face of oppression. Without the Church, none of this would have happened, my life would be completely different, I would not be the man I am today. I'll go even further: if I hadn't been a believer I wouldn't have survived all this. I've been threatened so many times, did you know that? So many. They even killed my best friend.

OF Were you always this religious, Lech?

LW Ye, ye, ye! Always! I have witnesses, you can ask the bishop about me! Ask my schoolteachers! When they were teaching us about Communism I never paid attention! I only strayed from my faith once when I was eighteen and nineteen years old. Eh, I lived life. Parties, girls, alcohol. But then something happened. One day I was cold and tired, and I was looking for a place to sit. And since there was a church nearby I went into the church and sat down in one of the pews. There, in the warmth, I suddenly felt so good that from

that moment on I stopped being a scoundrel. Not that I'm a saint, mind you. Please. Angels don't exist, and I'm certainly no angel. I'm more of a devil. But I go to church every morning, and I take communion every morning, and if I've done a little something sinful I go to confession, too. I say »a little something« because I'm a good man, all things considered, and I don't have much to confess. Since I was born, I've only been drunk twice: once when I was a soldier and once when I was going to trade school, and as far as girls are concerned ... listen, my wife's not a bad woman. Really, I have to say that she's my ideal woman: if I had married anyone else I'd be divorced now, or stabbed to death with a kitchen knife. I have no reason to betray her. Then, of course, the fact that we have six children shows pretty clearly that we get along and that we're good at making love. Good and industrious. Of course, you understand, well, when I find myself alone for a few weeks, like with the farmer's strike, there are temptations! Eh! I told you that I'm not a saint, that it's just my way.

OF I certainly hope the Pope isn't reading this.

LW But our Pope is an intelligent man, he understands men! Actually, I wasn't even intimidated when I met him. I only got nervous when I saw all those photographers, all those journalists, because I hadn't prepared any kind of speech, I didn't have any notes, but then I never do. Anyway, once I understood what kind of situation I was in, I asked myself: »How are you going to get through this, Lech?« And I began to be very afraid about getting the Pope in trouble. That's why my speech was so short and off-hand. After, when I sat down with the Pope, things were easier. Since I had a terrible headache, I couldn't even eat, and so I told the others: »You talk to the Pope, do your part.« And I just sat there quietly, thinking, what a shame. Breakfast with the Pope, and I couldn't even eat.

OF Did you worry about your headache when you met with the Italian labor organizers, too?

LW Nie, nie, nie! With them I didn't worry. Listen: I don't understand the Italian labor organizers, these Western organizers with their jackets and ties! I don't understand their strikes, all those strikes they make their workers do! There's a big difference between their

strikes and the ones we have in Poland, where we're arrested! No, I don't understand them at all. They earn a nice salary being union organizers and then they can't even solve any problems, they let the situation deteriorate to the point of no return. I told them that it's no way for labor organizers to behave. In fact, I don't think they were very happy with me. We had a number of heated arguments, a bitter back-and-forth that I enjoyed very much, it was like playing ping-pong! And I read them the riot act, even though I didn't say everything there was to say, I didn't use every trick in the book. It was the first time I'd been abroad and, since I was in Rome where our Pope lives, I didn't want to get the Pope in trouble.

OF But, nonetheless, they were very eager to be seen with Walesa, to have their picture taken with Walesa. Did you notice?

LW Ye, ye, ye! I certainly noticed! Not just the labor organizers, but a whole lot of other people wanted to be of service to me. When I got off the airplane, someone came up to me with a big bouquet of red carnations, and pressed them into my hands. I don't know if those carnations were a symbol or not, and I don't care. But I got rid of them immediately, I gave them to a girl, and I was careful to avoid the person who gave them to me after that.

OF Listen, Lech, I'm curious about something. It's well known that your stepfather lives in America, and that your mother died there a few years ago. Have they ever invited you to come live with them, have you ever thought of emigrating?

LW Nie, nie, nie! Never! I could never live outside of Poland, never! Besides, I've always thought that a man should live where he was born, so that he can give back to his country. Yes, my second father has invited me many times ... I call him my second father because he married my mother after my father died. My father died in 1945 from the hardships he suffered in a German death camp. My second father always writes me: »Come over here, what are you doing over there?« But apart from the fact that I'll never leave Poland, I always felt that his invitations weren't coming from the heart, but rather from all the dollars in his pockets. And I wasn't wrong, because when I saw him recently in Rome I didn't even recognize him. In Poland he was poor, but he was already ready to make sacrifices for others, to

share what little he had with others, and today he only thinks about money and fun. The dollars have gone to his head, and we don't get along anymore. Yes, it's great to have money, we need money to live decently and raise our children, to feed them and send them to school, but money isn't everything, and it can't buy dignity. On the contrary, it exposes you to a lot of temptations. It often makes you wicked. I never want to become a millionaire or a capitalist. Never! And when I go to America ...

OF When will you go, Lech?

LW In six or seven months, before the year is out. As soon as I've gotten the movement into shape, as soon as I've recovered from all the bruises I got from the dotting kisses of the crowds in Rome. Poland needs help. We don't need dollars: we need political help, economic help. If we hope to get it, we need contacts in the West. Besides, there are a lot of people in the West who make cold calculations, who would like to resolve their own affairs with Polish blood. Yes, I have to go to America and tell them that I don't like those calculations one bit.

OF I think your headache has passed, Lech, and that I can start asking you some more difficult questions. For example: do you ever think that you are in danger of being manipulated? Yesterday, in Warsaw, a prelate told me: »Walesa only does what the Cardinal wants.«

LW Wait a minute: as far as Cardinal Wyszyński is concerned, that's true. I would never act against the faith, against the Church, and more importantly, against the Cardinal. He is a great man, he is very wise, and his support has been definitive. Always and everywhere. People don't know that he was the one who made our meetings with Gierek and Kania possible, and that he's even been helping me out with the farmers and workers of Rzeszów and Bielsko Biala over the past few days. I couldn't do it alone, I had to ask his priests for help. Oh, no one can understand what the Cardinal has done for me, for us. It would be foolishness, in other words, to act against his wishes. Moreover, he would never allow anyone to act against me. Not even someone in a black tunic. But, if someone in a black tunic was trying to use me ... listen carefully: I can't swear that people haven't tried, on all sides. But I can swear that I wouldn't allow it, and that I will

never allow anyone to manipulate me, or even to influence me, and that anyone who tries will end up with a broken nose. Actually, if I realize it's happening, I'll break the nose myself.

OF What about the intellectuals?

LW From intellectuals and farmers *libera nos Domine*, I say. Oh, those farmers made me so angry with their strikes! I couldn't stop yelling at them: selfish, stupid, stubborn! What right do they have to behave like that? Intellectuals are similar to farmers: they don't know how to adapt. They were great during the struggle, and I respect them a lot, but they can't adapt, they want to keep going with the same methods. And you can't! I keep telling them: be realistic, you can't do this! I think this proves that I'm not being manipulated by them. Not by the Church and not by them. I certainly don't belong to KOR. I belong to Solidarity! Then, you'll ask, why do I keep all those professors and teachers around as experts and counselors? Eh! Because if I kept them out they would start burrowing underground like moles and they'd get in anyway, through their little tunnels. It's better to just tell them to come in and make themselves comfortable. Not to mention that they're intelligent people, and intelligent people are always good to have around: the important thing is not to be intimidated by them. And I'm not, you know why? Because intellectuals need a lot of time to figure things out. They need even longer if they want to decide anything. And their decisions are usually weak. Intellectuals are strange, sometimes you find yourself wondering if they're really that smart after all. They sit there, they discuss, and after five hours that arrive at the same conclusion I drew after five minutes or five seconds.

OF What about the regime, Lech? I've always wondered how the regime allowed a Walesa to rise so high, so quickly. Do you think they want to use you? As an alibi or a scapegoat, maybe? Or do they want to absorb you?

LW Nie, nie, nie! The idea that I could be absorbed by the powerful is a possibility I don't even consider. If they had wanted to do that they would have acted sooner, when I was Mr. Nobody. There was no shortage of chances, I promise you, you have no idea of the kind of offers I've been made! Now, even if I wanted to, I couldn't allow

such nonsense. I'd rather shoot myself: dignity is more important than life. Look, they let me emerge because they had no other choice. Literally. But this means that ... I mean, in Poland it is not enough to consider the internal reality. You also have to look at the external reality: we are a country under someone else's control, and we can't know what price we'll have to pay, and we fear that there will be victims. People always ask me: »Aren't you afraid of being killed, Lech?« I just shrug. I don't even work that hard to protect myself. Some of my friends try to keep me safe, they follow me around, but what's the point? Guns aren't the only things that can kill, and sometimes the only thing to be is a fatalist. If it's going to happen, it will happen. And it'll mean that I'm going to Heaven.

OF Lech, how long will Walesa last?

LW You mean if they don't kill me, if everything works out? Hmm. If I think about it rationally, I would say that it's all downhill from here. I don't know yet how steep the hill is. I'll explain. It's because I'm not a man who's very comfortable in normal times, I'm not very good about bending to the rules, at playing games. Because I'm deadly tired and my heart is screwed, my health is falling apart; because I can't keep doing the same thing, the same thing I did in August and the same thing I've been doing up to now. And finally, because if chaos finally comes to Poland, all the people's anger will rain down on my shoulders. The same people who applauded me, who erected shrines in my honor, will stone me. They'll trample me. They'll even forget that I was acting in good faith and in their interests. Oh, if I were clever or selfish, I'd shave my moustache and go back to the factory. But I won't abandon this, as long as the people want me to continue, I won't. I can't. I mustn't. Because from this moment forward things will just get harder, more complicated, and we'll take a lot of hits. A lot of big hits. So I have to stay where I am. To keep fighting, to put out fires like a fireman, to ...

OF To raise canaries to sing well ... thank you, Lech. Good luck, Lech.

LW Thank you, with all my heart. It's been very nice to spend these hours with you, even if you did give me at least two headaches. You've been kind to me. I don't believe what they told me, that you throw your chador in Khomeini's face, in people's faces. You've given

me a lot to think about! I'll never forget you. If the Polish censors allow your book to be published, I'll read it. It'll be the first book of my life. Do you think we'll ever see each other again? If I get to heaven, I'll save you a seat. Then we can talk about how to grow grain out of the concrete.

Deng Xiaoping

Peking, August 1980

What has become of the myth of Mao Tse-tung in China—of the legend who shook not just their, but our, lives? The man who dazzled young people lacking common sense, who seduced intellectuals without intellect, created both aesthetic and philosophical fashion, not infrequently in the name of opportunism, the man who is the father of the extremism that today kills and terrorizes? What remains of the so-called Cultural Revolution, the adjective »Maoist,« the Little Red Book that graduates in architecture would wave in the air (after they had beaten their teachers), as though they were plans for houses and bridges that were then never built? What does opening to the West mean for this China—this extraordinary and unpredictable China that jumped straight from feudalism to Communism, shocking the world and nearly destroying itself? What other changes are brewing at the highest level of its leadership, which for years was walled up in untouched and untouchable castles? What kind of perplexities exist about Italian, French, Spanish, and Portuguese communists—how are they judged? And what are the true motives behind the Chinese-Vietnamese conflict—what unconfessed dramas have yet to come to light? And, most important, how much inflexible hostility is there between the Soviet Union and China—what do the Chinese mean when they speak of the inevitability of war, of World War Three?

Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping—veteran of the Long March, thrice overthrown and thrice resurrected as his country's leader, the brain and the brawn of the incredible turnaround in the wake of Mao Tse-tung's death—responds to these questions in an interview that lasted more than four hours over the course of several days. He granted me an official audience along with the news agency New China, which

reported our talks in the press and on television. Deng Xiaoping received me on Thursday, August 21, and Saturday, August 23, in the Great Hall of the People in Peking. There wasn't a single question—no matter how awkward or insolent—that he avoided, always responding with ease and frankness, even candor, often smiling or even laughing, always fixing his intelligent, hard eyes directly on mine and cupping his ears in his hands: »I'm a little deaf—physically, at least.« A historic man; a unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience, as a journalist and a human being. Indeed, despite the tense mood that permeated our encounter, there were a few moments of good humor, which I have not noted in the text that follows. The first occurred when I gave him my best wishes for his birthday, which falls on August 22.

»My birthday? Is it my birthday tomorrow?!«

»Yes, I read it in your biography.«

»Humph! If you say so ... I don't know. I never know when my birthday is, and, even if it is, it's hardly something to be congratulated about. It means I'm turning sixty-six. And sixty-six means decay.«

»My father is sixty-six, Mr. Deng, and if I tell my father that this means decay, I think he'll clock me.«

»As well he should! You certainly shouldn't be saying such things to your father.«

The second happened at our last meeting. On Thursday we had had a squabble over Stalin—an argument that grew out of my comments on the enormous portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin that gazed over Tiananmen Square. Saturday morning, as I crossed the square to reach the Great Hall of the People, I was shocked to see that the portraits had been removed. Was it some banal coincidence, or, with that petty argument, had I reminded him that they should be taken down?

»Mr. Deng! This morning Stalin's gone! So are Marx, Engels, and Lenin! You surely didn't take them down on my account; this can't be because of me, can it?«

»No, no—not at all. We're merely returning to the old ways, as I explained to you the other day. When it's necessary, we'll put them back up again—even Stalin.«

»What a shame—I was so happy! I would very much like to be able to claim that I got Stalin out of Tiananmen Square!«

»I know, I know. I heard you. But I wouldn't give you the satisfaction.«

Here is the interview: I spoke in English, while Deng's Chinese was faithfully translated by Miss Shi Yanhua, *Swallow that Lights on the Flower*, the former interpreter of Mao Tse-tung.

ORIANA FALLACI Mr. Deng—you once said, in an article you wrote for the Western press, that China is in the grips of a movement that could be called a second revolution. And, indeed, the traveler who arrives in Peking today, the last days of summer 1980, experiences an almost physical sense of change: no uniforms, no slogans, no abundance of red. And the portraits of Mao Tse-tung can be counted on the fingers of one hand; up until now, I've seen only three, including the one at the entrance to the Forbidden City that looks onto the images of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. I'll use this detail to ask you my first question: will those few portraits of Mao remain, or will they be taken down?

DENG XIAOPING They will certainly remain. They will always remain, even the one in Tiananmen Square. In the past, there were too many portraits of Chairman Mao; there were so many that instead of being solemn they began to seem banal, even disrespectful, and so we took them down. But . . . look, Chairman Mao made mistakes, yes. Nonetheless, he was one of the principle founders of the Communist Party of China and the People's Republic of China. Thus, when we look at his merits together with his mistakes, we think that his mistakes take second place, while his merits take first. And this means that the contribution he made to the Chinese revolution cannot be forgotten and that the Chinese people will always cherish his memory; they will always think of him as one of the founders of the party and of the republic.

OF Yes, it's often remarked that today, all the blame is attributed to the Gang of Four: to Jiang Qing, Mao's widow, and the other three who started the Cultural Revolution. But is that historical fact, Mr.

Deng? Someone told me that many Chinese, when talking about the Gang of Four, raise five fingers and reply »Yes, yes—four!« in irritation. **DX** [He smiles]. Well, it seems I must immediately and clearly explain to you the difference between Chairman Mao's mistakes and the crimes perpetrated by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. I should remind you that Chairman Mao dedicated most of his life to China, that he saved the party and the revolution in their most critical moments, that, in short, his contribution was so great that, without him, the Chinese people would have had a much harder time finding the right path out of the darkness. We also shouldn't forget that it was Chairman Mao who combined the teachings of Marx and Lenin with the realities of Chinese history—that it was he who applied those principles, creatively, not only to politics but to philosophy, art, literature, and military strategy. Yes, before the 1960s—or, better, up until the late 1950s—some of Chairman Mao's ideas were, for the most part, correct. Furthermore, many of his principles brought us victory and allowed us to gain power. Then, unfortunately, in the last few years of his life, he committed many grave errors—the Cultural Revolution, above all. And much disgrace was brought upon the party, the country, the people.

OF Would you permit me to tweak your answer a bit, Mr. Deng? When you say »Chairman Mao's ideas,« are you referring to what is often defined as »Mao Tse-tung Thought«?

DX Yes, during the Revolutionary War, when the party was still in Yen Nan, we gathered together all the ideas and principles advanced by Mao Tse-tung; we defined them as »Mao Tse-tung Thought«; and we decided that this thought would guide the party from that point forward. And that is precisely what happened. But, naturally, Mao Tse-tung Thought was not created only by Mao Tse-tung. What I mean is: even though most of the ideas are his, other old revolutionaries also contributed to the formation and the development of those concepts—Chou En-lai, Liu Shaoqi, Ziu Den, to name the most important among them.

OF And you don't include yourself in that list?

DX I don't count, but of course I also did my part. If I hadn't, I wouldn't be an old revolutionary; I wouldn't be a veteran. [He laughs]. Then,

I was telling you, in the last years of his life Chairman Mao contradicted himself and the good principles that he had established. And unhealthy ideas and incorrect reasoning began to emerge from his behavior and his actions. The most unhealthy idea of all was the idea of the Ultra-Left. Humph! Maybe the fact that he had removed every trace of prudence from his character, or maybe he had lost contact with reality. You know, because of everything he had done for the revolution, he enjoyed great prestige in this country, and as a result he received too much praise, too much flattery. He ended up ignoring even democratic centralism, which is to say, the collective direction that he had always preached. And this was one of his most fatal errors, even though other revolutionaries, in some way, had their share of the responsibility—myself included. And it was thus that the patriarchal method began to develop in him; the life of the Party and the life of the country lost any semblance of normality. As you see, we are still talking about his mistakes.

OF Yes, and if that's the case, Mr. Deng, shouldn't we acknowledge that the mistakes began to emerge much sooner—almost immediately—and that the Great Leap Forward was an error?

DX Of course—and when I chose the second part of the 1950s as the start of all the mistakes, I should have made it clear that I was talking about the Great Leap Forward. But, here too, we cannot attribute all the responsibility to Chairman Mao; even here, we veterans had our share of the blame; we acted against the laws of reality; and we claimed we could hasten economic development with methods that ignored all economic laws. So it is true that the person most responsible for this was Chairman Mao, but he was also the first to understand our error—to suggest ways to correct it. And in 1962, when other negative factors began to emerge and the proposals were not carried out, he admitted he was at fault. But even that wasn't enough for us; even that didn't teach us the lesson we should have learned. And so the Cultural Revolution occurred.

OF But what was the Cultural Revolution really trying to accomplish?

DX It wanted to avoid the restoration of capitalism in China. Yes—that was the intention. The intention of Chairman Mao, I mean to say, not the intention of the people who would later become the Gang of

Four. However, despite the good intentions, such a goal was born of an erroneous judgment of Chinese reality. In short, once more Chairman Mao was wrong. He was also wrong when he chose what target to hit; he said that the target should be the followers of capitalism—the *compagnons de route* of the capitalists who existed within the party—and with this accusation he attacked a great number of high-level veterans: men who not only had made excellent contributions to the revolution but had great experience. And among them was Premier Liu Shaoqi, who was arrested and expelled from the party. As a result, all of the revolutionary leadership was dissolved. A year or two before his death, Chairman Mao recognized this error. He said that the Cultural Revolution was wrong in two things: destroying the revolutionary leadership and provoking a wide-ranging civil war.

OF So it was truly a civil war.

DX Yes, it was! The people were divided into two factions who were killing each other. And since the old revolutionaries had been swept aside, only those who declared themselves »rebels« were able to emerge. Like Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. Eh! Many people died in that civil war.

OF How many?

DX An exact figure is impossible. It will never be possible, because they died for various reasons and because China is such a vast country. But look: enough died that we are able to say today that their deaths were reason enough for the Cultural Revolution to have never taken place. Anyway, Chairman Mao's errors were political errors. This makes them no less serious, nor does it justify them, but political errors are one thing; crimes that are judged in court are another. I refer to the crimes for which we tried the Gang of Four and, posthumously, Lin Biao: the two groups of the Cultural Revolution that we consider counterrevolutionary. Of course ... well, of course it was Chairman Mao who permitted Lin Biao and the Gang of Four to take advantage of his political errors and usurp power ...

OF That's the point, Mr. Deng. Because I understand that you, as the leader of a new China, are attempting to survive a terrible situation: rescaling and possibly erasing the myth of Mao without destroying

it—throwing out everything while trying to throw out as little as possible. Ultimately, you are experiencing what some have defined as »the dilemma of choosing between accepting the past and disowning the past.« But, short of rewriting history and burning all the libraries, how will you choose? The director of the Gang of Four was Mao's wife, and it was Mao himself who chose Lin Biao as heir to the emperor. Was this also a »mistake«?

DX I believe it was, and I would group it with the other errors I have already noted. Then ... well, it's obvious that the investiture of Lin Biao wasn't right. It's obvious that choosing your own successor like an heir to the throne is, from a leader's perspective, a feudal practice. But we also need to be aware of the fact that democratic centralism no longer existed—that we no longer had a system for avoiding things of this nature.

OF To conclude this line of questioning: I can't imagine that, at the next Congress of the Communist Party of China, we will see a repeat of the events of the twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, when Khrushchev denounced Stalin. Or am I mistaken?

DX You are not mistaken. At the Congress we will objectively evaluate the merits and the mistakes that characterized the life of Chairman Mao; we will celebrate his merits and recognize that they are of primary importance; and we will admit his mistakes, recognizing that they are of secondary importance. By making public the mistakes that Chairman Mao committed in recent years, we will adopt a realistic attitude. But we will certainly continue to follow Mao Tse-tung Thought—or, rather, all that which constituted the just part of his life. And, no, it is not only his portrait that remains in Tiananmen Square but also the memory of the man who brought us to victory and who, in essence, founded a country. And this is no small feat. And I'll repeat: the Communist Party of China and the people of China will always look to him like a symbol—a very precious treasure. Write this down: we will never do to Mao Tse-tung what Khrushchev did to Stalin at the twentieth Congress of the CPSU.

OF But, besides the Congress, there will also be a posthumous trial for Lin Biao and the Gang of Four and ... there will be a trial, correct?

DX Certainly—we are preparing for it now. It should take place at the end of the year.

OF I only ask because you have been announcing these trials for at least three years, but they have yet to take place.

DX They will; I am telling you that they will. We needed all this time to prepare. The crimes that they are accused of are numerous! And by now the country is acting under a socialist legal system.

OF And the Gang of Four are alive, is that correct? Jiang Qing is alive, is that correct?

DX She eats—quite a bit—and sleeps. In prison, naturally. And from that you may deduce that she is alive.

OF Good. And since she is alive, she will speak. Since the other three are alive, they will speak. And they will invoke Mao's name; they will say many things about Mao. So the trial could bring about a moral condemnation of Mao—in other words, a verdict that is very different from the a priori absolution that will come about at the Congress.

DX I assure you that the trial of the Gang of Four will not sully the memory of Chairman Mao in any way. Of course, it will show that he had some responsibility—for example, that he used the Gang of Four—but nothing more. The crimes that the Gang of Four will be convicted of are so evident that there will be no need to involve Chairmen Mao to prove them.

OF I'm very surprised, Mr. Deng. With one hand, you accuse him; with the other, you defend him. But you defend him even when you accuse him; and you were deposed twice on Mao's orders.

DX Not twice—three times. But I wouldn't say that I was deposed with the approval of Chairman Mao. (He laughs). Yes, I had three deaths and three resurrections. Have you ever heard the name Wang Ming, the man who led the Communist Party of China in 1932, directing the faction of opportunists who defined themselves as the extreme left? Eh! My first fall occurred in '32, thanks to Wang Ming. He accused me of stirring up trouble for Mao Tse-tung's group; he got rid of me; and it took three years for me to recover. But I did recover; in 1935, during the Long March, at the Zunyi Conference, when the opportunists on the extreme left were defeated, Wang Ming was cast aside, and Mao Tse-tung retook control of the party, making me secretary

general. My second fall, as you know, happened at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, when I was secretary of the party and one of the directors of the Central Committee, not to mention vice-premier. And Mao tried to protect me this time too. He wasn't successful, however; Lin Biao and the Gang of Four hated me too much. They didn't hate me as much as they hated Liu Shaoqi, however, so I wasn't arrested and left to die in prison; but they certainly hated me enough to send me to Jiangxi province to do hard labor. And in 1973, when Chairman Mao called me back to Peking ...

OF Mao Tse-tung or Chou En-lai?

DX Chairman Mao. I know, some believe that it was Premier Chou En-lai. But it wasn't Chou En-lai; it was Chairman Mao. Chou En-lai was already gravely ill at that time, and, since the government was resting almost exclusively on his shoulders, the damage that his illness was inflicting on the country was great. Chairman Mao called me back; he asked me to substitute Chou in his day-to-day affairs; and he charged me with the office of vice-premier. He said that my case should be judged by a score of thirty to seventy; that is, thirty percent for my errors, seventy percent for my merits. And this shows you that even my second resurrection was due to Chairman Mao—even though, at that time, he was seriously ill himself. He couldn't even meet with the officers of the Politburo; he only saw the members of the Gang of Four. As far as my third fall is concerned, it occurred in April of 1976—three months after the death of Chou En-lai and five months before the death of Chairman Mao. And since, the following October, the Band of Four was arrested, it's no surprise that I rose again.

OF I'm surprised, however. Three times! Mr. Deng, how can a man fall and get back up again three times? Is there a secret?

DX [He laughs, happy]. There is not. I kept serving him again, and they kept throwing me out again. That's all.

OF And were you never afraid that you would be killed during those purges?

DX Yes, I was afraid of being killed. During the Cultural Revolution, Lin Biao and the Gang of Four always wanted to kill me. They didn't because Chairman Mao stopped them. Look, even when I was sent to labor in Jiangxi province, Chairman Mao made sure that someone

there was looking out for my safety. Eh! Foreign friends often ask me how I survived so many trials, so many tribulations, and I always reply, »Because I am an optimist, because I am never discouraged, and because I know that politics is a seesaw moving up and down.« But that answer is incomplete. The truth is that, through it all, I always believed in Chairman Mao. I believed because I was always sure that he knew me well.

OF I had always read that he couldn't stand you—that he complained about you continually: »He's deaf, but he always sits far away from me at meetings« »He treats me like a dead ancestor; he never asks me anything« »He never even tries to find out what I think; he always gets his own way.«

DX It's true, it's true, even though he didn't say only those things about me. He complained about everything to everyone, always saying that he wasn't being listened to, or consulted, or informed. But I truly did give him cause to complain, because I didn't like the way he behaved—his way of acting like a great patriarch. He acted like a patriarch; he never wanted to hear anyone else's ideas, even if they were good—never listened to opinions different from his own. He behaved in an unhealthy way, that's what it was; he had a feudal way about him. If you don't understand this, then you can't understand how he was able to launch the Cultural Revolution.

OF I don't understand many things, Mr. Deng. And the first involves Chou En-lai. How do you explain that the one man who was not caught up in the Cultural Revolution was Chou En-lai? How do you explain the fact that, even though he was a noble man, he never tried to check the infamy that was happening right under his nose; for example, the scandalous arrest of Liu Shaoqi?

DX Let me begin by telling you who Chou En-lai was: he was a man who worked like a dog his whole life without ever complaining. Listen, there were days when he was working twelve or even sixteen hours. I can tell you this because I knew him well; we came into the Cultural Revolution at around the same time, Chou En-lai and I, and when we were in France in the 1920s I thought of him as a big brother. Furthermore, he was respected by everyone who knew him—by his friends and his enemies, his comrades, and his people.

And this explains, at least partially, why Chou En-lai was able to remain in his position as premier when everyone else was caught up in the Cultural Revolution; something that, it should be said, was a great good fortune for a great many people—a great advantage. Well, during the Cultural Revolution, Chou En-lai always exercised a moderating influence; he acted as a cushion and shielded many people from violent blows. But for many years he found himself in a very difficult position—extremely difficult. And he often said things that he would have preferred not to say, he did things he would have preferred not to do, even though we all forgave him everything. He often acted against his own will, in short. When Liu Shaoqi was expelled from the party and imprisoned, the report of his so-called crimes was read by Chou En-lai.

OF By Chou En-lai?

DX Yes, by Chou En-lai. Naturally, the report had been written by others, but Chou En-lai read it. He couldn't have done otherwise; he had to read it.

OF That's remarkable—disappointing and remarkable. Because it shows, yet again, that revolutions do not change people and that after a revolution the proverb is still true: »The more things change, the more they stay the same.«

DX Hmm. I can only tell you that it is possible to prevent these things, or to attempt to prevent them, to establish a system that is truly new. A little while ago, I said the word »feudal.« There, some systems of our recent past were very similar indeed to feudalism. Indeed, they bore all the stigmata of feudalism: the cult of personality, the patriarchal way of running things, the lifelong terms for leaders. China has a history of feudalism that stretches back thousands of years, and, because of this, our revolution suffered greatly for the lack of democratic socialism, of socialist legal systems. Now we are trying to change—to truly reform the system—to finally establish a real socialist democracy and ... listen, there's no other way to avoid episodes like Liu Shaoqi.

OF Well, if you think about it, Jiang Qing's story is a feudal story, as well. One of the reasons why no one dared to challenge her is that she was Mao's wife, wouldn't you say?

DX Eh, yes. One of the reasons, yes.

OF Was he really so blinded by her—dominated by her?

DX Look, when I tell you that Chairman Mao made many mistakes, I'm also alluding to the mistake called Jiang Qing. She was a very, very bad woman. So bad that any bad thing said about her is not bad enough, and if you asked me to give her a score, like we do here in China, I would tell you I can't, because there is no ranking for Jiang Qing. She is a thousand times a thousand below zero. And yet Chairman Mao allowed her to take power, to form a faction, to use ignorant young people to construct a political base, to use the name of Mao Tse-tung like a banner for her own personal interests ... even later, when they had been separated for years—yes, separated. Didn't you know that Chairman Mao and his wife, Jiang Qing, lived apart? Well, even after their separation, Chairman Mao never intervened once—never even stopped her from using his name.

OF And in order to arrest her, to arrest the other three, you had to wait for his death. Mao wasn't even buried a month. Mr. Deng, who organized this arrest? I mean to say, how much responsibility do you take for it, even if you were deprived of all authority?

DX The decision was a collective one, and we knew that we had the support of the people. This support was clearly seen on April 5 in Tiananmen Square, when the people's exasperation took the form of a protest over the lack of ceremony to commemorate the death of Chou En-lai. I couldn't do much of anything at that time, given that I had no freedom, but I exercised my influence in 1974 and 1975, when I was still in the government. Without any pretext, I opposed myself to the Four, doing everything I could to expose them for what they were. But I have to say that, right before he died, Chairman Mao had some harsh things to say about them; it was he who defined them as the »Gang of Four« and he who chose Hua Guofeng, so that Jiang Qing and her accomplices would not become his successors. I think all these things contributed to the decision to arrest her. It was not an easy decision, you know. The Gang of Four was very strong after the death of Chairman Mao; they had even tried to overthrow the new government led by Hua Guofeng.

OF In that case, I need to ask you a somewhat delicate question, Mr.

Deng. And I'd like to apologize; I know that we Westerners are unable to understand some Chinese subtleties. Here it is: At Mao's funeral, September 18, 1976, why did Hua Guofeng say, »The great Cultural Revolution that Chairman Mao wanted and led, has triumphed over the plots of restoration designed by Liu Shaoqi, Lin Biao, and Deng Xiaoping, and has allowed for the power they usurped to be rightfully restored to the interior of the party and the state structure«?

DX [He smiles]. You know, in those days, people did not have a lot of time to tally up the last few years, to reflect accurately. The important thing was raising Mao Tse-tung's flag and confronting the Gang of Four. Only after, when we realized that that speech was not appreciated by the people . . . well, I'd even say that it was not a very well-thought-out speech. Let's say that it was a misguided speech, and that the words of comrade Hua Guofeng were intended to preserve stability. Remember, Hua Guofeng is one of the leaders who decided to arrest the Gang of Four only a month afterwards. And it goes without saying that, previously, some not-unpleasant things had happened for the Four, in direct contrast with Chairman Mao's wishes.

OF For example?

DX The decision to build the mausoleum. In the 1950s Mao Tse-tung had said that, upon their deaths, all Chinese officials should be cremated and only their ashes preserved—no tombs, no mausoleums for them. The idea arose from lessons learned in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death and was then confirmed in a written document that Chairman Mao signed first. Then the rest of us signed, myself included, and, indeed, Premier Chou En-lai was cremated. The document still exists.

OF Are you telling me that the mausoleum will be torn down?

DX No, we have no such intention. It's already there, and it doesn't seem opportune to demolish it. If we did, many people would be offended, and there would be too much gossip over the matter. Yes, I know that there are some people who say that the mausoleum should be torn down. But, as far as this subject is concerned, I do not agree with those who would change things.

OF Mr. Deng, I'm sure you understand why I asked you that delicate

question not too long ago; because many people think that there are conflicts between you and Premier Hua Guofeng. Are there?

DX No. The current line of policy has been taken up through unilateral agreement. Naturally, with some specific questions, agreement is not always easy. But now that collective leadership has been restored, we discuss all important problems in a group, so all this speculation about »power struggle« makes no sense at all, at least as far as I'm concerned. Power doesn't interest me at all. Soon I'll resign as vice-premier; in 1985, I plan to serve as a counselor and nothing more. And listen, I am sixty-six years old, and when a man passes fifty his brain no longer works like it once did. And then the elderly tend to be more conservative, so I think it's best to limit our role to one of counsel.

OF That seems like a jab at Mao Tse-tung. I mean, he saw things quite differently.

DX [He laughs]. As do several of my peers. Indeed, they don't want me to resign, to cut things short, and so we reached a compromise. I said, okay, let's see what happens then, when I'm eighty-one years old. But I said this still thinking that it would be better for me to resign before I reach that age, even if it's just to set a precedent. I've had enough with old men who continue to govern until they die; I'm sick of lifelong leaders. Nowhere is it written that old men must rule—that leaders should lead for life—and yet this tendency continues to dominate our system. And it is one of our weaknesses, because it impedes young people from moving up—it prevents the country from renewing its leadership. And China needs younger leaders. Yes, I believe the moment has come when the old put themselves out of the picture—when they spontaneously withdraw.

OF Of course, it's difficult to imagine China today without you, seeing as how you are the brains behind this change, Mr. Deng. Even if you are only the vice-premier ... speaking of which, will you relieve my curiosity on one point: how is it that a man such as yourself has always remained second-in-command, has always been the vice-somebody?

DX [He laughs even more]. Eh, eh! As you see, being in second place doesn't prevent me from acting. But, coming back to the previous

argument, I'll tell you that I won't be the only one to resign; many of my colleagues who are my age will, as well: Vice-Prime Minister Chen Yuan, for example, and Li Xiannian; Xu Xiangqian, for example, and others. And Hua Guofeng will no longer be premier and party chair at the same time. The Central Committee has decided to recommend comrade Zhao Ziyang.

OF So the question of new leadership also concerns Hua Guofeng.

DX Yes, even if he is not yet sixty—I believe that he's fifty-nine—because not even the post he'll retain, as chairman of the party, is a lifelong post. No, Hua Guofeng cannot stay chairman of the party for as long as he lives; it is not permitted under the new system. Hua Guofeng can remain for another two terms—at most, three—and then no more. We're still deciding over the question of terms and the renewal of mandates.

OF New things are truly happening in China! And, speaking of new things, let's talk a little about the opening to the capitalist West. This is largely an economic opening, necessary to realize the project of the Four Modernizations. Since this opening will introduce foreign capital into China, it's reasonable to assume that this will allow for the spread of private property. But isn't this just the dawn of a new capitalism, in miniature?

DX Let's say that the principles that we are following as we rebuild this country are essentially the same that were formulated at the time of Chairman Mao: to concentrate on our strengths and to consider international assistance as a subsidiary factor and nothing more. In whatever measure we open ourselves to the world—in whatever way we use foreign capital or accept the assistance of private investments—this assistance will only constitute a small part of the Chinese economy. In other words, foreign capital—and even the fact that foreigners will build factories in China—will not influence, in any way, our system, which is a socialist system based upon public ownership of the means of production. Despite this, we are aware that the decadent influence of capital will inevitably develop in China. Well, I don't think that's such a terrible thing. I don't think that it's correct to be afraid of this.

OF Do you mean to say that capitalism isn't so bad after all?

DX It depends on the way you look at it. In any case, it is better than feudalism. We cannot say that all of the things that have been developed in capitalist countries are of a capitalist nature. Technology, for example; science; the ways of managing the economy, which is another science in itself, do not bear a capitalist stigma. And we intend to learn these things from you in order to aid us in our construction of a socialist society.

OF And yet, at the end of the 1950s, I seem to recall, when you realized that the Great Leap Forward had been a failure, you recognized that man needs an incentive to produce; I would even argue that man needs an incentive to exist. Doesn't that mean questioning the ideas of Communism itself?

DX According to Marx, socialism, which is the first stage of Communism, covers a very long period. And, during this period, we will try to fulfill the principle »From each according to his ability, to each according to his work.« In other words, we will blend the interests of the individual with the interests of the country. There is no other way to mobilize interest in production among the masses, let's admit it. And since the capitalist West will be helping us to overcome the backwardness we find ourselves in—the poverty that afflicts us—it doesn't seem opportune to get caught up in the subtleties. However things go, the positive effects will be greater than the negative effects.

OF »It doesn't matter if the cat is black or gray, as long as it eats the mice,« you once said. Would you apply the same pragmatism, even the same tolerance, to political life? I ask you, thinking of an answer you gave during your visit to America: »In China we must eliminate dictatorship and broaden democracy.« What democracy were you referring to? The kind based upon free elections and a multiparty system?

DX I never said anything like that! That's a misunderstanding. But I can tell you that, after having removed the Gang of Four, we strongly emphasized the necessity of promoting socialist democracy. Without losing, you understand, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Democracy and dictatorship of the proletariat are two parts of the same antithesis, and proletarian democracy is far superior to its

capitalist counterpart. We are emphasizing the Four Principles that we must adhere to: the principle of socialism, the principle of dictatorship of the proletariat, the principle of Marxism and Leninism elaborated in Mao Tse-tung Thought, and the principle of leaders supported by the Communist Party of China. So, you see, that even the principle of dictatorship of the proletariat has remained untouched and untouchable.

OF Is this why, in Tiananmen Square, directly across from the portrait of Mao which guards the entrance to the Forbidden City, the portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin are still hanging?

DX Well, before the Cultural Revolution those portraits were only displayed during important occasions. This was the practice. But during the Cultural Revolution it was decided that they should always be on display, and that is why they are still there. Regardless, we intend to return to the old practice.

OF Important occasions or not, do you really need to keep the portrait of Stalin?

DX We think that Stalin's contribution to the revolution is much more important than the mistakes he made. To use the Chinese way, the score for Stalin would be thirty percent to seventy percent: thirty for his errors and seventy for his merits. Furthermore, Chairman Mao agreed with me on the question of Stalin's score, and, after the twentieth Congress of the CPSU, members of the Communist Party of China expressed a very clear judgment of Stalin. We said that we would always continue to consider his writings as classic works of the international Communist movement. You know, Stalin made mistakes even where the Chinese revolution was concerned; for example, after World War II he didn't want us to sever ties with the Kuomintang or to begin the war of liberation. But even this does not cloud our judgment of him.

OF And Khrushchev?

DX Khrushchev? What good has Khrushchev ever done?

OF He denounced Stalin.

DX And you see that as a good thing?

OF Not good—great. For God's sake, Stalin killed more people than the Cultural Revolution ever did.

DX I'm not at all sure of that. Not at all. And, anyway, the two things cannot be compared.

OF In short, anyway, you prefer Stalin to Khrushchev.

DX I just told you that the Chinese people would never do to Chairman Mao what Khrushchev did to Stalin!

OF What if I told you that in the West they call you the Chinese Khrushchev?

DX [He laughs]. Listen, they can call me anything they like in the West, but I know Khrushchev well; I dealt with him personally for ten years, and I can assure you that comparing me to Khrushchev is insulting. Khrushchev only ever brought pain to the Chinese people. Stalin, on the other hand, did some good for us. After the founding of the People's Republic, he helped us to build up an industrial complex that is still the foundation of the Chinese economy. He didn't help us for free—fine, we had to pay him—but he helped us. And, when Khrushchev came to power, everything changed. Khrushchev broke all the agreements between China and the Soviet Union, all the contracts that had been signed under Stalin—hundreds of contracts. Oh, this conversation is impossible. Our backgrounds are too different. Let's say this: you keep your point of view, I'll keep mine, and we won't say anything more about Khrushchev.

OF Fine, in that case we'll talk about Eurocommunism and Berlinguer. Mr. Deng, I know that in the past you have been very skeptical about Eurocommunism and Italian Communists. You once said, for example, that any participation by Italian Communists in government would only favor the Soviet Union. Do you still believe that this is the case, after Berlinguer's visit to China?

DX We've changed our minds about Italian Communists, and we've done so in keeping with Mao Tse-tung Thought, which states: »In every country the Communist party must combine the principles of Marxism and Leninism with the practical conditions in which they find themselves; there is no other way to find the correct path.« In other words, we don't think that any Communist party should copy the revolutionary experience of another, even if the other in question experienced the Chinese Revolution or the October Revolution. To answer your question more precisely, I will tell you this: comrade

Berlinguer asked me the same thing during his visit. And I told him that it was up to the Italian Communist Party to judge based on their own experiences.

OF I interviewed Berlinguer a little more than a month ago, and I told him that, in my opinion, Italian Communists and all European Communists more generally had not yet been able to cut the umbilical cord to Moscow. Would you agree?

DX Look, the reasons we reestablished relations with the Italian Communist Party is that the ICP has its own, independent thought. But this does not mean that we approve of all of the opinions held by Italian Communists. We don't even claim that they approve of ours, please understand, but ... well, let's say that in the past the Italian Communist Party had a misinformed view of the Communist Party of China, and vice versa.

OF That doesn't seem like such a big deal. And I think I can deduce that the mutual disagreement about the ICP's relations with the Soviet Union have remained unresolved. In fact, there was no joint address, as many thought there would be. In your view, what is preventing the Italian Communists from detaching themselves definitively from the Soviet Union?

DX It is partly due to historical reasons and partly ... look, it's not proper for me to hazard guesses or judgments about other people; I can only comment on specific arguments. For example, if you ask me about Afghanistan, I'll tell you it's very comforting that Italian Communists condemned the invasion of Afghanistan, and it is completely deplorable that French Communists attempted to justify it. But, you know, European Communist parties are very different from one another. In fact, we have reestablished relations with the Italian Communists, and the same is not at all true for the French Communists. And I see no interest, on their part, in rebuilding a relationship.

OF What about Santiago Carrillo? Or Alvaro Cunhal?

DX Spanish Communists have proposed the reestablishment of relations, but, for the moment, we have not gotten beyond initial contacts. We are waiting to see if they develop into something or not. We have no direct relationship with the Portuguese Communists—none.

OF Well, you certainly can't say that the international Communist movement is alive with internationalism.

DX You know, it's a good thing that no Communist party feels itself to be patriarchally at the center of the movement—that there's no center, no boss. At the outset, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union filled that role, but it is no longer the party led by Lenin. It is no accident that we regard the Soviet Union as an imperialist country and ... yes, imperialist—socialist-imperialist. And since the country led by that party has become an imperialist country, it's questionable if that party can still be considered a Communist party.

OF Yes, I wasn't really alluding to that so much as the fact that today, in the world, the only armed conflicts are between Communist countries. For Christ's sake!—leaving the Arabs to one side, on the other side there is no one country that hates another country with the same irreducible fervor that Communist countries seem to feel for each other. The Soviet Union against China, and vice versa; China against Vietnam, and vice versa; Vietnam against Cambodia, and vice versa ... I said the same thing to Berlinguer.

DX Do you want to talk about the Vietnamese? Look, from a globally strategic point of view, the Vietnamese are merely following in the Soviet Union's footsteps. As I always say, they've become the Cuba of the East. Isn't it proof enough that they've occupied Laos and Cambodia? What else do you need to see before you ask, What the hell kind of country is this? We Chinese are completely unable to understand why they've opposed themselves to us. During their struggle for independence, we helped them greatly. We never abandoned them—never. Nor did we interfere with their internal affairs. Do you even know the kind of help we gave them over the years? The aid we sent is, comprehensively, about \$20 billion. And we never asked anything in return. I'll say this: \$20 billion is a lot of money for a poor country like China.

OF But then you killed each other in a conflict that amounted to a small war.

DX Yes, it's true that we launched a defensive counterattack against them. But, judging by the results, I don't think that it was very effective. We were too contained; we saw that many countries were

against this action, and as a result we were too contained. But the episode proved how determined we are to chastise the tiger. And we reserve the right to chastise the tiger again.

OF It's one of the traumas of our time, Mr. Deng, because we all weep for Vietnam; we all fought against the war in Vietnam. And today some of us are asking, Were we making a mistake; were we wrong?

DX No! No, no, we were not making a mistake; we were not wrong. We Chinese do not regret taking their side. It was right to help them, and we will do so every time that a people fights against a foreign invasion. But today in Vietnam the situation is reversed, and we need to confront that situation.

OF Yes, but even the Chinese are wrong sometimes, Mr. Deng. How can you possibly take the side of Pol Pot?

DX Listen, we look truth in the face—right in the face. Who liberated Cambodia? Who got rid of the Americans and the American-supported regime of Lon Nol? Was it, perhaps, democratic Cambodia—the Cambodian Communist Party, led by Pol Pot? At the time, Prince Sihanouk had no power; he had been deposed by his own people. We continued to support him regardless, and we accommodated his exile government in Peking. But Sihanouk was not fighting in Cambodia; the Cambodian Communist Party was. They won, almost with no outside help. And do you know why they had no help? Because almost all the aid sent by China was confiscated in Vietnam. China shares no borders with Cambodia, so, in order to help them, we had to send our aid through Vietnam, and they took everything. Nothing ever reached Cambodia—nothing.

OF But Pol Pot ...

DX Yes, I know what you want to say. It's true that Pol Pot and his government made very serious mistakes. We are not ignorant of this. We were not ignorant of it at the time, and, looking back, I can admit that we may have been wrong not to talk to him about it. We've said as much to Pol Pot. The fact is that our policy has always been not to comment on the affairs of other parties or of other countries. China is a big country, and we do not want it to seem that we are imposing ourselves. Anyhow, today the reality we have to face has changed: who is fighting the Vietnamese? Sihanouk

still has no power; groups like Son Sann are too weak; and the only ones who are able to conduct an effective resistance against the Vietnamese are the Communists who follow Pol Pot. And the Cambodian people are following them.

OF I don't believe it, Mr. Deng. How is it possible that the Cambodians are following the same people who massacred them, dismembered them, destroyed them with blood and terror? You are talking about mistakes, Mr. Deng. But genocide is not a mistake, and genocide is what Pol Pot has done. A million people have been eliminated by Pol Pot.

DX The figure you name is not at all certain. You don't believe that the Cambodian people are following Pol Pot, and I don't believe that Pol Pot has killed a million people. One million out of four or five million? That's nonsense—crazy. Yes, he killed many people, but let's not exaggerate. He also had the bad policy of removing people from the cities, but let's not exaggerate. And I tell you that he has the support of the people, and his power grows more every day. And I tell you that opposing Pol Pot—trying to overthrow him—only helps the Vietnamese. Eh! There are people in this world who live outside of reality, who won't give someone who has made an error the chance to mend his ways.

OF Then I'm afraid I'm one of those people who live outside of reality, Mr. Deng. In order to convince us that he truly wanted to mend his ways, Pol Pot would have to resuscitate all the people he slaughtered. And, from outside reality, I will allow myself to ask you another difficult question: I understand your realism, but how are you able to have relations with certain people? Because Pol Pot is by no means the only one. When Generalissimo Franco died, the first flowers to reach his coffin were sent by the Chinese and bore the signature of Chou En-lai.

DX Look, the flowers we sent to Franco's funeral—they were meant for the Spanish people and intended to improve our relations with the Spanish government. The opinions that we have about individuals should not influence our actions, and, as far as Franco is concerned, I assure you that our opinion of him has not changed. Nor has our opinion of the emperor of Japan, and yet we have good relations

with Japan. The fact is that we cannot project the problems of the past onto the realities of the present.

OF Pinochet is not the past; he is the present. Argentinean dictators are present, not past. And yet you have relations with them, with Pinochet.

DX The case of Argentina is different: Argentina is under a military government, and we deal with Argentina as a country; our policies serve the interests of China with that country. As far as Pinochet is concerned, I know that many of our progressive friends will not understand our behavior toward him, but, speaking candidly, I can tell you that our presence in Chile has done some good. And I'll explain what I mean. Allende was a friend to China, and his memory is very dear to us. He was a friend, even if he let himself be too heavily influenced by the Soviet Union. On this count, Chou En-lai gave him a very sincere piece of advice: don't follow the Soviets in everything they say; do not adopt a far-left politics, or otherwise you will end up isolated. And, well, after Allende was killed and the democratic forces in that country found themselves in the extreme difficulty that we've all heard about, we thought long and hard about the appropriateness of retaining diplomatic representation in Chile, or breaking all ties. But we chose to stay. You know, when judging certain situations it's important to keep an open mind and to examine the far-reaching criteria of each situation. It's also necessary to consider global interests; in short, to be very cautious, very prudent. And, even if the choices you are referring to were made by Chairman Mao and Chou En-lai, and not by me, I maintain that they were correct. Listen carefully: you are a journalist, a writer, and you can say whatever you like about international affairs. You can choose freely. But when one is leading a country ... it's another story entirely.

OF This is a convincing answer, Mr. Deng. And at this point I'd like to undertake the last subject I came to interview you about: world war—or, rather, what the Chinese call »the inevitability of world war.«

DX War is inevitable because superpowers exists and because imperialism exists. And we are not the only ones who think this way; in every part of the world today, many people are convinced that war will break out in the 1980s. The next ten years will be very, very

dangerous. They're terrifying. We should never forget this, because this is the only way we will prevent war from breaking out immediately; this is the only way we can defer it. Not by chatting about peace and detente. Westerners have been talking about peace and detente since the end of the Second World War. So has the Soviet Union. But where is this peace, where is this detente? Year to year, if not day to day, the hot spots are growing; the factors that will lead to World War Three are increasing; and still they talk about detente and peace.

OF The fact is that most people don't understand this—don't want to understand this. Or they don't believe it, or don't want to believe it. Especially in Europe.

DX They delude themselves that war can be prevented. And so they close their eyes; they cover their ears. This is one of the factors that brings about war: this blindness, this subservience, this compliance. Before the Second World War, all of this became famous under one word: appeasement. Chamberlain and Daladier used this word to explain their passive attitude toward Hitler as he ravaged Eastern Europe. Today, certain European countries—and not only European countries—behave exactly as Chamberlain and Daladier behaved in the late 1930s. But what did Chamberlain and Daladier get out of it? What was their appeasement good for? World War Two broke out precisely because they underestimated the danger, because certain European leaders deluded themselves that they could avoid war by reacting passively and making concessions to Hitler. This new appeasement only serves to weaken the West—and Europe. The Soviets know this well, and so they encourage it. And every day they become more arrogant.

OF Do you mean to say that Schmidt and Giscard d'Estaing are playing a game with the Soviet Union?

DX I mean to say that certain people are not aware of the danger. I mean to say that the methods adopted by certain people are not wise. I mean to say that certain people are rolling the dice, tempting fate, and that this is not wise. We Chinese do not behave in this manner. When we face a problem like Vietnam, we do so in the interests of everyone, according to the rules of global strategy.

OF Mr. Deng—what, in your opinion, are the hot spots today that could trigger war?

DX I would indicate the Middle East and then Indochina. But dangerous zones are everywhere at this point, and it is not easy to determine where the fuse will be lit. It is easy, on the other hand, to determine *who* will light the fuse. You see, the Chinese have said for years that only two countries are capable of launching World War Three: the United States and the Soviet Union. However, after World War Two—or, rather, after the Korean War and the Vietnam War—American power has been steadily declining, and the United States have continued to withdraw. Today, they are on the defensive, and let's admit it: the United States are afraid of the Soviet Union. As if this weren't enough, they are operating under a political system that does not allow them to make immediate decisions. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, is on the offensive and only has to convene a few members of the Politburo in order to arrive at a decision. This is how it happened with Afghanistan; a few members of the Politburo met and decided to invade. Anyway, look: the focal point of Soviet strategy is Europe—is still Europe. And this reality will not change.

OF So war could break out in Europe? Is that what you're saying?

DX No, not necessarily in Europe—for Europe. I'm saying that World War Three will break out for Europe, because Europe has the strong economy, Europe has political influence, Europe has military might, and all of this is needed for world domination. Even if they occupy China—even if they occupy the rest of the planet—the Soviets will be unable to establish the global hegemony they desire if they don't have Europe. But, naturally, when I assert that the focal point of Soviet strategy is Europe, I include the Middle East, the northern coast of Africa, and the Mediterranean, essentially.

OF You didn't list the Persian Gulf among the dangerous areas.

DX But that too, as well as the invasion of Afghanistan, or the march of the Soviets toward the Indian Ocean—it's all part of their strategy to surround Europe in a pincer movement! Of course, the invasion of Afghanistan is the first step toward reaching the Indian Ocean so that they can gain complete control of the Middle East! And when this plan is completed, Europe will find itself in a critical moment,

because what can Europe do, once the Soviets have taken the oil wells of the Middle East? When former Prime Minister Callaghan came to China, I discussed these facts at length with him. I told him that Europe's critical moment would be reached when the Soviets gained control of the oil wells in the Middle East, and I asked him a direct question: »What will you do when the Soviet march toward the Indian Ocean reaches the Persian Gulf and the Middle East? Because at that point you will have only two choices, Mr. Prime Minister: either you fall to your knees before the Soviet Union and, at best, become a kind of Finland, which would be the most honorable solution, or you could fight.« And Callaghan said, »There would only be one choice.« He didn't tell me which choice, but I understood him, and I replied, »Then you should make that choice immediately, Mr. Prime Minister. You shouldn't wait.« Listen carefully: choosing now means stopping the front in Afghanistan and Cambodia and ... do you see now what I was saying about Cambodia? If it were possible to stop the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and in Cambodia, World War Three would be deferred.

OF And then? If World War Three is inevitable, deferral seems almost pointless.

DX Then ... we'll see. In a few years, things might even improve. The important thing is to postpone the war—to gain a few years.

OF And Iran? There are those who say that Afghanistan is a sort of rehearsal for the eventual invasion of Iran.

DX I am sure that the Soviet Union will not stop in Afghanistan if we do not stop them. And it's next target will be either Iran or Pakistan. And, even if it's not possible to know which of these two countries they will choose first, I think it's important to concentrate our attention on Iran.

OF But don't you think that the drama of the American hostages, the chaos in which Iran is drowning, the madness of Khomeini and his followers—in short, what has happened in that country over the last ten months—is an advantage for the Soviets?

DX Listen, I don't understand what is happening down there very well. I can tell you only that Iran is not just a hot spot; it's boiling. Let's not forget that the Soviet Union has a very strong influence

in Iran. Eh!—very strong. And this should show you why we have every intention of maintaining the best possible relations with Iran. Whatever happens in Iran, you will see that a Chinese embassy in Tehran will be very useful.

OF It wasn't very useful to the Americans.

DX The Americans are completely incapable of doing anything in Iran. But the heart of the matter, as I see it, is not Iran; it is war—the inevitability of war. I am not talking about Iran; I am asserting that war will break out, sooner or later. And whoever thinks differently is making a tragic mistake, because they are failing to enact effective measures. But really!—the Soviet Union talks about the SALT agreements incessantly, and yet it never stops arming itself. Its collection of atomic bombs and nuclear weapons is incredible, and its armories are filling up with conventional weapons. These weapons are not food; they are not shoes; they are not clothes; they are not things that will spoil if not consumed immediately. Sooner or later, they will be used.

OF Will you allow me an observation on this point, Mr. Deng? The Chinese always say that they are not afraid of the Soviet Union, that you are ready to face them. But how can you believe that you can compete with the tremendous efficiency of the Soviet military machine?

DX [He laughs]. Eh! China is poor and our military is backwards, I agree. But we have our traditions, you know. And for quite some time, using inadequate and miserable equipment, we have cultivated the art of defeating well-armed enemies. Our territory is extremely vast, and in this vast territory the people have learned the necessary resistance for a long war—to bend the strength of others through their weaknesses. Whoever wants to invade China should remember this truth, and I believe that the Soviets remember it well. Many people continue to predict that the Soviet Union's next target will be China, and some friends even pass us information to prove to us that the Soviets are amassing troops along the Chinese borders and border regions. But we simply say that this has never been a secret, and that invading China is a very big step for them. Even if they were able to occupy Peking and all the lands to the north of the Yellow Sea, for

us the war would be just beginning. No, there's no need to mythicize Soviet military superiority when you talk about China. The Afghan guerrillas are very active in Afghanistan, you know. And in China we have a lot of space—I repeat, a lot of people.

OF I think I understand the tradition you're alluding to, Mr. Deng—the one that consists in beckoning your enemy in and saying sweetly, »Come in, my dears, come in. Make yourselves comfortable. Then you'll see what happens. Who will ever see you again?«

DX [He laughs loudly]. Look, I don't know about a lot of things. I don't know much about the economy. But I know about war. I know how war is fought.

OF The fact is that probably no one will have time to fight, Mr. Deng, because war with China means world war; world war means nuclear war; and nuclear war means the end of the world.

DX I agree with the first part of your statement; if the USSR invades, it will not be a local war. I do not agree with the second part of your statement, however; it's not certain that World War Three will be a nuclear war. In my opinion, this is because both sides have nuclear weapons, and there is a strong possibility that World War Three will be fought with conventional warfare.

OF Thank you, Mr. Deng. I've finished, Mr. Deng.

DX Thank you, and please make sure everyone understands what I've told you. Explain to them that it is necessary to carry out an objective evaluation of Chairman Mao—to first consider his merits, and then his mistakes. Explain to them that we will continue to follow Mao Tse-tung Thought but that we will be clear about where he was wrong. And explain to them that these mistakes were our mistakes, too—my mistakes, too!

OF I will, Mr. Deng. And if you'll allow me one last question: What score would you give yourself?

DX Hmm ... listen, I have made mistakes—yes, sometimes serious ones. But I never made them with bad intentions; I always made them with good intentions. My conscience is clear about my own life. Hmm ... listen, I think I could give myself fifty percent. Yes, fifty percent would be all right.