

José Arcadio Segundo was in the crowd that had gathered at the station on Friday since early in the morning. He had taken part in a meeting of union leaders and had been commissioned, along with Colonel Gavilán, to mingle in the crowd and orient it according to how things went. He did not feel well and a salty paste was beginning to collect on his palate when he noticed that the army had set up machine-gun emplacements around the small square and that the wired city of the banana company was protected by artillery pieces. Around twelve o'clock, waiting for a train that was not arriving, more than three thousand people, workers, women, and children, had spilled out of the open space in front of the station and were pressing into the neighboring streets, which the army had closed off with rows of machine guns. At that time it all seemed more like a jubilant fair than a waiting crowd. They had brought over the fritter and drink stands from the Street of the Turks and the people were in good spirits as they bore the tedium of waiting and the scorching sun. A short time before three o'clock the rumor spread that the official train would not arrive until the following day. The crowd let out a sigh of disappointment. An army lieutenant then climbed up onto the roof of the station where there were four machine-gun emplacements aiming at the crowd and called for silence. Next to José Arcadio Segundo there was a barefooted woman, very fat, with two children between the ages of four and seven. She was carrying the smaller one and she asked José Arcadio Segundo, without knowing him, if he would lift up the

other one so that he could hear better. José Arcadio Segundo put the child on his shoulders. Many years later that child would still tell, to the disbelief of all, that he had seen the lieutenant reading Decree No. 4 of the civil and military leader of the province through an old phonograph horn. It had been signed by General Carlos Cortes Vargas and his secretary, Major Enrique García Isaza, and in three articles of eighty words he declared the strikers to be a “bunch of hoodlums” and he authorized the army to shoot to kill.

After the decree was read, in the midst of a deafening hoot of protest, a captain took the place of the lieutenant on the roof of the station and with the horn he signaled that he wanted to speak. The crowd was quiet again.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the captain said in a low voice that was slow and a little tired. “you have five minutes to withdraw.”

The redoubled hooting and shouting drowned out the bugle call that announced the start of the count. No one moved.

Five minutes have passed,” the captain said in the same tone. “One more minute and we’ll open fire.”

José Arcadio Segundo, sweating ice, lowered the child and gave him to the woman. “Those bastards might just shoot,” she murmured. José Arcadio Segundo did not have time to speak because at that instant he recognized the hoarse voice of Colonel

Gavilán echoing the words of the woman with a shout. Intoxicated by the tension, by the miraculous depth of the silence, and furthermore convinced that nothing could move that crowd held tight in a fascination with death, José Arcadio Segundo raised himself up over the heads in front of him and for the first time in his life he raised his voice.

“You bastards!” he shouted. “Take the extra minute and stick it up your ass!”

After his shout something happened that did not bring on fright but a kind of hallucination. The captain gave the order to fire and fourteen machine guns answered at once. But it all seemed like a farce. It was as if the machine guns had been loaded with caps, because their panting rattle could be heard and their incandescent spitting could be seen, but not the slightest reaction was perceived, not a cry, not even a sigh among the compact crowd that seemed petrified by an instantaneous invulnerability. Suddenly, on one side-of the station, a cry of death tore open the enchantment: “Aaaagh, Mother.” A seismic voice, a volcanic breath. the roar of a cataclysm broke out in the center of the crowd with a great potential of expansion. José Arcadio Segundo barely had time to pick up the child while the mother with the other one was swallowed up by the crowd that swirled about in panic.

Many years later that child would still tell, in spite of people thinking that he was a crazy old man, how José Arcadio Segundo had lifted him over his head

and hauled him, almost in the air, as if floating on the terror of the crowd, toward a nearby street. The child's privileged position allowed him to see at that moment that the wild mass was starting to get to the corner and the row of machine guns opened fire. Several voices shouted at the same time:

“Get down! Get down!”

The people in front had already done so, swept down by the wave of bullets. The survivors, instead of getting down, tried to go back to the small square, and the panic became a dragon's tail as one compact wave ran against another which was moving in the opposite direction, toward the other dragon's tail. In the street across the way, where the machine guns were also firing without cease. They were Penned in. swirling about in a gigantic whirlwind that little by little was being reduced to its epicenter as the edges were systematically being cut off all around like an onion being peeled by the insatiable and methodical shears of the machine guns. The child saw a woman kneeling with her arms in the shape of a cross in an open space, mysteriously free of the stampede. José Arcadio Segundo put him up there at the moment he fell with his face bathed in blood, before the colossal troop wiped out the empty space, the kneeling woman, the light of the high, drought-stricken sky, and the whorish world where Úrsula Iguarán had sold so many little candy animals.

When José Arcadio Segundo came to he was lying face up in the darkness. He realized that he was

riding on an endless and silent train and that his head was caked with dry blood and that all his bones ached. He felt an intolerable desire to sleep.

Prepared to sleep for many hours, safe from the terror and the horror, he made himself comfortable on the side that pained him less, and only then did he discover that he was lying against dead people.

There was no free space in the car except for an aisle in the middle. Several hours must have passed since the massacre because the corpses had the same temperature as a plaster in autumn and the same consistency of petrified foam that it had, and those who had put them in the car had had time to pile them up in the same way in which they

transported bunches of bananas. Trying to flee from the nightmare, José Arcadio Segundo dragged himself from one car to an other in the direction in which the train was heading, and in the flashes of light that broke through the wooden slats as they went through sleeping towns he saw the man

corpses, woman corpses, child corpses who would be thrown into the sea like rejected bananas. He

recognized only a woman who sold drinks in the square and Colonel Gavilán, who still held wrapped in his hand the belt with a buckle of Morelia silver

with which he had tried to open his way through the panic. When he got to the first car he jumped into the darkness and lay beside the tracks until the train had passed. It was the longest one he had ever seen,

with almost two hundred freight cars and a locomotive at either end and a third one in the middle. It had no lights, not even the red and green

running lights, and it slipped off with a nocturnal and stealthy velocity. On top of the cars there could be seen the dark shapes of the soldiers with their emplaced machine guns.

After midnight a torrential cloudburst came up. José Arcadio Segundo did not know where it was that he had jumped off, but he knew that by going in the opposite direction to that of the train he would reach Macondo. After walking for more than three hours, soaked to the skin, with a terrible headache, he was able to make out the first houses in the light of dawn. Attracted by the smell of coffee, he went into a kitchen where a woman with a child in her arms was leaning over the stove.

“Hello,” he said, exhausted. “I’m José Arcadio Segundo Buendía.”

He pronounced his whole name, letter by letter, in order to convince her that he was alive. He was wise in doing so, because the woman had thought that he was an apparition as she saw the dirty, shadowy figure with his head and clothing dirty with blood and touched with the solemnity of death come through the door. She recognized him. She brought him a blanket so that he could wrap himself up while his clothes dried by the fire, she warmed some water to wash his wound, which was only a flesh wound, and she gave him a clean diaper to bandage his head. Then she gave him a mug of coffee without sugar as she had been told the Buendías drank it, and she spread his clothing out near the fire.

José Arcadio Segundo did not speak until he had finished drinking his coffee.

“There must have been three thousand of them” he murmured. “What?”

“The dead,” he clarified. “It must have been an of the people who were at the station.”

The woman measured him with a pitying look. “There haven’t been any dead here,” she said. “Since the time of your uncle, the colonel, nothing has happened in Macondo.” In the three kitchens where José Arcadio Segundo stopped before reaching home they told him the same thing. “There weren’t any dead. He went through the small square by the station and he saw the fritter stands piled one on top of the other and he could find no trace of the massacre. The streets were deserted under the persistent rain and the houses locked up with no trace of life inside. The only human note was the first tolling of the bells for mass. He knocked at the door at Colonel Gavilán’s house. A pregnant woman whom he had seen several times closed the door in his face. “He left,” she said, frightened. “He went back to his own country.” The main entrance to the wire chicken coop was guarded as always by two local policemen who looked as if they were made of stone under the rain, with raincoats and rubber boots. On their marginal street the West Indian Negroes were singing Saturday psalms. José Arcadio Segundo jumped over the courtyard wall and entered the house through the kitchen. Santa Sofía de la Piedad

barely raised her voice. "Don't let Fernanda see you," she said. "She's just getting up." As if she were fulfilling an implicit pact, she took her son to the "chamberpot room." arranged Melquíades' broken-down cot for him and at two in the afternoon, while Fernanda was taking her siesta, she passed a plate of food in to him through the window.

Aureliano Segundo had slept at home because the rain had caught him time and at three in the afternoon he was still waiting for it to clear. Informed in secret by Santa Sofía de la Piedad, he visited his brother in Melquíades' room at that time. He did not believe the version of the massacre or the nightmare trip of the train loaded with corpses traveling toward the sea either. The night before he had read an extraordinary proclamation to the nation which said that the workers had left the station and had returned home in peaceful groups. The proclamation also stated that the union leaders, with great patriotic spirit, had reduced their demands to two points: a reform of medical services and the building of latrines in the living quarters. It was stated later that when the military authorities obtained the agreement with the workers, they hastened to tell Mr. Brown and he not only accepted the new conditions but offered to pay for three days of public festivities to celebrate the end of the conflict. Except that when the military asked him on what date they could announce the signing of the agreement, he looked out the window at the sky crossed with lightning flashes and made a profound gesture of doubt.

“When the rain stops,” he said. “As long as the rain lasts we’re suspending all activities.”

It had not rained for three months and there had been a drought. But when Mr. Brown announced his decision a torrential downpour spread over the whole banana region. It was the one that caught José Arcadio Segundo on his way to Macondo. A week later it was still raining. The official version, repeated a thousand times and mangled out all over the country by every means of communication the government found at hand, was finally accepted: there were no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families, and the banana company was suspending all activity until the rains stopped. Martial law continued with an eye to the necessity of taking emergency measures for the public disaster of the endless downpour, but the troops were confined to quarters. During the day the soldiers walked through the torrents in the streets with their pant legs rolled up, playing with boats with the children. At night after taps, they knocked doors down with their rifle butts, hauled suspects out of their beds, and took them off on trips from which there was no return. The search for and extermination of the hoodlums, murderers, arsonists, and rebels of Decree No. 4 was still going on, but the military denied it even to the relatives of the victims who crowded the commandant’s offices in search of news. “You must have been dreaming,” the officers insisted. “Nothing has happened in Macondo, nothing has ever happened, and nothing ever will happen. “This is a happy town.” In that way they were

finally able to wipe out the union leaders.