manuela

THE UNSUNG SOUTH AMERICAN HEROINE WHO CHANGED HISTORY

A NOVEL BY

GREGORY KAUFFMAN

(Excerpt)

MANUELA

Gregory Kauffman

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Historical Personae

Names associated with the South American wars of independence.

Abascal, Don Fernando de: Thirty-eighth viceroy of Lima. In power during the revolution in Quito in 1809.

Amat, Manuel: Son of **Viceroy Amat** and Micaela Villegas (see **La Perricholi**).

Amat, Don Manuel y Juniet: Thirty-first viceroy of Lima. He loved Micaela Villegas, the woman known as **La Perricholi**.

Bolívar, Simón: (Simón José Antonio de la Santisima Trinidad Bolívar y Palacios) Military leader who liberated the countries now known as Panamá, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Perú, and Bolivia. He was called **The Liberator** and considered by most to be the greatest leader in South American history.

Bonaparte, Joseph: **Napoleon**'s brother, who sat on the throne of Spain after the defeat of Madrid.

Bonaparte, Napoleon: Conqueror of Europe in the early 1800s.

Campusano, Rosita: Revolutionary leader in Lima. She was the lover of **San Martín**.

Canterac, General: Leader of the royalist forces in Perú in 1824 under Viceroy **La Serna**.

Casariego, Colonel: Spanish officer imprisoned in Callao who persuaded **Moyano** and **Oliva** to defect and turn the fortress of Callao over to the Spanish.

Charles IV: King of Spain between 1788 and 1808.

Cochrane, Lord Thomas: Admiral of the Chilean navy. Born in Britain. Attacked Spanish shipping in the Pacific, thus allowing **San Martín** to conquer Lima.

Córdoba, General José María: A brave hero of the revolution who fought under **Bolívar**. He was made general at the age of twenty-three.

Fernando VII: King of Spain after his father abdicated in his favor. Almost immediately, **Joseph Bonaparte** took the throne, and held it from 1808 to 1813, delaying Fernando's rule of Spain.

Flores, General Juan José: One of **Bolívar**'s generals, who later became the first President of Ecuador.

Godoy, Manuel de: Minister of **Charles IV** who carried on an almost open affair with the queen. Hated by the Spanish subjects.

Harrison, William Henry: United States visitor to Colombia in 1830, later elected President of the United States.

Humboldt, Baron Alexander von: German scientist whose explorations of South America stimulated the study of the earth sciences.

La Mar, Mariscal José de: Peruvian leader who fought with the Colombian army for the liberation of Perú, but later turned against **Bolívar**.

La Perricholi: Micaela (Miquita) Villegas. Lover of **Viceroy Amat** who captured the hearts of the citizens of Lima. Her life epitomized life under the rule of the viceroys. She died just prior to the end of the viceregal era.

Lara, General Jacinto: One of **Bolívar**'s most important generals.

La Serna, Viceroy: The man who forced the last true viceroy, **Pezuela**, to resign. He lost Lima to **San Martín** but held out against the revolutionaries for a few more years. La Serna illegally replaced **Pezuela** in order to defend the viceroyalty against the revolutionaries himself. His government was always on the move, however, and he never did have the political or social power of a viceroy.

Lautaro Lodge: Secret revolutionary organization started by **Miranda**. Its membership included nearly all of South America's intellectual and military revolutionary leaders.

Liberator: Informal title of **Simón Bolívar**, with which he was first hailed in 1813 after freeing Caracas from Spanish rule. Of all his titles, it was the one of which he was most proud.

Miranda, Francisco de: The first man to make serious efforts to start a revolution in South America. He was known as The Precursor.

Monroe, James: Fifth President of the United States (1817-1825), whose administration was marked by the acquisition of Florida (1819), the Missouri Compromise (1820), and the profession of the Monroe Doctrine (1823), which declared U.S. opposition to European interference in the Americas.

Monteagudo, Bernardo: Head of the **Lautaro Lodge**. His intellectual leadership helped move the revolution forward but he was cruel and believed in terror as a means to political ends. He was often hated.

Montúfar, Carlos: Early revolutionary leader in Quito.

Morales, Manuel: Early revolutionary leader in Quito.

Mosquera, Joaquín: President of Gran Colombia for a short time after **Bolívar**'s exile.

Moyano: One of the two leaders, with **Oliva**, of the Argentineans who mutinied and turned over the Callao fortress to the Spanish. This caused the loss of Lima to the Spanish and the long campaign in the Andes that followed.

Murat, Field Marshal: **Napoleon**'s field marshal who attacked Madrid and caused **Ferdinand VII** to leave Spain.

Nariño, Antonio: Printed the first Spanish translation of Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man.*

Numancia Battalion: The finest unit in the Spanish military. Defected to the revolutionaries during the liberation of Lima, ensuring success of the revolutionary cause in that area.

O'Higgins, Bernardo: Bastard son of a viceroy of Perú. When he was sent to study in Europe, he became involved with South American revolutionary intellectuals. Later he marched with **San Martín** in the liberation of Chile and was that republic's first President.

O'Higgins, Don Ambrosio: A merchant in Perú who ascended to the office of viceroy in the 18th century. Father of **Bernardo O'Higgins**.

O'Leary, Daniel Florencio: Aide-de-camp of **Bolívar** from the Irish contingent and one of **Bolívar**'s first biographers.

Oliva: See **Moyano**.

Osorio, General: Leader of the first expedition sent by viceroy **Pezuela** to quell the rebellion in Chile. He failed, and Chile was independent thereafter.

Padilla, Admiral: A minion of **Santander**; a traitor of Gran Colombia in the late 1820's.

Palacios, José: **Bolívar**'s trusted retainer who was with the **Liberator** since his boyhood.

Pando, José María: The delegate sent to the first Pan American Congress in history. Bolívar had organized the congress in Panamá, and though it was not entirely successful, it was the precursor to the OAS.

Pezuela, Viceroy Don Joaquín de la: The last official viceroy to sit in Lima.

Pizarro, Francisco: Conqueror of the Incas in the 16th century, and the first viceroy of Perú.

Páez, José Antonio: First President of Venezuela after breaking off his territory from Gran Colombia. He had fought alongside **Bolívar** for the liberation of Venezuela in the early years, but his ambition overcame his loyalty on many occasions.

Quiroga: Early revolutionary leader in Quito.

Riva Agüero, José de la: Early revolutionary leader in Perú. Later he was President, but he broke with the revolutionary leadership and was captured and exiled.

Robinson, Samuel: Alias used by **Simón Rodríguez.**

Rocafuerte, Vicente: One of the first leaders of independent Ecuador. He was only in power for a short time, losing to his rival **Flores**.

Rodil, General José Ramón: Spanish General who would not give up the fortress at Callao for almost a year after the fighting for independence was over.

Rodríguez, Simón: **Bolívar**'s tutor as a young man, and a friend throughout his life.

Ruíz, Count: President of the Quito when the abortive revolution of 1809 broke out.

Sandes, Arthur: A member of the Irish contingent who became one of **Bolívar**'s generals.

San Martín, José de: Liberator of Lima, in command of the Liberating Army of the Andes from Argentina. He and **Bolívar** have nearly equal stature in history as one of the two liberators of the American colonies from Spain.

Santander, Francisco de Paula: **Bolívar**'s vice-president when Gran Colombia was formed. Later a bitter political rival and ultimately President of the republic after **Bolívar**'s death.

Sucre, General Antonio José de: Bolívar's most able general and the first President of Bolivia. He liberated Quito, and later won the final battle at Ayacucho that broke the Americas away from Spain.

Sáenz, José María: Half-brother of **Manuela Sáenz**. He helped in the liberation of Lima when the **Numancia Battalion** defected from Spain

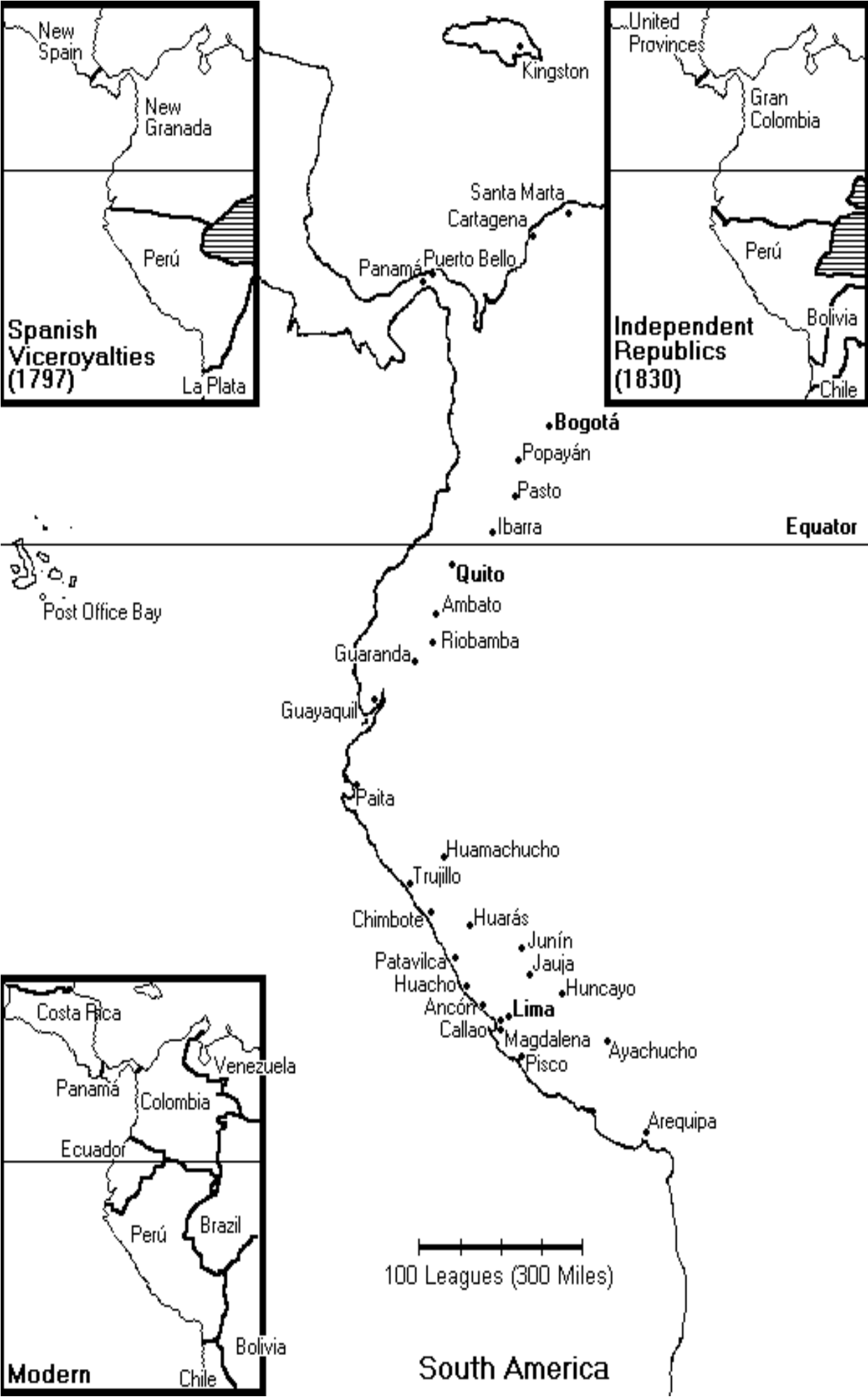
and joined the revolutionaries. Later he was a member of **Bolívar**'s staff. He died in Ecuador, a martyr to the cause of unification.

Sáenz, Manuela: **Bolívar**'s lover and most intimate advisor. She was the great love of his life who joined him during the Peruvian campaign and later saved his life.

Torre Tagle, Marqués José de: Important Liman citizen who helped in the liberation of Trujillo, but later was a traitor to the cause by helping the Spanish retake Lima.

Urdaneta, General Rafael: Political and military leader in Bogotá who remained loyal to **Bolívar** to the end.

Villegas, Micaela: See **La Perricholi**.


New Spain
New Granada
Perú
Spanish Viceroyalties (1797)
La Plata
Kingston
Santa Marta
Cartagena
Panamá
Puerto Bello
United Provinces
Gran Colombia
Perú
Bolivia
Independent Republics (1830)
Chile
Bogotá
Popayán
Pasto
Ibarra
Equator
Quito
Ambato
Riobamba
Guaranda
Guayaquil
Post Office Bay
Paita
Huamachucho
Trujillo
Chimbote
Huarás
Junín
Jauja
Patavilca
Huacho
Huancayo
Ancón
Lima
Callao
Magdalena
Ayachucho
Pisco
Arequipa
Costa Rica
Venezuela
Panamá
Colombia
Ecuador
Perú
Brazil
Bolivia
Chile
Modern
100 Leagues (300 Miles)
South America

MANUELA

May 13, 1857

Herman Melville, Esq.
c/o Harper and Brothers, Publishers
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Melville,

I do hope, after all this time, that you remember me and that this missive, addressed in care of your publisher, finds you in good health. I have heard that Harper and Brothers suffered a tremendous fire a year or so ago but I am optimistic that the confusion of such a calamity will not cause the loss of what I am herewith sending to you.

We met almost 17 years ago in a tiny town called Paita, on the shores of Perú. You had landed along with the rest of the ship's company from the whaler, *Acushnet*. I was the United States Consul there at the time.

You and other members of the crew came to me to report that the captain had been excessive in the administration of discipline aboard his ship. The ship's captain, I believe his name was Pease, was admittedly a rough sort. He also came to see me, a few days later, demanding protection for the ship's cargo, claiming that his crew was mutinous. There was reason for concern as the crew had been brawling on the shore for the last two days.

When the local authorities demanded depositions be taken, I enlisted the aid of a dear friend, a local woman who had been married to an Englishman, to help with the translations from English to Spanish. You met my friend that afternoon. Her married name was Manuela Thorne but she went by, and everyone knew her as, Manuela Sáenz.

When you met this lady, she was in the most profound penury; only barely surviving on the occasional sale of tobacco and such to the sailors that stopped in Paita to victual. A dusty termite-ridden house several doors down the street from where we took the depositions provided shelter for her and her adopted family.

Yet, despite the picture she may have made when you met her, those who loved her called her *La Libertadora*, The Liberatress. She had once been the most powerful woman on the South American continent—and the companion of The Liberator, Simón Bolívar.

Fortune had taken away nearly everything she ever owned. Most of the people she loved were, or were quickly becoming, victims of betrayal in the ever-changing political landscape. She was alone, in exile, and far removed from her days of glory. Nevertheless, as the years went by, her serenity rarely left her. She was a friend to all, generous to those in need (even though her own needs may have surpassed those she tried to help), and an inspiration to her friends.

Manuela is my reason for attempting to contact you after these many years. It is to ask you a favor in her name. Recently, Manuela died of diphtheria; and I am writing to implore you for help in fulfilling her last request to me before I left Perú. I learned of her demise from General Antonio de la Guerrera, a friend of Manuela's, who wrote to tell me of her last days. You will find a translation of his letter, and something else he sent along, in this package.

However, I call your attention to the main document enclosed herein. It is a personal history that I assisted Manuela in setting down. The reason she wrote her story, in English, was due to certain injustices she felt posterity was about deliver upon her. These inequities are explained quite well by Señora Sáenz in her narrative. However, I will tell you that she was being systematically written out of history by her political enemies. She did not know what to do about it, and I could tell that it upset her.

I suggested she write the truth herself, but she rejected the idea. She claimed, correctly, that a book written by her would never be published. Then she remembered the sailor and storyteller who had entertained us one hot afternoon with whaling stories many years before.

We had heard about your publication of *Typee* and *Moby Dick* and she decided to write her story in English—if I would help her—and send it to you. She wanted to ask you to speak to your publishers that it might be published in the United States. Then, Manuela supposed, when it was translated back into Spanish and published in South America, no one would be

able to deny it. She hoped that you had not forgotten your stay in Paita and that you would help her.

I could indeed assist my friend in the writing, as it was 1855 and the whaling industry had diminished so much that there was very little for me to do. Several months later, I was recalled from my position as Consul in Paita because whaling had become so poor. I left Perú, and my friend Manuela Sáenz, but not before we had finished her story. I carried the manuscript with me on my return to the United States, and you will find it included in this package.

I admit this manuscript has been in my possession for quite a while and I am only now impelled to send it to you due to the recent news of Manuela's death. I would beg forgiveness of my friend, if she were alive, for holding it this last year or so while I settled again into North American living. It has been ready all this time, and I have been remiss in fulfilling my promise to her.

However, I must make a confession to you. Prior to my departure, we both worked very hard at setting down her story. Manuela would dictate, as her arthritis had almost completely disabled her hands. I, in addition to doing much of the actual

writing, assisted by occasionally correcting her English or providing an idiom to help the readability. I sometimes added my own translation, in parenthesis, to Spanish words or phrases she used. But there were other ways I helped as well; although, whether it was help or hindrance will have to be decided by the reader.

You see, she would often desist from dictation and change subjects, being wary of becoming too personal or revealing too much about herself or her friends. I would then have to coax her to tell the truth exactly as it happened, instead of retelling an incident in a way that would not make her, or some loved one, look bad. I encouraged her to reveal her private thoughts and emotions, and to say what she had told no one before. She resisted the revealing of intimate details so frequently that only through great diligence was I able to have any success in this matter.

If it had not been for me, I do not believe she would have told so much of what she knew. I know it was especially difficult for her to speak of very personal moments such as the utterances or actions that only lovers would know. But I urged her to tell what she, as a true lady, would not otherwise discuss

in polite company. This she did, and I worry that such revelations will be only another means to attack her memory by those small-minded, "moral," narrow people who are so fond of denigrating greatness.

However, the result is a personal statement that I hope will reveal the true Manuela Sáenz. I believe, through my persuasion, she has told us everything she could tell, and it will fall on me for my foolish persistence if posterity decides to "judge" her for revealing too much.

The document enclosed is the life story of a great woman. I ask you, if you respected this lady and if you have any influence with your publishers, to help her publish it. I hope that you remember my friend. If so, I am confident that you will help her.

Sincerely thankful,
Alexander Ruden
Former U. S. Consul to
Perú

My Life and My Involvement in the Revolution of the South American People for Independence and Freedom

Manuela Sáenz

1855
Paita, Perú

As I look out from the Port of Paita, I realize that my life is but a drop in the ocean of time. I hold it dear, having traveled far and seen much, but that single drop of my life would never be part of an ocean whose name is "Pacific."

I lived in the time of revolution, when the countries of the world fought for independence, when Napoleon nearly crushed Europe, and when war marched across the world. It has only been in these recent years that I have at last found any peace. Yet, there is still one thing that will not let me rest: lies.

Having heard about many recent distortions, or neglect, of historical fact concerning the revolution of the South American people against Spanish rule—some even published by those who were there and know better—I began to feel I should write an account that would tell the truth. Later, when I heard about the actual suppression of published true accounts, such as that written by my friend General O'Leary, I felt that I could no longer let my pen stay idle.

Today, as I write this, Simón Bolívar is being accepted in his rightful place in history, as a hero. This has not always been so. In the years following his death in 1830, he was ignored or lied about at the

orders of his political enemies. At least now, 25 years later, he is being remembered as a hero.

His enemies should have known they could not long suppress his greatness. However, now they have decided to tell different lies. Now, wishing to align themselves with this greatness, Bolívar is being transformed into an icon, a mere picture, a shallow myth that serves only political ends.

Like every other man, Simón Bolívar was not an ideal, nor a myth, nor a romantic figure who always did right; he was a man of turbulent energy and living contradictions. I don't know whether I dislike it more that he is now being painted without depth or, as before, not at all. I am also disturbed that the same vilification, or neglect, once directed at him in death, is now being directed at our love affair.

I, who was there to provide comfort and support for my friend and lover through the years of some of his greatest hardships; I, who saved his life; I, who loved him completely and unconditionally, am seen by those writing history today as a blemish on his "perfect" life.

Our relationship has been called illicit because it was sanctified by no other religion than pure love, and so it could not be mentioned. I have been called a "public woman" because I dared to love and allow the fact that I loved to be known. My contributions to the revolution have been called exhibitionistic because I was flamboyant in my methods and uncaring of whom the truth might expose. My involvement with the making of a new world was called negligible because I am

"only a woman." These injustices are the reasons I was first compelled to begin work on my account of history.

I originally intended to tell only of my years with Bolívar. However, the act of telling this story has become an act of meditation, which, if nothing else, has brought me a greater peace—and I have wanted peace for so long. As I looked back on the panorama of time, I discovered a deeper understanding of the last half century than the rush of life allowed me while living it. The early part of my life provided much of the meaning for the later part. I found myself less and less interested in striking a blow to my enemies and their disregard for the truth, and more intrigued with the expression of the beauty I found in my memories. So this history is of my life entire.

I hope, dear reader, that you too can find a little beauty in a life lived during a time of war, when the world changed forever.

Manuela Sáenz

Part I

Wherein I tell of my early years before meeting The Liberator, Simón Bolívar

Chapter 1

It was early on the fourth of February, in the year 1797, that the city known as San Francisco de Quito was about to change. Once called *Quitu* by the Incan princes that lived in the area before the conquest, this was the city where I was soon to be born. Like the rest of South America, this city was quickly approaching a threshold in its history.

An overcast sky glowed faintly as volcanic giants surrounding the city became illuminated by the advancing daylight. The mist enfolding the night-cloaked Andes still clung to the crags of Cotopaxi, the tall, cone-shaped mountain that commands the horizon to the south, far across the plain of Anaquito. Low clouds hid the silent crater of Pichincha that dominated the western edge of the city. The urban paths winding

up its side disappeared into the pre-dawn darkness. All was still and as it should be that morning for the people of Quito. Neither their priests nor their king could have warned them of what was about to transpire.

Over two and a half centuries earlier, Cortés had conquered Mexico. With its new world colonies established, Spain had grown to become the richest and mightiest empire ever known. The king's dominion was a worldwide monarchy so powerful and so far reaching that sub-kingdoms had to be created, with authority delegated to vice-kings. With the help of these *virreys* (viceroys), who collected gold and silver and other goods for their sovereign, the mighty Spanish empire appeared to be eternal. Yet on that day in 1797, the city of my birth—the capital city of the Presidency of Quito as part of the Viceroyalty of New Granada—stood on many thresholds.

The portal between day and night was not the only frontier through which Quito was about to pass that morning. Sitting on the girdle of the world known as the Equator, hanging between land and sky, almost a league above the Pacific Ocean, balancing on the sharp hemispheric spine of the jagged Andes, Quito faced another threshold. The inhabitants of this important

city and surrounding countryside did not realize that in the next quarter of a century their home and the rest of the world would change forever.

In a few years, a new century would emerge and new modern inventions and ideas would shut the door to the old. This was expected. What the people of South America did not know was that they were soon to face a revolution. It would be many years before the first revolutionary whisperings would be heard in the city of Quito, but some minor twists in the path of history—of no interest to the inhabitants of the city that day—would be reverberations of events about to transpire in the next two hours.

On that particularly chilly morning, on a very narrow street, there was a poor living space fitted in among somewhat larger houses. All were of the same *adobe* bricks, and timbers, all protected with the same white mud that covered the walls, called *tapia*.

As a child, I hated those walls. To me, their purpose never seemed to be shelter. They appeared to exist only to keep me from entering the dwelling beyond. Despite the wealth of my parents, I was born illegitimate and have been an outcast for

most my life. From my earliest remembrance I was made to believe that I was, and always would be, nothing. The cold and lonely mountain tops of the Andes often seemed to hold more of the warmth of human kindness than the people of my city. I would peer through doorways and windows, set in those same walls, to find happy scenes of mothers, fathers and children eating, playing or laughing. I would imagine, if it were not for the walls that kept me out, that I could eat or play with them. As I reflect from my years, I see that all I ever wanted from Quito was to tear down those walls that I might escape my isolation. The few people who did love and care for me often made me feel worse, because it was so clear that their numbers were few. As I grew, I longed to be accepted, respected and loved by people around me, just once.

Yet it was not to be. My course was set on this February morning before I was even born. My mother told me the story of these events at different times—as did my father, later on. The only reason I go back this far in my tale is that I truly believe that what came to pass that morning made me and shaped me and, in many ways, shaped the world in which I was to live.

On that gray morning, inside a humble dwelling, a sleeping girl of 18 rested her head in her arms and grappled with a terrible dream. Joaquina Aispuru was this young girl's name, and she was to be my mother.

She had been up all night giving comfort to her closest friend, Juanita, who lived in the little house. My mother came from a wealthy family, but my mother's companion, also about 18, was very poor.

There were many differences between the two young girls. Joaquina lived with her mother and sisters and her brother Carlos, my uncle. He owned and worked one of the largest estates in the countryside. The family was wealthy, but unhappy because they were still grieving for my grandfather who had died a few years before. Juanita, on the other hand, had only an aging, infirm mother to care for, and no money at all.

My mother had befriended Juanita and her aging mother in the beautiful Church of the Fathers of Mercy, where they attended Mass. Apparently, this was her first true friend and she loved the blithe young girl who never seemed to tire of reminding Joaquina that their names had the same initial. My mother talked about her companion for years. That night, a

debilitating fever had been ravaging Juanita. My mother, fearing that her friend might die, had been up for many hours taking care of her.

At last, my mother had fallen asleep, only to be troubled by her frightening dream. Sleeping in a chair, with her head and arms resting on Juanita's tall bed, my mother was seeing images that I believe were prophecy. At first my mother also believed it to be so, but later denied there was any prediction in the dream. However, as I am now over 50 years old and can see into time where my mother could not, I do hold the dream to be at least partly prophetic.

She saw a scene of desolation, a dark wasteland of destruction filled with smoke, flame, and chaos everywhere she looked. The bodies of men and women were lying all about. Through the confusion came a cart with many dead bodies inside. She could hear terrified voices and saw figures rush by her, holding their wounds, calling for help, and praying.

Then she saw a dark figure riding a white horse through the confusion. He seemed to be the victor of the chaos around him. Not a destroyer, but a savior. Wherever he rode, his very

presence brought order, and at that moment there was peace all around him.

Suddenly his horse faltered; and the savior, whose face she could not make out, seemed to grow weak. Then, next to the man there appeared a beautiful woman, who looked very much like Joaquina herself, riding a black mare.

She rode up and kissed the man and he became strong again. The couple rode on, at peace. But the chaos, and my mother's own fear, grew as they rode away. Somewhere in the confusion was a fire on gray sand filling the atmosphere with thick black smoke.

Joaquina woke with a start. She did not know where she was at first. Shivering in the chill of the morning, she pulled her shawl around her. Still shaking from the terror of her nightmare, she went to the window to see if it was dawn.

The sky was a canopy of faint gray light. The lamp by the bed had nearly gone out, and she pulled the curtain back farther to look at Juanita's face. She heard her labored breathing, and saw the tiny drops of perspiration on Juanita's forehead reflecting the light like small precious stones. Had Juanita been well, my mother would have told her what she had dreamed.

Their favorite games were interpreting dreams, and deriving prophecies. The memory of their happy moments together brought the thought, and the fear, that Juanita might not recover from her illness.

Picking up an earthen jug, as Joaquina turned toward the door to go after some water for her friend, the moment took on a strange intensity for her. She felt more afraid. She perceived with an unfamiliar acuteness the rough red clay of the vessel in her hand. With a strange clarity, she heard Juanita's mother let out a sigh as the old woman turned over in her bed across the room. She saw a single drop of perspiration stand out from its fellows on Juanita's temple.

"There is nothing to fear," Joaquina told herself. "I've been frightened by a dream, that's all. It's over." She forced herself to be calm and she opened the door.

Stepping over the sill, she experienced a feeling of unnatural stillness. Nothing seemed to be moving. The street was very narrow, with little contrast between the gray cobblestones, the ashen sky, and the white walls. An Indian woman walked up the street, a block away, yet silence and

stillness pervaded everything. Why could she not shake her fear? Calming her breathing, she turned towards the square.

The sky seemed to be much lighter as she entered the plaza. It was a very wide open space with a fountain in the center that had been built, in the days of the conquest, by enforced Indian labor. There were two or three women at the fountain, but their presence and their movements did not break the sense of stillness hanging over the city.

She could see the Renaissance steeple of the Church of the Fathers of Mercy, the tallest in the city, standing like a sentinel in the calm. This church, known as "Los Padres," was a short distance down the street that led into the far side of the square. Farther on, towards the center of town, were the slightly shorter towers of The Cathedral of Quito, the Church of San Francisco, and the many other beautiful churches that dotted the already elaborate architecture of what was known to be one of the most beautiful cities in the new world.

Just then, the heavy silence was broken by the sound of hooves on cobblestones echoing loudly down the street. At that moment, riding past "Los Padres," sending the noise of irregular clacks from the feet of his skittish horse past the doorways and

shop fronts, was a man she had seen at the family estate many times. She had never met him, but she knew who he was. Everyone knew him. He was well known and well liked, despite being the Collector of Decimal Tithes for the crown. He was Don Simón Sáenz y Verega—a man in his forties, destined to be my father.

My mother was surprised at the behavior of the horse, an old dark bay she recognized that was long past her prime. Joaquina wondered at the nervousness of this ordinarily languid animal, but she watched for only a second and then turned to cross the square toward the fountain.

She never made it.

Dogs howled. The sounds of barking and wailing arose all over the city. She stopped and looked around.

Wings flapped violently. Birds, nesting on rooftops and under eves around the square, took to the air.

Then she felt it.

Movement beneath her feet.

A low rumble.

The women at the well looked up in fright. Water trickling from fountain spouts moved back and forth in a macabre dance.

Earthen jars shattered on the ground, shaken out of frightened hands.

The fear my mother had felt since awakening turned to terror. Images of destruction from the dream returned to her mind. The shaking grew worse. In the same dreadful instant, as the rumble became deafening, mud walls began to crack. Facades of buildings tumbled from their framework with a horrifying noise.

Instinct took over. Terrified, she ran from the sight toward her church. The earth shook more violently. Buildings trembled. She fell—cutting her hands and knees.

As she rose, a two-story building at the square's perimeter collapsed. Small sections of the wall fell toward her with a deafening crash. A flying timber almost hit her. She was nearly hidden by a cloud of dust that swept over the plaza. She turned, not knowing where to go. Unable to see through the dust, she took a step, twisted her ankle, and fell.

She struggled to stand, but the pain was too great. Then, a sudden wind cleared the dust a little and she saw, through stinging eyes, how foolish she would have been to leave the square. The streets were already filled with people crying

prayers to heaven. Many rushed out of buildings only to fall under rubble raining down on them from above. Hundreds of desperate men and women were trying to open the doors of the church of “Los Padres” to seek safety and prayer.

Through the dust, Joaquina saw Simón Sáenz fight to control his mare. He dug his spurs into the horse’s side, trying to race to open space, but his mount was too frightened. Standing on its hind legs, the old horse twisted around and fell, throwing Simón to the stones. Before Simón could stand, the horse jumped to her feet and galloped back up the street toward home.

At that moment, the erratic convulsions of the steeple of Los Padres shook it apart. Bricks and little stone flowers fell from elaborate renaissance decorations. Then, the entire structure came down with a noise that filled the entire valley. A sickening collapse of stones on flesh crushed perhaps a hundred people in an instant. The mare, that had tried so desperately to escape, also died under the falling steeple.

Simón, already racing toward the square and open space through the immense cloud of dust raised by the falling tower, could not keep his balance as the earth shifted beneath him. He fell and cut his forehead. Masonry scattered in front of him as he

scrambled to his feet and ran on. All about him were fallen bodies, crushed and bleeding.

He made it over the rubble blocking the entrance to the street. My mother was still struggling to stand when Simón came running past her. “Help me, Señor!” she implored over the deafening rumble of shifting earth beneath them.

He rushed by her at first. Then, recognizing her, and seeing the look of terror in her eyes from which rivulets of tears stained the dust on her cheeks, he came back. He took her in his arms and carried her to the center of the square where they huddled together with a few other souls lucky enough to reach merciful open space. They held each other desperately while the ground continued to shake with terrifying fury.

Chapter 2

That day changed my mother's life. Everyone's life changed. In other parts of the country, people saw their world destroyed before their frightened eyes. The watched the earth split open, spewing forth mud, water, or lava in destructive waves that drowned their land, their homes, their loved ones, and their dreams. Cotopaxi, inactive for years, erupted. Barely hidden behind the low clouds that glowed red as the molten rock poured forth, Cotopaxi's fire reflected a terrifying pall of crimson over the faces of the people praying in the streets.

Among them were the two people who were destined to be my parents, thrown together by the violence of the earth. That violence has been my birthright. In my half-century, I have known almost nothing but violence: either that of the earth or of

the men who walk upon it. I have had to embrace violence, or succumb.

It had been nearly 50 years since South America's last big earthquake, but the quake of 1797 was the worst in history. Had my mother been able to proceed up the street to her church, she would have suffered the same fate as 40,000 other people who perished that day. Most of them died trying to find a place to pray.

When the shaking died down, it left the sound of wailing up and down the Andes for over 300 leagues. My mother was crying also. She trembled in Simón Sáenz's arms, clinging desperately to him as he tried to comfort her in the stillness following the quake.

"All is well. It's over now," he said, holding her close. He wiped the blood from his forehead, and asked, "Are you all right?"

She turned and looked at the man who had saved her as he brushed the hair off her forehead. Suddenly she remembered. "Juanita, I must go see Juanita!" she said. She tried to stand on her swollen foot. Her hands shook as she reached out for support. Simón did not understand at first. Tears made wider

paths in the dust on her face as she tried to persuade him to help her. “I must see if my friend is all right.”

“No, we must stay in the open for a while. The earthquake may start again,” he said.

“Please, Don Sáenz, I must go to her. I need to take care of her. I must know if she is all right, or help her.”

Reluctantly, he assisted while she hobbled up the street. Although limping, the act of making her way through the disaster in order to save her friend seemed to take away the pain in her ankle and the fear in her heart.

The little street that had been still and silent so many long moments before was now littered with debris and grief. A man wandered in a daze, blood flowing from half an arm. A woman knelt over her husband, a bloody piece of masonry next to him. As she wailed, she dashed her head on the stones on which his life flowed away. Two-story buildings had been reduced to piles of rubble. Bodies lay everywhere. Those who were still alive were frantically lifting stones and timbers, searching through rubble in a vain attempt to uncover members of their families.

Joaquina’s heart leapt for joy when she saw the little house was still standing. She avoided the horror all around her as

she single-mindedly climbed over shifting stone, wood and plaster. Only one wall of the little house, common with an adjacent fallen building, was gone. The door was completely blocked by rubble from the building across the street.

They climbed over stones and timbers to reach the partially blocked opening of the fallen wall. When they crawled inside, my mother realized instantly that Juanita and her mother had left, seeking safety. Safety that they probably never found. She never saw Juanita again.

Tears came to her eyes. She was about to sit down in despair when the first after-shock struck. With it came a loud crack as the ceiling timbers broke.

Simón quickly sought safety under the tall bed on which my mother had rested her head so recently while she dreamed. He pulled her in after him and held her close.

The roof crashed open. Into the room came the rainwater that had accumulated on the flat roof in the preceding days. The two survivors were splashed by the mud that rolled across the earthen floor. The shock lasted only a moment and then stopped.

When my mother told me the story, she said that after the last shock had died, my father took her home. Years later, I

overheard her tell a priest, in a confession, a different account. As I reflected on that story from adulthood, it made more sense.

This is the way I now understand it: the after-shock was over in an instant, but they stayed in each other's arms, grasping for life from each other for a long time. It was almost half an hour before they left. In that time they made a silent bond. I have been close to death many times and I know something about what it can do to desire, and I know how she felt.

She desperately wanted to feel his hands touch her skin, yet she knew it was wrong and held back. Then, as she told the priest, the chaos of the morning made her mind re-create the images of her dream: a man on a horse who first brought chaos and then peace, and the woman who rode beside him.

Next to my father, my mother felt both safe and exhilarated. He had been her rescuer. Perhaps her dream was prophecy. That was why God had made her dream so frightening a dream. She told herself that she dreamt of her own savior. God knew she would be saved by this man and wanted her with him. She looked into his eyes and then they pressed their lips together. Their yearning pushed away all else.

The horror of the day was too much for them to comprehend. No one that day could know how complete was the devastation caused by the "great earthquake of 1797." The shaking is said to have lasted almost a quarter of an hour, and it would be 40 years before the damage done to the property in and around Quito was completely repaired.

Throughout the Andes, people lost their lives and their hope as the cities and towns they had built crumbled and fell about them. Not only Quito suffered. The towns of Cotocollao, Nano, Pomasqui, San Antonio and many others, in an area that stretched for many leagues on either side of the Equator, sustained almost complete destruction. One of the largest mountains in the Andes, Chimborazo, erupted with such heat that the ice cap partially melted, flooding the lands at its feet, while it rained down fire on the towns of Ambato, Riobamba and Guaranda.

Along with the damage to property, the effects on the people's souls would take years to restore as well. Though Quito was all but destroyed, the ground was not all that was transformed. The human "terrain" changed as well. In the few years just prior to the earthquake, Quito had been gaining a

reputation for being a somewhat licentious city. Finding a way to ensure guilt, the merciless priests would not let the poor people of Quito forget the earthquake. “It was your punishment,” the priests declaimed from the pulpit. This, of course, did nothing but add to the misery of those who had lost their loved ones and homes, and who were already insane with grief. The priests saw to it that the spirit of the land stayed a dismal color for years.

The effects of such persecution on my mother were devastating. She had lost a dear friend in the earthquake and she had reached out to one who could help her. Nothing could be more natural, but in the end, she would be made to pay for that “crime.” If I had seen nothing else, the sight of my mother in the following years would have been enough to make me abhor the church. I know I should not say this, but I am too old to dissemble now.

Every aspect of colonial life was affected by the quake—politics in particular. Only a few months before, Spain had entered a war with Britain. The blockade of Spanish shipping at Cádiz by the British during 1797, which would have brought much needed supplies to the colonies, forced the people of the

Andes to seek help elsewhere. For nearly 300 years, all trading done by the colonies was, by law, done with Seville or Cádiz. Suddenly, with the war blocking Spanish shipping and the urgent need for medical supplies and building materials, the colonies had to, and did, find new trading partners. Thus Spain's grip on the colonies lost some of its power. The interruption of the supply of gold to Spain due to the earthquake weakened the Spanish monarchy as well.

The *criollos* (aristocrats born in South America, or "Creoles") were already beginning to wonder about their attachment to Spain. Three years earlier, Antonio Nariño had published the first Spanish translation of *The Rights of Man,* in the city of Santa Fe de Bogotá. It was in this document, written by Thomas Paine in 1791, that Nariño and other South American patriots found inspiration for their own search for liberty.

Intellectual inspirations aside, the *criollos* were already vexed at injustices imposed upon them by the high-minded *peninsulares* (the aristocrats born in Spain). Those born on the Iberian peninsula, who always had the choicest positions in government or business, never tired of reminding their South American born cousins of their unlucky birth. When the king of

Spain sent a little money to repair the ruins of the earthquake, he did something else that exacerbated an old problem with the *criollos*—he also sent Spanish-born administrators to further crowd the American born from office and work. Thus did the earthquake push the American born *quiteños* (citizens of Quito) closer to the idea insurgency. It would be long after Simón Bolívar had liberated the continent that I would really understand what happened politically in my city, but I see now that the earthquake of 1797 was a small turning point that had driven forward the coming revolution.

On that day, hiding under a bed in a small house, oblivious to past or future, were two souls who were also being changed forever. My father was not the kind of man who was in the habit of indulging in such improper behavior. He was well known in Quito as a wealthy importer of Spanish goods, an office holder, and a solid citizen. He was also known for his propriety. Concubinage was practiced by nearly all men of position, but my father was conservative, sometimes to his detriment, and he would not ordinarily have become involved with young Joaquina Aispuru. In addition to his successful business affairs and his civil appointment as tax collector, he

was also head of the King's Militia, a not unimportant position. A few years before, he had married a wealthy noblewoman, Juana María del Campo, and they had three children, but their marriage was not a happy one. Nevertheless, my father, if anything, was very staid and would not have indulged himself thus without the force of the cataclysm impelling him onward.

This pretty young woman he was kissing, and who seemed to be of supreme importance to him in those moments following the earthquake, did not fit into his life at all. The thought of my proper father in that compromising position makes me laugh to this day. My father always resisted change, yet he was constantly being pushed and pulled by forces beyond his control.

As they hid in the darkness, exploring each other's bodies with their lips and hands, exchanging their first words of love, the outside world slowly began to intrude. Though their desire was great, they refrained from making the final act of love that day. It would not have been emotionally possible for them, despite their need. After the last shock died away, the cries of men and women began drifting in from street. They heard shouts calling to each other, as families searched vainly through the

rubble, trying to reclaim their loved ones and friends—shouts full of grief and terror. As the outside world invaded Simón's and Joaquina's hiding place, creating such conflicting feelings in them, they were able to muster enough moral self-discipline to stop themselves.

My father decided to take Joaquina to a nearby home—friends of the Aispurus. He would leave her there, at the Larrea mansion, until her ankle healed enough for her to travel back to her own house, which was in an outlying part of town.

They weaved through the dusty, sorrowful streets and were still brushing dirt off their clothing as they approached the rubble that had been "Los Padres." As they looked up, they shuddered at the scene of horror before them.

A middle aged priest stood on the debris, his thin frame balancing on shifting masonry. Where his left eye should have been was a gaping wound, from which blood flowed into his beard and onto his frock. Beneath his feet, Simón and Joaquina and the other *quiteños* who were witness to the scene, could see limbs and bodies sticking out from beneath the fallen stones of the once great church.

Over his head, the priest held a rosary. In his remaining eye was the punishing fire of God as he cursed those who stood about. “Repent of your misdeeds, oh evil city. God’s wrath has fallen on you. Drop to your knees and ask forgiveness for having forgotten God and king. Christ is your only savior.”

Already, many were on their knees. Others did the same upon hearing his judgment. Simón and Joaquina walked as far around him as possible. As they turned the corner they heard the priest shout after them, “You shall not escape judgment!” To their emotions and their desire for each other was added the fear of God that covered them in a cloak of guilt.

Soon they were at Juan de Larrea’s heavy wooden door. It was open. As they entered, Joaquina looked around and marveled that this grand house, on one of the most important boulevards in Quito, had somehow suffered very little damage. The fountain, a sculptured cherub with its arms around a swan, was still pouring forth water in a peaceful trickle, ignoring the horror all around.

The Aispurus were close friends with this very wealthy family, and Joaquina and Simón were recognized immediately. A servant called to Doña Larrea from across the courtyard.

She rushed up to them and said, “Don Sáenz, are you all right? Joaquina, oh I’m so glad you are safe. Juan is out trying to help the poor victims.” Tears sprang to her eyes. “I wish he would return. I don’t like it when he is gone.” Then she noticed my mother limping. “Oh, Joaquina, you’re hurt. Sit down.”

She guided them into the courtyard where members of the household, and some others who had been brought back to the house by the generous Juan de Larrea, were lying in pain waiting for medical attention. For some of those, a doctor would do no good.

Joaquina could no longer stand and she was lowered to the ground and propped up against the wall. Simón was explaining his presence: “I came across her and she asked me to bring her here. I must rush home now.” At that moment, Doña Larrea was called away.

The confession I overheard later told the story of two people destined to break the commandments after all. Once Simón had seen to Joaquina’s comfort, he went to the massive door, still open to the street, and looked at the confusion beyond. Then he came back, knelt down, took her hands in his, and looked into her eyes.

"I must go," he said, softly but urgently. "If I see your brother, I will let him know where you are." Then he leaned over and whispered, "I *will* see you again. Take care of yourself until then."

He looked quickly around to be sure he wasn't being watched and then he kissed her passionately. She closed her eyes as she returned his kiss and swore to herself that she would wait for him. She felt him pull away before she opened her eyes. Simón was gone.

She raised herself to watch him walk down the scattered street. Touching her lips, she felt the exhilaration of a new love move through her body. At that moment, the sun broke through the overcast sky.

Then she saw something that brought her quickly back to her broken world. The priests had already organized a procession. Indians and poor Spanish, carrying the Virgin of Earthquakes, moved arduously through the rubble-strewn streets past the Larrea mansion, where another procession, a most important procession, would pass one day. They moved on to the main square in the center of the city. Over houses fallen on the dead of Quito, they marched, chanting of death and penance.

Joaquina took her trembling fingers away from her lips and averted her eyes. The remembrance of all the morning's events took hold of her. Slowly, she sank back to the ground. Her body shook as sobs overtook her. A mournful wail came to her throat, but the penitent chanting, passing the open front door, drowned out the sound of her weeping.

Chapter 3

In the weeks that followed, my mother was happy for the first time in her life. Living first under the domination of her religious father and then her brother, of even more stern moral convictions, she had little of life that she could call her own. When she lost her first real friend and then found that

relationship replaced by a deeper and more intimate one, she quickly fell in love.

She tried to ignore her feelings of guilt that the priests, in their zeal to disseminate shame to their followers, often made her feel. “The earthquake was God’s punishment for the sins of Quito,” she would hear almost daily. The priest who had lost his eye in the quake was one of the city’s most vocal accusers and he could be seen preaching in the streets for weeks. He was so zealous that some people began to call him “mad.” She felt mortified whenever she saw him even though he could not have known that she was guilty of the sins for which he condemned the city.

In the next two months, regardless of her guilty feelings, my mother was unable to keep away from the object of her love, or he from her. She tried to resist her feelings. Sometimes, when she knew she had to leave for an appointed rendezvous, she would tell herself that it was wrong and that she would not go. But she could not stay away from the joy that Simón brought her when they were together. They secretly saw each other every few days. Sometimes many days would go by before they could escape their families and meet for brief moments. Yet, any

longer than a day or two apart filled her with anticipation and distraction.

At first, the site of their trysts was most often a makeshift hospital. The Church of the Fathers of Mercy, roof no longer intact, its interior exposed to the sky, was deemed unsuitable for prayer. The numerous injured and sick were tended there, under tents to keep out the rain, by overworked doctors and young volunteers like Joaquina.

Simón would enter on some pretext, and they would secretly meet in a small room in the back where broken statues were stored. There, with God and terra cotta saints looking on, they enjoyed stolen moments, moments that were filled with kisses, or the smell of each other's hair, and the touch of each other's skin. Their ardor for each other grew until, one afternoon, they met in a field outside the city and, at last, consummated their love.

For the next month, they were able to see each other almost every day, and their meetings were filled with passionate lovemaking. Then, he stopped seeing her. I have deduced that his wife became suspicious, and perhaps it is all understandable, but the effects on my mother were disastrous. Feeling happily in

love one day and deserted the next naturally brought her great anxiety. No reminders of her prophetic dream on the day of the earthquake gave her any peace. No fantasizing about the future gave any hope.

She did not see him again for six weeks. Six weeks of longing and grief, and in the meantime Joaquina's monthly time came and went. Each day without her flow, and each sermon reminding the populace of the earthquake, brought her more worry and grief.

One day, she saw Simón for a moment in the market. She walked toward him through the crowd in the street, but before she could tell him of her trouble, he spoke softly and quickly. "I am sorry, but Juana is with child. It has become impossible for me to get away. Shhh. She's coming. Later. Later."

"Simón, please . . . ," she called after him, but he was gone. Joaquina was left with his name on her lips, his child in her belly, and the realization that she had been fooled by the treacherous dream she had on the morning of the great earthquake.

The weeks passed. Almost before she could think about it, she was so big that her hoop skirts were no longer able to hide

her condition. Every important family in Quito, except the kindhearted Larreas, began a campaign of whispers behind her back.

Most of the things that were said about her were lies. Some of it was the truth because the servants in Simón's house heard the quarrels with his wife and spoke to the servants in other houses. The story spread quickly about the sinful Joaquina and the father of the bastard she was carrying. Everyone, especially the church fathers, turned against my mother; the vehemence of the clergy kept her from even walking through a church door in her condition. Even though my father was equally guilty, and everyone knew it, he was never chastised.

My uncle Carlos, ashamed to have her in the same house with the rest of the family, admonished her violently for the humiliation she had brought to the Aispuru name. He had been the head of the household since the death of their father and when he discovered his youngest sister's condition, he packed her up and housed her in a little hut just outside of town. He told her very explicitly that she was to stay there with her Indian servant until she was past her condition. "You will bear a bastard, a child who will be no more than a drain on public

charity. I hope you're proud of yourself," he swore at her as he left her in her dismal surroundings. Food was brought from the Aispuru household by servants, but Joaquina received little from her family to nourish her soul.

Then my vengeful uncle spoke maliciously to important men in the *cabildo* (town council) and soon Simón was removed as head of the militia. The militia was disbanded sometime after that and the King's Infantry was formed. An officer named Salinas was appointed to lead it.

My father hated Captain Salinas. He was known to have a loose tongue. He was known to be foolish. Yet he was given an important position of authority. The irony in this is that because it was Salinas and not my father who was in charge of that aspect of the military in Quito, its history would be quite different, as you will see.

Meanwhile, the course of my family's history had been set. Carlos, by isolating my mother and attacking my father, only impeded Simón from giving any kind of support to her. My mother thus became resentful of him. I know my father did try to help my mother despite such impediments, but Carlos tried even harder to keep him away from her. He succeeded too well.

Some men have concubines, and the church and society merely wink at them. But my uncle Carlos was intensely angry with Simón and my mother. As time went on and the strife between my two families worsened, Carlos threatened to kill my father if he spoke to, or even looked at, Joaquina again. All of Quito knew of the scandal and the hatred between my families. Many took sides, but most agreed that Joaquina was a whore. A wedge of immense proportions was driven between the two unhappy lovers who were my parents. This strife lasted for years.

Like the city in which I was born, my life lay on a threshold: a violent frontier between my two families. It was not enough that I should be born both from both Spanish and American stock, in poverty from aristocratic parents, a colonial destined to be a revolutionary, but that my two families should always be at war kept me ever divided.

It was in the last hours of a cold day, on the 29th of December, in the year of the big earthquake, that my mother's servant made her way through the darkness carrying a small bundle. It was cloudless that night even though it was the rainy season in the high Andes. The moon, three-quarters full,

glistened in the puddles between the stones in the street. This watchful orb was the poor Indian woman's only light. Her hands could not carry a lantern because they bore a more delicate burden. In her arms slept a newborn baby girl wrapped in a shawl that was far too exquisite for an Indian servant to own. My nurse—whom my mother always called Juanita in memory of her friend though I do not think that was her name—carried me through the moonlight to the rectory of a nearby church. She held me close and knocked on the door.

I did not sleep through the baptism. I am told that I began crying almost as soon as the priest's scraggly features approached to peer down on me in myopic scrutiny. No doubt I was already mad at priests.

In addition to the fact that the priest was getting ready for bed, he showed obvious distaste for babies and rushed through the ceremony. Afterwards he wrote in a large book:

> . . . the 29th of December, 1797, solemnly baptized Manuela . . . born two days previously, a spurious child whose parents are not named . . . .

A few days before my humble ceremony, this unnamed father attended the baptism of his youngest son, my half-brother, José María Sáenz, in one of the rebuilt churches in the center of Quito. It would be days before my father would know I was born.

Chapter 4

The course of my life was set by the events preceding my birth. Had I not been born illegitimate, who knows what I might have become? Who knows how differently my influence on those around me might have changed history, and in what way? Who knows what would have happened if I had not been born into a world already set for conflict?

My parents families were in constant strife. Yet, in spite of Carlos's efforts to keep him away, my father came to see Joaquina and me a few months after my birth. If he intended the reunion to be a happy one, the journey was wasted.

Joaquina had bowed to the priests' sense of morality and had been living a life of contrition. She refused to return home after my birth, relying rather on her humble surroundings to serve as proper penance. My mother stayed in our little house as much as possible, with only Juanita to attend to our needs. None of the Aispurus ever came to visit, despite our house being on the path they had to travel to go to town. My mother played with me, and prayed, and did little else.

Since no one came to visit, she was surprised to find my father at her door one day. Painful memories returned, and though she invited him in out of social habit, she could not bear to see my father pick me up without feeling resentment. An argument ensued shortly after, and Simón left. "She took you from my arms so soon," my father said while telling me this story, a rare look of sadness darkening his face. This was the same look I saw on my mother's face at times.

Throughout the land there was discontent and hardship. My parents were not alone in their unhappiness. The *criollos* were constantly talking of the need for change. Change was in the air. As for my mother and father, they were in conflict and most unhappy, and things stayed as they were for more than six years.

During that period, my mother became more religious, and every day she withdrew further from any interaction with other people. Carlos could have made her come home after my birth, but he was content to leave her where she was. The earliest image I can recall of my uncle is him saying angrily, “I wash my hands of you!” My maternal grandmother died without ever seeing her only grandchild, and this caused Joaquina to withdraw even more into her own world. As the years advanced, she became increasingly reclusive and finally never left our little house again.

During those first years, my father visited me every now and then, but he was never made to feel welcome. Despite that, I liked him. He always brought me a little nosegay of sweet smelling flowers, or some fruit, or a *dulce* (sweetmeat). He was

nice to me, but his visits were rare. I hardly saw any member of my family except my mother.

A kindhearted priest, by the name of Father Ramón, took pity on us. He came to take confession from Joaquina and to instruct me in reading and writing. He was always meticulously clean, boyish, and friendly, with a shock of thick black hair that would forever fall in his eyes. He seemed confident about everything, yet a serious look never left his face. He was kind to me, and many times he went out of his way to take me into the city to see the Larreas.

They were the only family in Quito that even tried to maintain a friendship with my mother. “Joaquina, you and Manuela must come to dinner,” Doña Larrea would write in a note delivered by a barefoot servant wearing satin breeches. My mother would never go, but she would send me with Father Ramón.

It was Juan Larrea who taught me to ride. I was terrified the first time Señor Larrea picked me up and set me down on the bare withers of a dark brown gelding. I cried in fear and clutched at the mane, but he smiled and soothed me in some knowing

way. The next time he asked me if I wanted to ride, I was only a little afraid.

"Horses love people," he used to say. He was a great teacher, and I was riding by myself before I was five years old. Everyone agreed I had a knack for it.

However, I might not have become the accomplished horsewoman that I became if it had not been for Señor Larrea's kindly manner. The first time I fell off a horse, I almost stopped riding.

Don Larrea picked me up and said, "Don't cry, Manuela. You are not hurt. Simply ride again."

"I don't want to ride anymore," I whimpered.

"You're only saying that because you're frightened. You must face what frightens you. You must ride again. You must refuse to feel afraid."

"No, Señor, please."

"Now I am going to set you on that mare again. Be brave. Just say to yourself, 'I refuse to feel afraid.'"

"No, Señor, no."

"Please, Manuela, try. For me. Please."

I did. I said the words, "I refuse to feel afraid," and Señor Larrea put me back on the same horse. It was hard at first, but I conquered my fear. I was never afraid of a horse again, and the words he taught me often helped me later in life.

I learned more than riding from the Larreas. Except for the Larreas, people all around me made me believe I was nothing, nothing but a bastard. Certainly I believed that I would never mingle with such people of the upper classes. But the Larreas were different. They accepted me, and I learned many things from them. I learned what it was like to be well situated. This would have been my birthright had my wealthy parents been married, or my mother not in disgrace.

I learned to act like a lady at the Larrea mansion. If I was eating dinner at their table, I would watch the meticulous Doña Larrea delicately handle her knife and fork. I observed how to hold long-stemmed crystal. I learned the proper way to sit at a table with a fine linen covering. I also learned the things I was not supposed to do. "Manuela, we must not rest on the cloth with our elbows," she would say, gently. I learned proper manners and what was expected of society's "best."

Despite the kindly attention of the Larreas, most of the families in Quito's high society were cruel to me and my mother. These were the families of counts, marquises, and other Spanish nobility of great altitude. They all knew my mother and my father. They were merciless in their abuse of us.

I also had to endure the jibes of children, who could be most cruel. If some of the kinder children tried to include me in their games, an older one would very often see that I was ridiculed. "Do you want to play, Manuela?" one would say. "She won't be able to get permission from her parents. They live too far apart," said another. Everyone would laugh.

When I would act distant and ignore such a group in order not to be hurt by their taunts, I heard, "Too good for us Manuela? I didn't know it was so important to have no family."

When I became angry enough to hurl insults in return, to attack my attackers, I almost always heard, "Just what you'd expect from a bastard."

I never admitted to anyone that I was hurt profoundly by their taunting, but I almost always converted the pain to anger and the anger to bloody noses. Not even the boys were safe when I was antagonized into a fight. I was constantly being

scolded by the parents of defeated children and sent home where I would let down my barriers and cry. “You little bastard, you’re nothing but vermin on society,” or some similar remark would ring in my ears while my mother comforted me.

Any vulnerability that my youth might have given me was slowly replaced by thick skin and deep resentment. As I grew, I added sarcasm, laughter, and stubbornness to my defensive arsenal, but I was never as good at making fun of my enemies as I was at fighting. I took pride in the fact that I was called formidable by those who knew me later in my adolescent years. Now that I no longer have to fight, I find it only amusing. But when I was young, it seemed I ended each day with a mixture of grief and anger.

Such was my life until I was seven, when events altered my future completely. My life may not have been the best up until then, but it was the only life I knew. I would have been content to go on living just the way I was. But catastrophic changes were about to occur. They began when my uncle came to our house to demand that my mother sign some papers.

I heard my mother say, “No, Carlos, the land belongs to all of us. I should have a say in how it is—”

"Damn you. You have given up your rights when you embarrassed us. The Aispuru name—"

"But, Carlos—"

"I have already deeded over this parcel you live on. Now you must relinquish—"

Then my mother noticed I was watching and listening and sent me outside. I heard them argue for a long time.

The conflict lasted for a week. Carlos came over every day until my mother became very ill. When Carlos came the next day, she was too weak to talk to him.

For two nights I could not sleep with my mother as I always did. I had to sleep in a chair with my head in my arms, resting on her sick bed. Then, on the third day, her fever worsened. I became frightened, as did Juanita. She ran to the Aispuru estate to find help.

I remember shivering in the doorway and calling out, "Hurry, Juanita, hurry!" I watched her disappear down the road. The sky was a deep gray with fast moving clouds. Heavy rain drops began to fall as I stood there.

When I closed the door, my mother roused herself weakly. “Manuela, bring me some paper and a pen.” She spoke in such a feeble voice, that I barely heard her.

As I set them in her lap, she said, “Manuela, I am going to write my will. I want you to have something of mine—something very important—after I die.”

“No. No, Mama,” I said, terrified.

“Shhh, my child, listen to me. I won’t be around to make it happen. Your aunts and uncle will try to take my gift from you. But you must make sure that you obtain my share of the family estate. You are a fighter, my love. Keep your spirit. Do not lose your will to fight for what is yours. My share of the estate was left to me by my father, and I give it to you. You must have it. Promise me that you will fight until you have it.”

“Yes, Mama,” I said, though I really didn’t understand.

She had been half delirious all day, but her eyes were clear then and she spoke passionately. “It is mine to sell or give away.” Her voice was raspy and strands of black hair stuck to her damp forehead. “I cannot go back to my home. There is nothing for me there. But you, you will own a house some day. You will sell what you receive from me and buy a house of your

own. You will sleep in a fine bed. If I could know that you would have all that, I would be happy as I die. That is why I give you my gift." Her voice quavered in grief and her eyes filled with tears.

"No, Mama, no. Please don't cry—"

She waved her hand, indicating that she wanted to write. I silently prepared the ink and paper, and set them before her. Her pen scratched the rough paper as the evening gloom filled the house.

I looked at the tattered covers on her bed. I never noticed the patches and rips before. I looked around the room. Mostly the house was made of cane and thatch with a framework and flooring made of lumber, and a stone wainscoting. In one corner was a narrow cot for Juanita. In the other corner was a tiny stone kitchen that seemed to have been added to the little house as an afterthought. The kitchen had *adobe* walls with a stone floor, a small table, and a stone hearth. This one little room and small kitchen was home to me.

I ran my hand across the blankets. It was my one true comfort to climb into bed with my mother every night. I did not really understand death, but my mother's words made me know

that I might lose her. Fear filled me as I waited for her to finish writing.

The sound of wind and rain hitting the roof overcame the sound of the quill. Darkness took over the room, and I lit what few candles we had. When I was finished, Joaquina was folding the paper. She reached out to hand it to me, but there was a knock on the door.

I admitted Father Ramón. "How is she, my child?" he whispered, as he wiped the rain off his face with his sleeve.

"I don't know, Father." Tears welled up in my eyes.

"Shhh, everything will be all right." He crossed the room and sat down next to her bed. "Joaquina, I saw Juanita and she told me you were worse."

"I am dying, Father," she said so weakly that it scared me.

"Now, of course you're not," he said, though his brows knit in worry. "I gave Juanita my mule and she will have alerted your brother very soon. Carlos will bring a doctor."

The flames of the candles sputtered in the draft. Rain and wind penetrated the cracks in the walls, and the thatch on the roof rustled loudly. Near the corner next to the kitchen, the roof always leaked. I heard drops of water hitting the floorboards as I

stepped behind the tattered curtain that closed off the kitchen. When I tried to light our only lamp, I heard my mother begin to confess to the priest.

"I know I have sinned, Father, because my life has been sad, because I have lived as an outcast here without a husband."

"Now then, rest easy, Joaquina."

Father Ramón was proof that all priests are not bad. His way was to pay attention to what people really needed, rather than "church business." His befriending of friendless people like my mother, who were not in the good graces of the church leadership, got him into more than a little trouble, I think.

"I sinned on the day of the earthquake, Father."

"Shhh. Calm yourself, Joaquina. I understand." He did not rattle off the usual responses to a confession. I think he believed she would be all right, and I know he had heard of the earthquake and her feelings of guilt before. "Do not speak just now. Try to rest." He was not listening as a priest, but as a friend, and he was right. She did not die that night. My mother may not have died at all, if subsequent events had not occurred.

She pressed on. "Father, listen to me. When I was carrying my Manuela, I was not allowed to go to church because

of my sin. My family and most of my friends turned against me. Now I am dying and I have suffered for seven years. Seven years is long enough and I must have your help. Promise me you will help me."

"Of course, Joaquina. What do you want?"

"I want my share of our family estate to go to Manuela when I die."

"You will not die, Joaquina, if you can get some rest and—"

"Father, please help me," she interrupted. "Here is my will. Take it and help my little girl. She can sell her interest in the family property. When she has money, people won't be cruel to her anymore. Father, promise me that you will be my witness. Promise me that my inheritance will go to my Manuela. I want her to have it. You can't punish me anymore."

"Joaquina, it is I, Ramón, who is before you. I do not wish to punish you. I will see that your wishes are carried out."

Suddenly, Joaquina began to cough violently. When she recovered, she said, "I am sorry, Father, but because of that dream, I thought Simón was sent to save me. Now I know that Christ is my only savior. But please help my child, Father."

"Of course I will, but you will be all right if you get some care and have a chance to rest without suffering. Try to calm yourself. It won't do any good to—"

Before he could finish, the door opened, admitting the storm. Carlos Aispuru stood on the threshold a moment, shedding water onto the dusty floor. He slowly looked around the dark room.

I peeked through a hole in the curtain, terrified, and saw an angry look on his face. Every time I had seen him before, he had left my mother in tears and me shaking with fear. He was tall and had to stoop a bit to enter the room. His face was long and furrowed, though he was only about 35. There was no gray in his straight black hair, and his aspect could only be described as stern and unmoving. He was my uncle, but I loathed him even at my young age.

He brushed the rain from his clothes. Father Ramón met him at the door and began to speak softly to him. Carlos cut him off with a curt, "Where's the child?"

My heart froze. Carlos cast his eyes around the room and ignored my mother. I could hear, and partly see, the rest of their conversation. Father Ramón looked at him as if he couldn't

believe his ears. He said softly, “She’s around her somewhere. But where is the doctor? I thought you would bring a doctor.”

Carlos turned back to him and then looked at Joaquina, “I couldn’t find him. Does she need him urgently?” Then, raising his voice and turning toward the doorway, he called out harshly, “Manuela, come here.”

The priest lost his temper. He grabbed Carlos by the arm and turned him around. Whispering, he said, “Of course she needs him urgently. She might die if she doesn’t get some help.” He brushed the hair out of his eyes and said, “She can be saved, but her condition is very serious.”

Carlos looked at the dread on Joaquina’s face and said quietly, “You’re wrong, priest. She is going to die whether she gets help or not. Look at her.”

“Well?” the priest challenged, grabbing him tighter.

“In which case, she doesn’t need a doctor,” he hissed. He shook off the priest’s grip and called toward the kitchen, “Manuela?!”

Father Ramón was livid. “How can you—” he started, but Carlos ignored him and walked over to the kitchen. I quickly hid behind a large water jug in the corner. I looked back and saw

their silhouettes on the curtain. Before Carlos could enter, Father Ramón spun him around, saying, "How can you be so heartless? And why is it so important to find the child?"

"I'm taking her to a convent until Joaquina recovers, *Father*." His voice was full of venom as he pronounced "Father." I tried to make myself smaller behind the jar. Then Carlos noticed the will in the priest's hand and snatched it from him. "What's this?"

"*That* is Joaquina's will, *Señor*." He pronounced "Señor" with the same rancor that Carlos had just used.

Carlos read it quickly and then exploded, "Never!" I heard him thunder over to Joaquina. His shadow loomed larger on the curtain, and I saw him crumple the will. He said, "Your bastard will never have any part of our estate. Do you hear me? *Never*!"

"Carlos, please . . . ," she said feebly. But my uncle threw the paper down and came back to the kitchen.

"Manuela, where are you?" His tone was more angry than ever as he threw back the curtain. I cowered behind the jar and hid my face. His heavy footsteps approached, and then I felt him grip my wrist so hard that it hurt as he stood me up angrily.

As he started to drag me to the door, Father Ramón rushed in to protest. I screamed and overturned the table in an effort to grab onto something, spilling the oil lamp on the floor. Father Ramón stopped to extinguish the fire while Carlos dragged me across the hut to the door.

"Have mercy, Carlos, please! Why? Please, no! Why?" my mother implored as he pushed me outside.

Carlos stopped in the doorway. "I'm taking Manuela to the convent of Santa Catalina for her education. I would rather not, but I have a civic and familial responsibility to educate her." He looked at me with loathing. "Even though I can tell she will amount to nothing."

"Carlos, please—" my mother wailed.

"If you had any decency, you would have entered the cloister yourself. When I have seen to this last responsibility of mine, that's the last I'll have anything to do with you or your bastard. You have shamed our family long enough." He stormed out of the door, dragging me cruelly behind him.

I kicked at him, bit him, and screamed as he dragged me through the rain to waiting mules, farther and farther away from my mother. Finally, he stopped and shook me, shouting at me

over the downpour, “Stop it! Stop it! Do you hear? Stop it! Now!” At last, I stood still. “I’m taking you to the convent, and it’ll only go worse for you if you fight.”

With that, he picked me up and placed me on the sopping back of a mule in front of an old Indian servant. The old man who held me understood my fear. He said, “Do not worry. Everything will be well. Do not struggle anymore. You will only make it worse for your mother.”

I looked back through the door, veiled by the rain, where I saw my mother crying out for me. I wanted to cry out also, but I was so afraid for her that I could only sit shivering in the rain that covered my tears. I saw her try to stand, in order to follow, but she was so weak that she collapsed on the floor. Father Ramón impotently tried to comfort her as Carlos mounted his own mule, and we rode off.

I wanted to run back and hold my mother. I wanted to say good-bye. I wanted to tell her everything would be all right. I wanted to stay and help her, but nothing could turn me back that night. Carlos led me, cold and drenched with rain, through the streets of Quito until we came to the main door of the Convent of Santa Catalina. We entered, and after hurriedly handing me

over to the sisters he turned to me and said, “Try to behave.” A look of disgust crossed his face, and he walked out.

I shrank from the strange surroundings. Before I even understood where I was, I was taken to the school area in the back and given some blankets and a linen nightshirt. I did not protest at all. The words of the old Indian servant, warning me that I would make it worse for my mother, were still in my mind.

I did not speak, even when asked something directly. “You will live here now, Manuela, and learn to read and write. Would you like that?” asked a nun, while two others removed my wet clothes, and dried me.

I resented them touching me, and being part of taking me away from my mother. I wanted to yell insults at them, but I was too numb. They ignored my silence, as they efficiently washed me, dressed me in a nightshirt, fed me, and made me go to bed in a small, cold room. I never had so many people attend me, yet I never felt so alone.

As I lay there in the dark, listening to the wind and rain outside the window, I became afraid for my mother. I lay trembling for a long time.

The next thing I knew the sun was up. I could see that it had been up for an hour or so. The storm was over, but not in my heart. I felt I had to get back to my mother. I was afraid for her.

I began to look for my clothes so I could steal out of the convent and return home. As I was about to open the door, two sisters brought in a little habit similar to the white Dominican style habit that was worn by the nuns. “I don’t want to wear that,” I said, when they told me to get dressed.

“Manuela, everyone wears this kind of dress here,” one of them began.

A very short argument ensued, and then they started dressing me. It took them almost an hour and both of them were half undressed by the time they were finished engaging in battle with me. I kicked and fought until they had to call in two others to pin me down. Immobilized as I was, I was still able to talk. I let out a steady stream of obscenities and curses, but it made no difference.

When I was dressed, two of these angry nuns dragged me back in the direction of the main door of the convent to take me to the chapel to “pray for forgiveness.” I fought them, I dug in my heels, I went limp, I tried everything to resist them but they

were too strong for me. Then as we went through the main entrance hall, I saw a wonderful thing. My father was there.

Apparently he had come to my mother's house that morning when he heard she was ill. Juanita had seen him and told him of her condition. Father Ramón was still attending Joaquina that morning, and he told my father what Carlos had done. My ordinarily reserved father was furious and rode immediately to the convent.

He was arguing with the *portera* (the doorkeeper) when I was taken through the entrance hall. When he saw me, he called out, "Manuela!"

His shout made the nuns escorting me stop. I was thrilled to see him. He pushed right past the *portera*, who began calling for help. My captors were distracted enough for me to break free, and I ran into his arms.

"Papa! Papa, help me!" I sobbed.

"It is all right Manuela. All will be well. They have no right to take you away from your mother."

Then he was accosted by several angry nuns. He brushed them aside and carried me out to his horse. They almost successfully blocked his way at the entrance, and there was a

great deal of shoving before he pushed through. The nuns followed him all the way outside, still trying to stop him. A stream of protests came from them. “Set her down!” “Criminal!” “Abductor!”

As he put me on his horse and began to mount, they again tried to block his way. Some tried to stop him from getting on and some tried to pull me off the frightened animal. One of them slipped and fell full length, in her white habit, face first, into the mire. Despite my fear, I laughed.

He finally mounted and spurred his horse. As he rode off, hooves splattered mud all over the faces and clothes of several nuns who were trying to recover me. I watched them chase after us in powerless frustration as we galloped down the street.

Often my father was weak and lacked decisiveness, but on occasions, like that morning, he could be a conflagration of strength. So it was that I was able to say good-bye to my dying mother. Also, my determination was strengthened somewhat by his example so that I was better able to survive the next years. Having seen him only a few times in my life, and feeling the bitterness my mother felt for him, I was uncertain about him,

though I naturally felt kinship with him. That day I learned to love him.

By the time I returned to our house, my mother was much worse and not aware of her surroundings. Father Ramón was not there. She was all alone with Juanita. My father asked after Joaquina, and then he left. I stayed with my mother two days and watched her die.

A doctor was there most of that time, but he could not seem to help her. My father was not there because he knew he was in trouble for taking me from the convent grounds. Neither was Juanita there when my mother died. She left to get me some food and did not return until after my mother was gone.

Father Ramón did not come until the very end. My mother asked for him, but we did not know where he was. Later I found out that Carlos had insinuated improper behavior between the kind priest and my mother, and he was in trouble with the church authorities.

In the afternoon of the last day, there was a knock at the door. The doctor went over and opened it wide. A dark apparition stood in the doorway silhouetted against a sky that glowed with the last rays of the setting sun. The doctor greeted

the figure who entered solemnly. I saw it was a tall angular priest, bearded and carrying a book. When he turned to look at me, I was frightened. A beam of light illuminated his face and I saw that his left eye was only a deep socket, with a gash instead of an eyelid. The cavity watered as though he were crying. However, the rest of his features belied tears. His face was cruel and angry.

He looked at me for a moment out of his one angry eye and then walked over to my mother. I became frightened and I threw myself in front of her. She was weak and could not even raise her hand to touch my head. I was making such a fuss that the doctor took me outside.

I saw Father Ramón approaching and ran up to him, saying, “Father, I’m so afraid.”

“I’m sorry, but I was called away. How is she?”

“I don’t know. There is a priest in there. Come!” I began to lead him to the door.

He looked at the doctor and then said softly, “Not just now. The priest is giving her extreme unction. Let us wait a minute.”

When the priest with one eye came out of the house, he walked briskly back toward the center of town. He stopped for a moment when he saw Father Ramón, gave him a strange look and then he walked on. Father Ramón looked after him and said, "Father?" The older priest ignored him and kept walking.

Father Ramón slowly turned back toward the house. I could see there was a tear falling from one of his eyes. "Come," he said.

By the time we walked back inside the house, my mother was gone. I walked over to her bedside and slowly rested my head on her hand. I wanted to stay there forever. Time stopped for me.

After the doctor left, Father Ramón said, "Come. Help me. We must dress her."

First we emptied the entire room. The two little mirrors we owned were the first to go; then all the candles but four; then the chair, the little table, Juanita's cot, and everything else that was in the room, were moved outside, or to the kitchen.

As we started to dismantle the bed, Father Ramón found my mother's will where Carlos had thrown it on the floor. He uncrumpled it, looked at it a moment, then folded it, and put it in

his frock. “Family,” he muttered. He turned to me and said, “You and I are much alike.” He looked sadder than I had ever seen him.

I appreciated his words, knowing that someone was there to take care of me; however, I did not acknowledge him. I walked around in a daze, doing as I was bidden by my kindly friend. After the room was laid bare, a straw mat was placed on the floor with a sheet on it. My mother’s body was placed on the sheet and one of the four candles was set at each corner.

Usually, a friend or relative will buy a habit or monk’s robe for the deceased, but there were no friends, and no money. Unlike the usual tradition of dressing the dead, she was merely wrapped in another sheet.

Juanita came back, just as we finished. Realizing she was too late, my nurse burst into tears and held me in her arms. “Your uncle kept me all afternoon,” she cried.

My mother was to remain thus for a day, and I was prepared to sit with her; but it was not to be. An army officer, the one who now had my father’s military position, Captain Salinas, came to the house a little later with orders to take me back to the convent.

I was too overwhelmed to resist. After receiving assurances from Juanita and Father Ramón that they would see me the next day, I left with Captain Salinas. He seemed oblivious to my feelings and determined to carry out his orders. I cried softly as we walked back to Santa Catalina. He also talked incessantly. “My mother was a good woman.” “How old are you?” “Everything will be all right when you are in the convent.” “My mother died only five years ago.” On and on he went, as we walked through the dark, oblivious as to whether I was listening or responding. I wished he would have kept silent.

The nuns received me and dressed me in a habit. I did not resist. I was given some solitude in the chapel, in deference to my loss, before being made to sleep in a dormitory with the other students. It was quite late when I was put to bed. All the other girls were asleep.

I was awakened early the next day and taken to the chapel. I stayed there all day, and early the next morning Joaquina Aispuru was buried. Again, the nuns roused me early and took me to the chapel to pray, and later they took me to the funeral. Father Ramón, who had been the only friend my mother knew at the end, was not there, nor was Juanita. As I stood at the edge of

my mother's grave, I watched my uncle look straight ahead in icy coldness while my aunts sniffled. I surrendered to a feeling of intense hatred.

I decided to beat my uncle. Of course, I was only seven years old and had no idea how to have any effect on him. Neither did I really understand yet what it was I was supposed to get from him. All I knew was that I was going to get what was mine and make him pay for my mother's suffering.

The nuns who had taken me to the funeral tried to usher me back to the convent as soon as the service was over. Before we had taken three steps, I snatched my hand free and ran over to Carlos, who was standing stiffly next to his crying sisters. "I hate you!" I screamed at him, "I hate you!"

I tried to spit in his face, but he was too tall and the spittle sprayed all over his surtout. Before I could see his reaction, I turned to flee.

I ran straight into the arms of the nuns, who scolded me and dragged me off to the convent, and a beating, and ten years of "imprisonment." I fought them all the way.

Chapter 5

"You have upset this community more in one day than anyone has in the last twenty years." I had just had a switch administered to me for my disobedience at the funeral before being turned over to this stern woman in charge of the convent students. When she tried to take me in hand, I cursed her and I was punished a second time. I was learning what was in my future.

"We have rules here. How to dress. How to eat. How to sleep. How to talk. You will live like a consecrated nun and you will especially learn to keep your filthy mouth clean." She paused and took a deep breath. Somewhat calmer, she said, "These rules are for all citizens of this community of women. You will obey them!"

I stood rigid, tears running down my face, murder in my heart, listening to my introduction into convent life. Only one thought was in my mind: "I will never obey!"

When my disciplinarian was through with her lecture, I was immediately put to work cleaning the greasy kitchen floors. I was at that job for three days, until my "jailers" deemed me rehabilitated.

I was given only porridge to eat, twice a day. Each evening, before being put to bed, dirty, in a small room where I could be watched, I would be given a choice. "Manuela, if you will promise to behave, you can attend school tomorrow. If not, you will continue with the chores we've given you."

The first two nights I answered in an insolent manner, seasoned with foul language, for which I was punished and put to bed. Thus did I spend my first days in the convent of Santa Catalina, days that would stretch out to a decade.

I hated those years. I was in turmoil the entire time because I never agreed with my situation. I never accepted that I had to be there. Always disobedient, I fought with my surroundings constantly.

Santa Catalina was one of the *conventos grandes* of Quito. It was only 100 years earlier when large cities like Lima, Quito or Santa Fe de Bogotá had convents whose populations grew to as many as 1000 women. By 1805, when I arrived, the populations were not as large, but these convents were still little cities within cities, with their own governments and social systems, composed entirely of women.

The conventual governments were controlled by the nuns of the black veil, the highest order of nun. These women were the only ones who had the right to vote on convent concerns. They controlled the convent. Their only other responsibility was singing in the choir.

Sisters of the white veil were "brides of Christ," just as their senior sisters, but they were not of the same earthly social class and they did not have the same political or social rights in the convent. These were most often the gardeners, bakers, doorkeepers, or the supervisors of the *donadas*, maids, and slaves.

Beneath the nuns of the white veil, in this stratification, were the novices. These were often young women, with their

entire lives in front of them, who had decided to forsake everything for convent life. I never understood them.

Below these were the *donadas*, who were merely workers that were allowed to live in the nunnery and imitate the nuns in dress. They wore a nun's habit and had certain community rights, but they were little more than maids living as though they were consecrated nuns.

Other women in the community were secular ladies in retirement or in seclusion, schoolgirls, occasional illegitimate babies left for the convent to raise, and a large population of servants, maids, and slaves.

The convent grounds in most *conventos grandes* were completely walled and took up multiple city blocks. Each area of the convent was designated for a specific kind of work. Most business done with the outside world was done in the *porteria* (the main entrance hall) and in the adjoining *locutorios* (parlors and offices). The entrance hall itself is where merchants would deliver their goods and those wishing to see a member of the community would wait. In the *locutorios* could be seen judges or royal officers on official business, family members visiting with their daughters or cousins, female friends come to show off the

latest fashions or to gossip, priests giving confession, or even a dandy who had brought flowers to a favorite nun whom he "loved from afar."

The rest of the convent was divided into the *seglarado* (where the schoolgirls stayed and studied), the kitchen, the laundry rooms, the bakery, the sewing rooms, the dormitories, and various other areas where convent work was done. In the center of the convent was a little "*pueblo*" of "cells," as they were known, which were the living quarters of the nuns of the black veil. Each nun of the black veil, or her family, had to buy or build a cell in which she would live. Into these cells, with their little gardens and porches, they might invite a nun of the white veil, *donadas*, servants, or others to live with them.

If one of these lower class women were not lucky enough to have such an invitation, she had to sleep in the communal quarters. Those who were chosen lived with their benefactors as elegantly as women in high society. These large convents were very well organized, opulent and clean, and they all had beautiful grounds. To some women, especially nuns of the black veil, convent life was freedom, freedom from a world ruled by men.

For me it was a prison, and despite the large number of women, I was lonely most of the time. In the ten years I stayed in that convent, never did any of the Aispurus come to visit me. I know Carlos came to the convent—at least every few months—to give the usual fixed donation and to pay other fees. I saw him on occasion. But he never did ask to see me. Not that I wanted to see him either.

I suppose I should have been grateful that he was paying for my education. The fees were not inexpensive. It cost 50 pesos a year "just to stand on the ground of the nunnery," as it was phrased. In addition, the families of the convent students had to pay up to 200 pesos a year for room and board. They also had to pay for clothing, medicines, doctor's visits, supplies, and other necessities. Regardless, I was not grateful.

Neither was I grateful to the sisters for the good education I received, because I knew, to them, I was merely a means of supporting the nunnery. Occasionally the convent management would take certain parents before ecclesiastical judges for permission to expel their daughters because their families had not paid the fees. These girls would often be good students and faithful members of the convent community, yet, because their

families might have missed only one expense payment, they would choose not to keep the child so that someone else could enter and pay. This, in spite of the fact that it was well known that the *conventos grandes* were very wealthy.

Carlos paid some of my expenses (I know both my father and the Larreas paid for part of my upkeep in the convent as well), but he never provided one other thing that I might need. In fact, my father is the only member of my family who ever came to visit me. He would come every two or three months, and I was always so very glad to see him.

Knowing he was in the city gave me hope and confidence. So often when I felt lonely I would think of my father possibly coming to visit me (and perhaps taking me out of the convent for good); then I would have the courage to continue. His visits kept me going, and I needed him at that young age.

Sometimes he would bring my brother, José María, to play with me, and that always made me doubly happy. I loved my brother. He was the same age as I, soft spoken, gentle, with an angelic face, and he was always friendly to me. He could usually beat me at racing or other physical activities, but with him I did not mind. He made me happy. My father, my half-

brother, and the Larreas were the only people who ever rescued me from my loneliness and my grief for my mother.

As I look back through time and experience, I can see that my isolation was made more complete by my own insolence, an insolence born out of the bitterness of being reminded constantly that I was illegitimate and thus unworthy to be a part of society. Consequently, the only face I ever showed to the world was one of disrespect; sometimes it was angry, sometimes sarcastic, but always disrespectful.

There were other complications that contributed to my insolence. Most significantly, very few of the other girls befriended me. To be honest, I could inevitably do anything they could do, only better, and my attitude prompted me to make sure they were defeated in some way before I even let one of them try to be friendly to me.

Most of the girls were from wealthy families who had placed their daughters in the conventual school in preparation for the black veil or to get the fine education available. They knew they were Spanish, and therefore important. They were not used to being bested. I felt a compulsion to compete with these girls, girls who had families, and win. They, in turn, in order to regain

some self-importance, would remind me of my low birth, which then led me to attack them with words or fists.

Some did not need any help from me in order for there to b conflict. Some girls were unequivocally mean. One student, m age, taller than most of us, named Antonia, was there when arrived. She was of aristocratic Spanish blood, with stron beautiful features. Like others of the most noble families, h family considered itself of such ancient lineage and so importa that they began their prayers, "Mother of God, our cousin . . . ."

Even before I showed her up or beat her in games, Antonia abused me. On my first night in the convent, as soon as the *donadas* were not looking, she yanked on my hair so hard I fell down. All the girls standing around laughed. She continued to abuse me from that day on.

No matter how many times I was disciplined by the nuns, the switch they used on me never subdued me, but rather seemed to instill in me an even greater resolve to be free of them. Contrary to their intentions, I became less and less tractable. Not even the convent jail with its awful loneliness, in which I spent a few nights from time to time when I became an adolescent, affected my behavior one bit.

Although I was the charge of the sisters of Santa Catalina, I seemed to be in the city far more than the other little girls being educated in the convent who, for the most part, were never allowed out. The rich ones usually had sisters, or aunts, who were nuns of the black veil. These powerful members of the convent community, having their own spacious cells, would invite their young relatives to dinner, to sing songs in the evening, or to live with them. Consequently, many wealthy young students had most of the benefits of a complete home life. On the other hand, a few of the girls had parents who were poor, or no parents, and were there as a result of arrangements made by charity-minded citizens. They, especially, had nowhere to go outside the convent.

A woman could spend her entire life in a convent. She might be placed in the *torno* (a revolving box used to pass food and other supplies through the cloistered convent walls) as an illegitimate newborn. She would be raised by the nuns, grow up in the convent school, and finally (and it is little wonder that such women would do so, never having known any other home) ask to take the veil. If such a girl could sing well, or could provide some other important asset to the convent, she might be

taken in without even a dowry, which was a requirement. Such women, inevitably, would be obedient to convent and school rules and would never leave.

On the other hand, I, while carrying the stigma of bastard, did have a rich father who was not totally inattentive to me. I also had the Larreas, one of the wealthiest families in Quito, who really liked me, and they would invite me now and then to their home. If I had any real friends, other than my father and brother, it was Don and Doña Larrea who got me out of there every week or so.

Convent rules were usually very strict, but the very large convents in most cities were difficult to control and Santa Catalina had perhaps the worst reputation for lax discipline of any in Quito. Nuns themselves were even known to leave the convent and spend days with their families during the holidays. So when the Larreas asked to take me out for a few hours, to have me sit at their elegant table and eat fine food or to go to the theatre or to let me play in their home, the convent agreed. They did not want to antagonize such wealthy patrons as the Larreas, and I don't think they really cared that much about the rules.

Whenever these wonderful friends of mine invited me out, to the market or the theatre, they seemed oblivious to the whispers behind their backs that they had brought along that Sáenz/Aispuru bastard. The Larreas were too rich or too kind-hearted to let it bother them, if they heard. I, being overly sensitive to such whisperings, imagined that I heard every word.

Perhaps that is why I loved the theatre so. There I would become spellbound by the actors' accomplishments on the stage and be transported from the hostility I believed I felt around me. I have loved all things theatrical ever since those early convent years when I saw my first performances from private Larrea chairs.

When I was at the Larrea mansion, I would usually be allowed to play with the servants' children and I would have some normal social contact. On special occasions, I might be invited to sit at the dinner table with Don and Doña Larrea. Usually, however, I would spend most of my time in the stables and eat with the servants. The stable-hands would let me sit on a horse or ride it around the immediate area, giving me instructions in the finer points of horsemanship.

In addition to my visits with the Larreas and outings with my father, I could always find a way out of the convent on my own when I wanted to do so. I was almost always reported on such occasions, by the "good people" of the town, and was punished. I was not always caught and punished, but I was most often. But punished or not, while I was out, I would inevitably cause mischief; and when I was disciplined, I would resolve to escape again.

On such occasions, when I escaped, I might be seen purposefully impeding servants carrying chaise chairs that conveyed one of the city's matrons who disliked me most. Or, I might snatch parcels out of hands in a surprise ambush that would scatter the contents all over the ground. I might steal from vendors on the street. I would purposefully raise mischief all over the city, but my victims were mostly the "good" women and men of the city who knew who I was, those who were most vocal about their dislike for me and the "shameless" Joaquina.

Naturally, my antics did nothing to change their opinion of me, and when I went out, I would always hear expressions like, "Just what you would expect from a bastard." I have heard that so many times in my life, it has become a hymn to my

unkillability. As the years went on, it would only take my presence in the squares or streets to provoke a shaking of heads, a snarl on the lips, and a pronouncement of the derogatory name I had been given by these people, “La Sáenz.” I later used that name like a title that demanded respect.

Even as a young child, I realized that these people (such as my uncle) who controlled the city with their “moral,” hypocritical ways and who were most responsible for the mistreatment of my mother and me, were distinguished only in their personal mediocrity. Mostly they produced little, and they controlled much that they did not produce.

It enraged me that my life should so often be dominated by the likes of such people. I realize now my impotent mischievous behavior was my own childish way of trying to bring them down. At other times, however, I admit I was equally enraged, or morose, that I could not be like them or to even be accepted by them. Sometimes I regretted deeply my low birth, which prevented me from being part of the Aispuru household. If I was an accepted member of such a family, I knew I too would then have that same ability to have power over other peoples lives (and more importantly, my own).

There was a constant war within me, not unlike some of the middle class of Quito, who were also trapped on the thresholds of their own births. Even though my veins pumped the aristocratic blood of pure Spanish stock, my life was actually like that of the *cholo* (half-breed Indian), who did most of the work that supported the city.

These people made up the majority of the population and were soldiers, priests, craftsmen, and the like. They were descended from the offspring of the conquistadors and the native Indians. Many Incan princesses were the mothers of some of the great families in Lima and Quito. It was Doña Inés, Pizarro's ex-concubine, granddaughter of Manco Capac, who, by marrying the nephew of St. Ignatius, Ones de Loyola, founded the noble family of Oropesa, which is universally respected throughout South America.

In the intervening centuries, the social standing of those first half-breeds had degraded considerably. They were excluded from high administrative office, even though they had shown their indispensability to society and ostensibly had the same rights as the Spaniards, by law, just like me. But also like me, they were constantly being excluded from the enjoyment of

those privileges when not actually being persecuted by the "whites."

Whenever I looked into their eyes—when I saw them on the street or at the market—I recognized the same battle that was raging in my own heart. They, too, hated their "masters," and yet, they wished that they could be them. They, too, suffered in their souls as they tried to reconcile their ancient aristocratic past with their subservience. The only difference was that my youth kept the fires burning so hot that I *never* agreed with my condition and thus I never moved into the well-known docility of the *cholo*.

Because I so identified with the *cholo*, whenever anyone questioned me about my ancestral heritage or asked about my lineage, I would always proudly say that I was "American"—not one race, but all races.

So my life as a child was fraught with loneliness and abuse, and I see now that there were only two things that kept me from running away and never returning. First, I had never known any other existence than what I had and, therefore, everything outside of Quito was unknown and unreal to me. Second, I desperately needed the little bit of love that I did

receive from the Larreas, and especially my father and brother. I needed to know they were nearby and that I could see them now and then.

Regardless, throughout those first years in the convent, I looked for an opportunity to escape from my position when I was awake and I dreamed about it at night. All I really wanted then, or now, was to be who I am and to be free from the shackles of those who have tried to control me. The small-minded who have tried to keep me in "my place," as a child or as a woman, have always been my real enemies.

I knew, even when I first entered the convent, that these were my enemies. I tried to fight them those first two days. I stoically washed that kitchen floor, wanting to show them I could take anything they gave me, but I knew I could not take it for long. When I was asked again that third night to comply with their rules, I decided that school would be a much better situation than cleaning that floor forever.

I stood up and lowered my eyes. "All right," I said softly, looking at the floor I'd just cleaned. There was a great deal of noise in the kitchen. Workers were coming and going, talking,

moving knives or pottery around, and one slave was scrubbing a large brass pot.

"I cannot hear you, Manuela."

I kept my eyes on the floor and said again, loudly enough to be heard over the din, "All right!"

Having not heard me curse when I opened my mouth for the first time, the sister decided that I could "join" the community. "Very well, you may have a bath and tomorrow you will attend school and eat with the other girls. You had better have learned your lesson. Now, put these things away and go to the dormitory."

My eyes still lowered, I uttered, "Yes, Señora."

"That's better," she said as she left the kitchen.

I meekly picked up the jug and rag, rinsed them out, and put them where they belonged. Then I slowly made my way through the confusion in the kitchen. As I was crossing the threshold of the kitchen doorway, I turned to see if anyone was looking.

"I will never obey," I whispered and I spit on the floor.

Chapter 6

In August of the year my mother died, an event occurred far away from Quito as I lay in my dormitory bed: an event that would someday have great meaning for me. I had been in the convent only a few weeks. My surroundings made me feel suffocated, alone, and sorrowful. I missed my mother and felt unable to control anything at all in my life and impotent to make any effect on the world around me. I was ill that day.

I lay in my sick bed, utterly miserable, staring through the doorway to where nuns walked back and forth in the hallway like a wall of soldiers determined to keep me in prison. I sobbed in desperation and wanted to give up and die. I was sure that my captors were right about me: I would never be able to do, or be,

anything at all. I was certain that I would never know love, such as I had shared with my mother, again.

My illness lasted for many days. Thus, I know that one of those days was August 15, 1805. Ironically, as I cried to myself that early morning, I did not know something was happening, at that moment, which would eventually change my life. I did not know this because this event was happening so far away that it was already a sunny afternoon in Rome where two men walked through the dusty streets toward the Monte Sacro.

One man was older than the other by ten years or so, being in his middle thirties at that time, though his thinning, unkempt hair and small, barrel chest made him look more aged. In any event, he never would divulge his years. He had eyes that looked through dwarf spectacles with intellectual fire and challenge.

Perhaps it was the way the older man wore his clothes, or the clothes themselves, but it seemed that his attire was meant to scandalize those around him rather than cover him, although to describe them one could only say “rags.” On that afternoon he used a staff that he was still breaking in, to keep pace with his feet, a staff he had recently picked up on the road from France.

He had been a priest when young, for a very short time, but had been defrocked due to unwise encounters with his female parishioners and because of his refusal to know the right time or place to spout his affection for the revolution-inspiring words of Rousseau. His name was Simón Rodríguez, but he went by the name of Samuel Robinson.

The other, younger man was Simón Bolívar, perhaps the wealthiest aristocrat in the new world, though only 22 years old. He dressed in the latest fashions when attending the salons of Paris, or Madrid, or when visiting the Pope, as he had done a few days earlier at the behest of the Spanish ambassador. This afternoon he wore a very simple, but stylish, walking outfit of a matching brown coat and trousers. His visage was long and angular, with thick black eyebrows that arched over piercing dark eyes. A sparse beard had recently grown on the young face, but it was perfectly trimmed. His black hair, tied with a ribbon in back, was longer than it normally was since he had spent the last few weeks walking through Europe with Rodríguez. Years before, in Venezuela, Rodríguez had been the young man's tutor.

If I were made to say so, I would have to state that Bolívar was not really handsome. His dark skin was slightly blemished and his patrician nose was too prominent. Taller than his companion, but still a little shorter than average, he was quite slender, with quick, high-strung movements. Despite all that, he had a quality of virility, a likable intensity, and a true sensitivity that more women than I found irresistible.

Eight years prior to his walk up the Monte Sacro, while Quito was still feeling the effects of the great earthquake and l was busy being conceived, Rodríguez had to leave Venezuela abruptly. Balding and stooped even then, though only in his twenties, he had been implicated in a revolutionary plot. He left Venezuela on an English ship, under the name of Samuel Robinson. Because he was without his tutor, young Bolívar asked his guardians (both his parents had died a few years before) if he might go to Europe to study.

It would be two more years before Bolívar would leave for Spain, arriving in the spring of 1799. He was no more than 15 years old. There, coming from a wealthy family, he had taken up with the high society of Madrid, rooming with a *criollo* relative who was supposed to be having an affair with the

Queen. He moved in the highest social circles and quickly learned the ways of the world.

The truth is, the man with whom Bolívar lived, Mallo, truly was one of the men with whom the Queen shared her attentions, along with the infamous Godoy. Bolívar told me about her coming to their apartment one evening, disguised, to have dinner with them, nearly causing a fight later between the two colonials as her affections appeared to be turning towards Bolívar.

Later, when Bolívar became famous and his history was being told, the rumor was that Bolívar himself had an affair with her, but he had not. He was just then learning his way with the ladies (and learning that he had a way with them) when he met María Theresa, his soon-to-be wife.

I am told that she was a delicate, beautiful girl, with whom he fell instantly in love. After a long ordeal, Simón finally gained her father's favor. It was May of 1802, at only 18 (when I was 4), that he married and began the journey to return to his country estate in Venezuela.

There he intended to live in idyllic happiness with his new wife. Considering the beautiful countryside, his inherited wealth

(now that he was married), and his deep love for his bride, he might have succeeded except that six months later María Theresa died of yellow fever. Her memory continued to haunt him all his life.

By the time he was walking down the streets of Rome, angrily arguing with Rodríguez, Bolívar had spent most of the intervening three years, since his bride's death, in Europe. He was apathetic and grieving at some times or, so I'm told, living the life of a wastrel at others. Rodríguez was in France, still going by the name of Robinson, when fate dictated that they should meet.

The tutor saw that his student of long ago was wasting away in Paris and enticed him into a walking tour of Europe. Bolívar agreed and their journey took them to the south of France, through Milan, where they witnessed Napoleon being crowned Emperor of Italy, then on to Padua, Florence, and finally Rome.

They arrived in the Eternal City in late June and took an apartment in Rome's *Piazza di Spagna.* It had not been their plan to stay long, but Bolívar, true to his character, had met a

Spanish noblewoman, living in Italy with her husband, and the two were whispered about as his stay turned into weeks.

Rodríguez has told me this story more often than anyone. As the two of them walked through the streets of Rome that day, their conversation was animated, spurred on by events earlier that week. Bolívar was still fuming because of the treatment he had received at the Vatican a few days before.

The Spanish ambassador had sent a messenger to rouse him early that morning. The Pope had learned that a colonial nobleman was staying in the city and had asked the Spanish ambassador to bring him to discuss life in the colonies. In the *Piazza di Spagna* were many Spanish nobles, but Bolívar was the first colonial to live in Rome for many years.

Neither the ambassador nor Bolívar was in an amiable mood as their carriage drove through the streets toward the Vatican. The ambassador, whom Bolívar described to me as a thin, wiry little man, did not enjoy having his daily routine disturbed so that this colonial, of loose morals he had been told, could be made more important by meeting the Pope. Bolívar was sour because in addition to being aroused early by a surly

messenger, the note from the ambassador had been quite rude in demanding that Bolívar meet him at his palace immediately.

Bolívar had experienced this kind of treatment before, in Spain. The total disregard that the Spanish authorities had for colonials made him angrier each time he experienced it. Bolívar, in addition to having a proud temperament and a keen mind that could see the truth of things, had been raised on Rousseau and other inflammatory writings placed before him by Rodríguez and others. In his heart, he was already a budding revolutionary.

His trip to the Vatican was a moment of crystallization after a lifetime of preparation. It is said that the entire time they waited in the Pope's crowded antechamber, the arrogant ambassador lectured Simón on proper etiquette in the presence of his Holiness. Simón, as was so typical of him, ignored the man.

Finally, the two were asked to enter. Bolívar walked up to the Pope, stood very proudly, and gave a little nod of his head in respect to the pontiff. The ambassador quickly gave him a sign, and Bolívar, following the instructions he had just received, reluctantly dropped to his knees in supplication. Inwardly, as he

lowered himself to the floor, Bolívar became angry. He had had enough of princes, be they holy or otherwise, degrading him.

The ambassador, after a moment, whispered urgently, "Now you must kiss the cross on his Holiness's slipper."

Bolívar did not move. The ambassador urged him again, "Kiss the cross on the slipper."

"No!" Bolívar whispered back angrily, "I will not."

"You must kiss the cross on the slipper."

Bolívar looked straight ahead while the ambassador gestured to the pontiff's foot.

Finally, the Pope saved the situation by smiling and saying quietly, "Let the young man from the Indies do as he pleases."

The ambassador stood up angrily and forced a smile at the Pope, while the pontiff went ahead and asked Simón several questions about his homeland. When they returned to the antechamber, after about three quarters of an hour, the ambassador upbraided Bolívar for being so rude.

Bolívar finally exploded in his defense, "The Holy Father must have little respect for the symbol of his own religion if he carries it on his foot! Even the proudest kings of Europe wear it

on their crowns!" He walked off, returning to his apartment without benefit of the ambassador's carriage.

A few days later, an argument ensued in their apartment as he and Rodríguez discussed his audience with the Pope. Bolívar realized that the ambassador would make life less pleasant for them in Rome. He was, therefore, more determined to stay. On the other hand, Rodríguez, already feeling the need to keep traveling, made pleas to depart.

Bolívar was stubborn and said he had not seen enough of Rome's history. Rodríguez knew he was posturing and suggested a walk up the Monte Sacro, to challenge Bolívar's argument. Bolívar angrily accepted the challenge, immediately, and walked out the door, forcing Rodríguez to run to catch up.

Rodríguez retold me this story—it was his favorite—not too long ago, just weeks before he died. It was never quite the same story but the important parts were always there. He told me that the Aventine or "Holy Hill," on the edge of Rome, was the place where, two millennia ago, the people of Rome had confronted the ruling class to demand their lawful rights.

As the pair reached the foot of the hill and made their way along the path, Bolívar was still talking about the disdainful way

he had been treated by the ambassador merely because he was from the colonies.

Rodríguez was actually more insurgent than Bolívar at the time, but he was older and he wanted Bolívar to calm down. "But, Simón," said Rodríguez soothingly, "it wasn't personal. That is the way the ambassador was reared—"

"Yes, like all *peninsulares*," he said cutting off the older man, "he has been taught that only they have any rights. It needs to change, do you not see?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"I wish a leader such as Napoleon had been born in Venezuela. We need someone like him to drive out the Spanish leeches."

"Napoleon is as bad."

"Yes, it disgusts me how he has declared himself emperor. I refused to go to his coronation when I was in Paris."

"Then why did you insist on attending his coronation in Milan?"

"Because . . . even though I loath his abuse of power, I respect him." As Bolívar went on to explain his logic, so he would not appear to be contradicting himself, Rodríguez knew

what his student felt: youthful admiration for the conqueror of Europe. “Think, Rodríguez—”

“Robinson. Remember, it is Robinson.”

“Of course. But think how much he has accomplished. He has commanded so many men and conquered so much territory.”

“Yes, Simón, but—”

“I am only saying that I wish someone of his abilities had been born in our homeland. Do you know, when I was in Paris, I spoke to Alexander von Humboldt and he said, ‘Spanish America is ready to be free, but has no man of stature to lead them.’”

“So you think that if Napoleon—”

“No, Rodríguez,” Bolívar said angrily. “I’m saying that if a man *like* Napoleon could lead us, we could be free of these indignities and chart our own destiny.”

“Yes, but . . .”

“The man we really need is someone like George Washington. He set his country free. That is what we lack, a man who can lead a revolutionary army and establish a new republic such as the United States of America.”

By now, they were halfway up the Monte Sacro, and the sun was about to set. Rodríguez said nothing, knowing it was pointless to argue with Bolívar when he was aroused. They climbed the hill in silence. When they reached the top, the heat was oppressive. They sat on a slab of marble in the shade.

The two friends sat there for some time, silently contemplating the domes and towers of the world's great city. Finally, Bolívar motioned to the expanse before them and said, "So, this is the city of twelve Caesars. This is the great city with its history that goes back to before Christ."

Rodríguez said, offhand, "Yes, decadent now."

"Rodríguez," Bolívar went on, "this city has contributed something to everything: being a republic, depraved emperors, catacombs for Christians . . . ." He laughed at his own description. "Orators, poets, statesmen, philosophers, historians, naturalists, warriors . . . ." Then he spoke more seriously. "Contributions to every cause but the cause of the people. Nowhere is there something the colonies can use to fight their masters."

The legend, spread mostly by Rodríguez, is famous now. How Bolívar grew silent, and then, tears brimming in his eyes,

he lifted himself and, shaking his fist, said, “I swear before you, by the God of my fathers and the honor of my country: I will not rest, not in body or soul, until I have broken the chains of Spain.”

Bolívar told me what he actually said that day: “We should kick their Spanish asses back to Spain. And we shouldn’t rest until we do it.”

The two friends laughed and descended the hill, their argument seeming to have vanished. Despite the lack of romantic allure that the true story had, they both knew, without speaking about it, that a kind of commitment had been made.

Shortly thereafter, they resumed their tour and wandered around Italy for a short time, but a restlessness had taken over Bolívar. He had begun to consider the possibilities of a revolution in the new world. Finally he left Rodríguez to his own travels and returned to France.

After taking almost two years to put his affairs in order, during which time he joined the Masons in Paris and the Lautaro Lodge in London (of which I will speak more), he left Europe. He took a long voyage. First he went to New York, where he stayed for some time. From the people and institutions of the

United States he sharpened some of his own ideas about revolutionary governments. Finally, he left for Venezuela. In July of 1807, he was back in Caracas.

I hold that day in Rome to be sacred, because it brought him to me. The young man named Bolívar, later called "El Libertador," kept his commitment. He freed South America from Spain, liberating an area far greater in size than Napoleon ever controlled. His battles one day took him to the city of my birth. That day in Rome marked the beginning of his journey to me.

While he walked on the Monte Sacro, I lay in bed and felt like nothing in life would ever happen right for me. I was wrong. Only a few years later our paths would begin to cross, sparked by the abortive revolution of 1809 in Quito. The story of my own life as a revolutionary would begin in 1808, when I was ten, with certain events proceeding that tragedy.

Chapter 7

Because I was able to free myself of the convent walls so often, I had an encounter in 1808 that shaped me far more than I realized at the time. My experience that day also foreshadowed the unfortunate insurrection that was about to transpire.

Two months before my eleventh birthday, a new president of the Royal Audiencia arrived in Quito. Preparations for his arrival had kept the city in disorder for a week. Everywhere he stopped on his route from Guayaquil there had been a celebration. I knew something was happening, but I was too young to care or know what it was.

As part of the welcoming ceremonies in Quito, a theatrical evening had been arranged. I happened to meet the two men who were primarily responsible for choosing and preparing the

entertainment. Later these two would have a much deeper significance to me and the land of my birth. They should have been commemorated and glorified in the annals of my country for being its first revolutionaries, but like me, they may not even be remembered.

I met them on the eve of the theatrical presentation for the new president, Count Ruíz. I was at the Larrea mansion that afternoon, where I had been playing all afternoon. Three other children and I were playing a game of tag running in and out of the stables. It was one of the few times that I was truly having fun, and in youthful glee I ran through the stable doors and right into a man just walking in to get his horse. I hit him so hard I fell back down in the dirt.

I became paralyzed at the thought that I had offended some visitor of Don Larrea's. The other children vanished, but I could only sit there on the dusty ground in the doorway to the stable while my eyes rose from shiny boots to a handsome face. Not yet approaching middle age, he had a smile that completely captivated me. This smile turned to laughter as he looked down at a young girl, frozen, mouth open, covered with a layer of stable dust.

As he reached down and took my hands to help me up, Don Larrea said, “This is Manuela Sáenz. Manuela, say hello to Señor Morales and Señor Quiroga.” When he spoke my name, I saw recognition on the handsome face of Morales, and he turned his head sharply toward Don Larrea. I did not understand how he knew me. Don Larrea gave an indication to Morales that he should not say whatever was on his mind.

I stood with my mouth open while Don Larrea brushed the dust from my back and said, “Manuela, say hello to my friends.”

I put on my very best adult manners and attempted a curtsy. “I am very pleased to meet you.”

Morales smiled at me and said, “Well, I am pleased to meet you, Manuela. How did you get this straw all over you?” He reached down and took a long piece of dried grass out of my braid.

I felt the blood rush to my face. But he was so disarming with his smile, I found myself smiling back and replying, “Oh, just playing.” When I said that, I felt childish and self-conscious.

Morales chuckled and took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped a bit of dirt from my forehead. He said, “We have the same name. My name is Manuel and yours is

Manuela." Then he handed me his handkerchief, saying, "Here, why don't you keep this. It has your initial on it." I looked at the embroidered blue "M" in one corner next to the dirt that had just been wiped from my forehead. Morales smiled at me and turned toward the stable to get his horse.

I took a deep whiff of the heavy cologne on the handkerchief and I think I fell in love for the first time. I wandered aimlessly around the corner of the stable. Then, I overheard Don Larrea saying quietly, apparently to an inquiry from Morales, "It's his little girl. She's illegitimate and lives at the convent of Santa Catalina. But, as I told you before, he should not be contacted. He's loyal to the crown and always will be. Take his name off that list."

"Very well, Don Larrea," Morales replied.

Don Larrea went on, while walking out of the stable with the two men and their horses, "Please consider my opinion again, Señors. As I said, I will not be a party to a violent coup."

"We understand," said Morales.

"Your theatrical presentation tomorrow is a fine idea, but I doubt it will have any effect on the Count Ruíz. I know His

Excellency and he is as unchanging as the mountains." He lifted his hand toward Pichincha overlooking the city.

"Your reticence is understandable," said the other man, Quiroga, "but things will not stay as they are forever. The *peninsulares* pass on only official reports of the events in Europe, but we Americans hear the truth from our relatives. We must do something to stir up feelings for political change. Anyway, we thank you for your hospitality, and we look forward to seeing you tomorrow night at the university."

I paid little attention to all of this. It was only later that I thought about what was said, trying to understand what had happened. Mostly what I was thinking about was the intoxicating smell on the handkerchief. I did hear the words "theatrical presentation," and I wanted to go. As I watched them walk out of the stable, wondering if I dare ask if I could go to the theatre, I saw Morales fold something—which looked like a register of names—and tuck it in his coat. As they walked to the center of the street, unnoticed by Morales, the folded paper fell to the ground.

How would things have been different if I had let it lie? However, I saw an opportunity to prolong my encounter with the

handsome Morales. Perhaps he would invite me to go to the theatre.

"Señor Morales! Señor Morales, you dropped something." I rushed to where it lay, picked it up, and carried it over to him."

"Oh, thank you, Manuela. I must not lose this."

Without thinking, I said, "Are you going to the theatre?" with a distinct plea in my voice.

Don Larrea smiled patiently at me, and Morales and Quiroga laughed. Morales said, "Do you like the theatre, Manuela?"

"Oh, yes," I said, "It's wonderful."

"Do you get to go often?"

My face became dejected as I said, "No." Then, I began to feel embarrassed by my obvious childishness.

Don Larrea saw my discomfort and said in a kindly way, "We take Manuela to the theatre once in a while, don't we, Manuela?" He patted my shoulder.

"Yes, Don Larrea," I said, smiling happily at him.

Morales, miraculously said, "Well, why don't you come tomorrow night? I'll bring a stool and you can sit in my box."

I felt like heaven had opened up and I turned to look at Don Larrea saying, “Oh, yes! Please?”

He smiled and said, “We’ll see.”

“Oh, please, Don Larrea, please. Please.”

“Now, Manuela, I said we would see. Don’t be rude.”

I withdrew. I was embarrassed and worried that I might have offended Don Larrea. I backed up. Good-byes were said, while the handsome Morales and tall, thin Quiroga mounted their horses. I stood silently watching them ride down the cobblestone street into the evening gloom.

Then, Don Larrea, who had been standing in stern silence, put his hand on my back to direct me and said curtly, “It’s getting dark. I had better see that you get back to the convent.”

I knew I must have offended him. I cursed myself for being so stupid. I had so wanted to go to the theatre, but it seemed I had only made my friend angry with me.

As I walked back to the convent, alongside a Larrea servant, I was feeling conflicting emotions. First I would smell the cologne and the faint musk of masculinity on the handkerchief and feel exhilarated in a way that was subtle and

indefinable; then I would think about how I had been so silly and had perhaps upset Don Larrea, and I would become melancholy.

My emotions shifted between these two extremes all the way to the convent. By the time we reached the portals, I had realistically decided I would probably never see Señor Morales again. Nevertheless, I said to myself, “He is my friend, whether I see him again or not.” I was always making such pronouncements to myself, deciding who would, and who would not, be allowed to be my friend. I saw my world divided into “friends” and “enemies” and I made quick decisions about the category into which each person was to be placed. As for Don Larrea, I hoped I hadn’t offended him and that he still liked me.

Later, I put the handkerchief under my pillow without knowing it belonged to a man who might have one day been regarded on the equator as one of its heroes. Barely remembered by the end of the revolution forming all over the continent, he and Quiroga were two of its first leaders.

Morales was a native of Mariuita, which lies in the Viceroyalty of Santa Fe de Bogotá. He had been a government official in Quito a year or so prior to my meeting him, when the Baron de Carondelet had been president. Sometime during the

preceding years, he had lost his employment to a cold, ambitious *peninsulare* named Señor Arrechaga.

Morales suffered the same fate as many Creoles in the Spanish colonies. The *criollos* were always being relieved of their positions so that Spanish born, newly arrived on the continent, could take their jobs. A bitter feud between Morales and Arrechaga began when Morales lost his position.

He was feeling thus abused when he met Señor Quiroga, a native of Arequipa who was married to a *quiteña* (lady of Quito) and who had been practicing as an advocate. In Quiroga, Morales found someone of a like mind. Quiroga was a very opinionated speaker who had, in the year preceding these events so offended the leaders of the *audiencia* (local governing body) that he had been disbarred.

These two had been openly discussing the wrongs of the government throughout the city, in the salons of prominent members of society, at the time I met them. They had undeniably hinted at revolution, which was why my father, a devout Royalist, should never have been on Morales's list of potential supporters. Juan Larrea had been right in urging that

the name of Simón Sáenz be removed from it. Would that the plea had been heeded.

I understood nothing of what was happening in the world at that time, sheltered as I was by the convent and my age, but the time was indeed ripe for discussions of revolution among the aristocracy. The "events in Europe," of which Señor Quiroga had spoken, had begun exactly one year earlier than my meeting with the two men.

In October of 1807, the conqueror, Napoleon, had made a treaty with Spain at Fontainebleau. In this treaty, he secured the right to march through Spain in order to attack Portugal (which at that time was still trading with the British). He was also allowed to set up garrisons on Spanish soil. This was Napoleon's first step in conquering the Iberian Peninsula. Ferdinand VII, the heir apparent, actively opposed the treaty, knowing Spain would eventually suffer.

At this time, Charles IV was King of Spain. However, he was scorned by the Spanish for his weakness. He was already in low esteem because he did nothing to stop Queen Luisa's almost open affair with their minister, Godoy, whom the populace hated. Making a treaty with Napoleon was the final act of

weakness. He was forced to abdicate in favor of his son, Ferdinand VII.

The Spanish rejoiced, but it was short lived. Napoleon, after successfully conquering Portugal—sending the Royal Family fleeing to Brazil—ordered his field marshal, Murat, to attack Madrid. This was done ostensibly "to protect the Spanish coast from the English."

By June of 1808, Ferdinand VII had been replaced with Napoleon's own brother, Joseph. The effect on the colonies was turmoil.

The official Spanish government, administered by the Spanish-born in the colonies, was really not Spanish anymore, but French. Yet the positions and income of the colonials depended on the good graces of those government officials. Due to the long-standing disregard with which the *peninsulares* held the *criollos*, the American-born began talking more fervently of their rights.

The general atmosphere of the times was liberal—the United States had just shocked the world by prohibiting the further importation of African slaves. Everyone was talking about how the new century would finally affirm the rights of

man. On the day I met Morales and Quiroga, even at my young age, I knew something was happening. I did not understand how, but I knew my world was about to change.