

Part Four: El Segundo escape/the second escape

Chapter Forty-Three

Fernando was grateful for the high ceilings and huge fans in the Licata warehouse. His office was toward the rear of the vast space, and was semi-enclosed. It was a stifling hot and humid day in June of 1936. Almost five years had passed since Fernando joined the Licata family business. Having expanded beyond fresh fruits and vegetable, the company was now called "Licata Food Distributors". Focusing on Mediterranean food products, it was one of the main suppliers of wholesale food items to restaurants in Tampa and the west coast of Florida. This was the "public" version of the business. While Turiddu was focused on this legitimate enterprise, his older brother Rosario handled the more lucrative "non-public" activities. Gaetano, now 80 years old, spent his days quietly, working in his garden.

"Bolita" means "little ball" in Spanish. It was also the name of an illegal lottery popular in Tampa and other nearby towns. One hundred numbered small balls are drawn from a cloth bag, with bets placed on which numbers would be drawn. Based on Cuban tradition, a system called "La Charada" assigned a specific object to each number.

Superstitious players would bet based on some personal experience involving the object. For example, if one dreamed of an elephant, that week's bet would be on number 9. The Licatas controlled this favorite Tampa pastime, earning record profits. Also, during the prohibition years, Gaetano had become involved in smuggling liquor out of Cuba into Tampa; the Licata tentacles now extended well into that island country, in particular the casinos and nightclubs of Havana.

Both Fernando and Ignacio had managed to survive and prosper during the worst years of the Great Depression. There were some signs that a slow recovery had begun, but it would be several more years until the economy would return to normal. They had both contributed in many ways to assist those in the community who had been less fortunate. Contributions to emergency assistance funds in the various mutual aid societies and food donations to food banks and cooperative grocery stores were among their efforts.

"Bueno, Gaitero. En unas horas empieza su vacación! Están todos listo para el viaje y su primer vuelo? No sé cómo vamos a funcionar sin ti para cinco semanas!"

Turiddu acknowledged that Fernando's vacation was to begin in a few hours, and he didn't know how they were going to function without him

for five weeks. He asked if they were ready for the trip, and for their first flight.

"Por supuesto. Estamos muy ilusionados. Tenemos gana ver nuestras familias después de tantos años. Estoy muy agradecido para la generosidad de tu familia."

Fernando responded that they were very excited, and that they looked forward to seeing their families after so many years. He thanked Turiddu for his family's generosity. The time off and the regular gifts of cash that the Licatas gave him made this vacation possible.

Fernando and Ignacio, along with most of their families, were going on a trip to Spain. It had long been their dream to return for a visit. Before Spain had transitioned to a Republic in 1931, many male Spanish immigrants feared going back, concerned that they would not be allowed to return. The monarchy and Catholic Church had frowned on those young men who had gone to Cuba or elsewhere to avoid the draconian military draft. Even though neither Fernando nor Ignacio had attained U.S. citizenship, they no longer harbored these fears. Their trip would begin the next day with a flight to Havana. After two days in Cuba, they would board a ship bound for Santander, Spain.

Tampa's airport was named after Peter O'Knight, a well-known and wealthy attorney and entrepreneur. It was located on Davis Islands, a primarily residential area consisting of two man-made islands, developed during the Florida boom of the 1920s. Located near the confluence of the Hillsborough River and Hillsborough Bay, it housed a seaplane basin utilized by amphibious commercial aircraft. In addition to land-based operations by other airlines, Pan-American Airways had recently begun direct seaplane service to Havana from Tampa.

As the Suárez and Prendes families gathered in the terminal lobby, they could hardly contain their excitement and anticipation. Carmela, the eldest Suárez child, would not be going. She was married and was expecting her first child. Anselmo, the eldest of the Prendes children, had offered to remain behind and oversee the operation of the dairy.

As the eight travelers stepped up to the check-in counter, they handed their travel documents to the agent. Only Fernando and Ignacio lacked U.S. passports. Giuseppina had obtained her US citizenship some years before, and Sofia and the four children were born in Tampa. Fernando and Ignacio had their US residency cards and Spanish passports. After many years in Tampa, they were able to obtain their passports from the Spanish consulate in Tampa. Having immigrated to

Cuba when it was still a Spanish province, they had not been required to obtain passports at that time.

As they stepped into the amphibious aircraft, Luciano and Rafael scrambled to find two seats together. They had agreed that one of them could have the window seat for take-off, and switch halfway through the flight. Luciano, in particular, was fascinated with aviation. A steward went down the aisle, offering champagne to the adults and Coca-Cola to the children. The two boys were talking over each other with excitement. Spanish was their first language, but they, of course, spoke fluent English as well, having learned it in school. They had learned that they could block their parents from "eavesdropping" by simply speaking very rapidly in English. Even Fernando, who did speak limited English, couldn't understand them when they did this. Their fathers decided their behavior was all in fun, and due to their excitement.

The aircraft taxied out of the basin and into Hillsborough Bay proper. Within a few minutes the four massive engines were drowning out all conversation as they revved up to full power. After what seemed like a brief but very rough boat ride, the water below and the surrounding land began to shrink in size as the plane rapidly gained altitude. Fernando leaned his head across the aisle to speak to Ignacio.

"Que le parece, Zapato! Alguna vez en tu vida pensaste que estaríamos haciendo esto?"

Fernando had asked Ignacio if, ever in his life, he thought they would be doing this.

The Pan American Airways flight banked to the left over the city. Soon the west coast of Florida lay beneath them. Havana was but a mere two hours away.

As the aircraft leveled off, Fernando's thoughts drifted back in time. Through the window he could see the tiny image of a ship. His love of maps and geography served him well. He knew it was passing Egmont Key as it entered the Port of Tampa shipping channel. He couldn't help but wonder if it was carrying young immigrants seeking a better life. He was transported back to November 9, 1900, the day he first arrived in Tampa. The steady hum of the engines was hypnotic, and he found himself deep in introspection. He was grateful beyond words for the life he now had, but still somewhat conflicted. Some aspects of the Licata business remained disturbing to him. While he rejected the basic Catholic dogma of sin and punishment in hell, he wondered if he or his family might one day pay a price for benefitting from the Licata enterprise. Over the years Turiddu had assured

Fernando that the Licatas had shifted their activities away from those of violence.

"Victimless" pursuits such as gambling, drinking, and prostitution were now the core of that "other" Licata business. The carnal vices of human beings were serving them well. Only those who violated the time-honored oaths of loyalty and secrecy suffered bodily harm.

Fernando, always the pragmatist, reminded himself that above all, his mission was to provide the best possible life for his family. He knew, from his childhood experiences in Spain, that life's security and comfort were very tenuous. Unsettling forces beyond one's control could surface at any time.

As the steward removed the lunch trays, the captain of the aircraft announced that they were now approaching the coast of Cuba and would be landing shortly. Fernando leaned forward and peered out of the window. He could see the outline of "El Malecón", Havana's famous esplanade and seawall. At one end lay the entrance to Havana harbor and the Morro Castle, an old Spanish fort.

Havana, in all its splendor, never looked more beautiful.

Chapter Forty-Four

After transiting customs and immigration, the Suárez and Prendes families were met by an associate of Rosario Licata. Several assistants had gathered the luggage and loaded the bags into an enclosed van. The travelers were escorted onto two large touring cars, the adults in one car and the children in the other. Soon the entourage was on its way to the Hotel Plaza, in Old Havana.

As they exited the airport area, Giuseppina and Sofia anxiously and repeatedly looked behind them. They wanted to make certain the car with the children was following them. Rosario's associate, riding with them, assured her that they were safer than the president of Cuba. As if to further reassure her, he introduced himself as Vincenzo, addressing her in perfect Sicilian. Gaetano's influence in Cuba was clearly present.

Fernando was amazed at the changes which had occurred over the nearly 36 years since he had left Havana for Tampa. The early 20th century had been a time of unprecedented prosperity in Cuba, largely driven by the tobacco and sugar industries. Prior to World War I, the main source of the world's sugar supply was beet sugar from Eastern Europe. The war had eliminated access to that source, and Cuba

suddenly became the undisputed world capital of sugar. In 1925, Cuba produced 5 million tons of cane sugar. While poverty was certainly an issue, Cuba's middle class was one of the largest in Latin America. The next two days were spent relaxing and touring the highlights of Havana, which had become a world-class city, with an obvious American influence.

After checking out of the hotel, the travelers and luggage were again arranged in a motorcade and taken to the Port of Havana. The cars approached a guard shack and stopped.

"Señor Suárez, como se llama su barco?"

Vincenzo had asked Fernando the name of their ship.

"Se llama "Cantabria", y es de la línea Compañía Trasatlantica Española".

Fernando had responded that the ship was called "Cantabria" and operated by the "Spanish Transatlantic Company", one of the main passenger shipping lines between the Americas and Spain.

Within a few minutes, they arrived at the processing area for the departing passengers. Vincenzo embraced the men and bowed to the

women and children. He wished them a good trip, and asked Giuseppina to extend his greetings and warm wishes to the entire Licata family.

As the immigration officer looked through the documents, he politely questioned Fernando and Ignacio in detail. When had they left Spain? Had they been back to Spain since they emigrated? Had they served in the Spanish military? After answering all the questions, they were cleared and boarded the ship.

They had reserved large suites across the hall from each other. Each suite consisted of two bedrooms separated by a small common sitting area. The fathers and sons would sleep in one bedroom, and the mothers and daughters in the other.

After getting settled, the two families gathered on the main deck to enjoy their departure from Havana. It was late June, and the summer heat and humidity were palpable. After a few blasts of its horn, the "Cantabria" slowly pushed away from the dock, assisted by several tugboats. Soon they were passing the Morro Castle, an old Spanish fortress built centuries ago to guard the entrance to the harbor, the most important in the history of the Spanish Empire. Within minutes, the ship banked to the right and began to increase its speed. The sea air, rushing against their faces, was a welcome relief from the heat.

"Zapato, me siento como el Rey de España. Nunca pensaba en realizar el sueño de ver mis padres y la tierrina otra vez. Parece mentira que en una semana estaremos con nuestras familias en Candamo. Hemos tenido una suerte que no es típica para muchos inmigrantes, verdad?"

Fernando commented to Ignacio that he felt like the King of Spain, and never thought he would realize his dream of seeing his parents or his homeland again. It was hard for him to believe that in about one week they would be back in Candamo, with their families. He acknowledged that both of them had been luckier than most of their fellow immigrants.

"De acuerdo, Gaitero. Pero también hemos trabajado mucho por lo que tenemos, no es solo por la suerte."

Ignacio agreed with Fernando, but also pointed out that they had both worked very hard for what they have, and it wasn't only because of "luck".

"Tienes razón, pero muchos otros trabajan duro sin tener éxito. Creo que la vida es una apuesta, y a veces fuera de nuestro control."

Fernando responded that many others also work hard but don't achieve success. He elaborated that he believes life is a gamble, and sometimes beyond our control.

Their first dinner was not disappointing. "Cantabria" was not a super deluxe ship but had a reputation for excellent accommodations and outstanding food typical of Northern Spain. Inside the front cover of the menu was a history of the ship. Originally called "Rey Alfonso XIII" ("King Alphonse the Thirteenth"), its name was changed in 1931 when Spain elected a Democratic Republic, rejecting the royalty and the Catholic Church. Fernando and Ignacio agreed that they were soon to experience a "new Spain".

It was very early in the morning of their seventh and final day at sea. They would be docking at the port of Santander in roughly ten hours. The night had been foggy, and the ship had appropriately slowed, sounding its foghorn periodically. Though this had made sleeping somewhat difficult, Fernando and Ignacio felt energized with excitement. As they stood on the main deck, they could occasionally see faint beams of light attempting to penetrate the gloom. This part of the Spanish coast was extremely rugged, and dotted with numerous lighthouses. Though it was now early July, the waters and wind off Northern Spain were quite cold. It was a welcome respite from the summer heat of Tampa and Cuba.

Deep in thought, Zapato and Gaitero sipped mugs of hot coffee with milk. As the sun began to break up some of the mist and fog, a particularly impressive lighthouse began to come into view. Within minutes they could see Cabo Vidio ("Cape Vidio"), a beautiful peninsula that jutted out from the coast, the lighthouse at its very tip. This was one of their favorite places when, as children, they would occasionally venture out to the coast with their families. Each man looked slightly away from the other. Their silence spoke volumes as they both fought back tears.

As the ship entered the large estuary which led to the docks of Santander, throngs of passengers were lining the decks. For many, this was their first visit to their native Spain after having left many years prior. Transiting the immigration and customs office was easier than anticipated. Within two hours of docking, the Suárez and Prendes families were resting comfortably in their hotel. Their train to Asturias was scheduled for the next morning. Rather than eating dinner at the hotel, they decided to walk to a nearby restaurant. As they walked along the streets, the children commented how different this was, compared to Tampa. They found the density of people to be somewhat disorienting, yet fascinating. They were quickly learning that America's most readily available commodity is space.

Train travel was a new experience for the children, and they excitedly took their seats. Soon the train was beyond the city. The countryside impressed them beyond words. The extremely mountainous terrain, verdant and dotted with stone farmhouses, couldn't be more different than the vast flatness of Florida. Fernando, Giuseppina, Ignacio and Sofia were grateful that they were able to give this wonderful gift of travel to their children.

The train station in Oviedo, Asturias was jammed with travelers. This was the beginning of a holiday weekend. As the two families gathered their baggage and navigated the crowds, Ignacio commented to the others.

"Oigo mucha gente discutiendo la política. Parece que hay problemas en el Congreso en Madrid. Creo que muchos están preocupados que la república es muy frágil."

Ignacio had noticed that many people were discussing politics. There seemed to be concern that the democratically elected Spanish Republic, now five years old, was in a fragile state. Apparently, the Congress in Madrid was having problems.

"Bueno, ahora somos americanos y estos son problemas para los españoles, no para nosotros!"

Fernando replied that they were now Americans, and these were problems for the Spaniards, not for them. Ignacio was about to remind him that he and Fernando were still Spanish citizens, when a loud voice distracted them.

"Familias Prendes y Suárez! Familias Prendes y Suárez!"

A man with a cap was paging the two families.

Chapter Forty-Five

Ignacio raised his hand and called to the man with the cap. The gentleman, rather elderly, rushed toward the group, pushing a large baggage cart.

"Soy portero de la estación. Hay dos coches que les esperan afuera. Darme su equipaje y les llevo ahora mismo."

The man described himself as a station porter. He told Ignacio that two cars were waiting for them outside the station. He offered to transport their luggage and began loading the bags onto the cart.

Fernando had advised his brother of their arrival details, asking him to help arrange hired cars with drivers. He was impressed and relieved that all was going as planned.

The parents and children almost instinctively arranged themselves into the two cars, as they had done in Havana. As the porter was loading the final bag into the trunk, he turned to Fernando.

"Muy bien, señor. Y de dónde son ustedes?"

The porter had asked Fernando where they were from.

"Somos americanos, pero yo y el otro señor nacimos aquí."

Fernando replied that they are Americans, but that he and the other gentleman had been born here.

"Ah, americanos. De dónde, La Argentina o Cuba?"

The porter understood that they were Americans but wondered if they were from Argentina or Cuba. At that point, Fernando remembered that in Spain, "America" refers to the entire region of North, Central, and South America, not to just the United States. He felt embarrassed

that perhaps he had developed a bit of the geographical arrogance commonly attributed to those from the U.S.

"Perdón, señor. Somos de Los Estados Unidos."

Fernando apologized, explaining that they were from the United States.

"No sabía que había inmigrantes españoles en Los Estados Unidos. Pensaba que todos habían ido a Cuba o La Argentina. Bienvenidos a tu tierrina."

The porter expressed surprise, telling Fernando that he was not aware of Spanish immigrants in the U.S. He thought they had all gone to Cuba or Argentina. He then welcomed him "home".

Fernando smiled, and handed the porter a rather generous tip. The old man smiled and thanked him, tipping his cap.

As children, neither Fernando nor Ignacio, or their families, ventured into Oviedo very often. Their lives were focused in and around their small country villages. However, they both noted significant changes in the city, with notable improvement in infrastructure. There appeared

to be an emerging middle class, symbolized by the surprising number of modern automobiles.

As the cars approached San Román, both Fernando and Ignacio agreed that little had changed. Cars were a rare sight, donkeys still the primary means of transport. One notable change was the presence of some electrification, mostly of government buildings and some private businesses.

A small crowd had gathered in the center of the village. As the cars came to a stop, many people rushed toward them.

Fernando and Ignacio immediately recognized their parents. As they emerged from the car, the two immigrants were embraced by their mothers, both of whom were crying uncontrollably. The frenzy of hugs and kisses made it almost impossible to breathe, a small price to pay for these moments of unbridled joy.

After the introductions and more rounds of hugging and kissing, the group made its way to the Suárez home, located immediately outside of the village proper. Both families had organized a welcome dinner for the visiting Americans. Several long tables had been placed beneath a trellis on which a flowering vine was growing.

"Entonces, han regresados los indianos!"

Ignacio's father had announced the return of the "Indians". This was the term used in Spain, primarily in the north, to describe those emigrants who had settled in the Americas. This was a result of Christopher Columbus mistakenly assuming he had sailed to India when he stepped foot on the island of Hispaniola. As immigrants prospered, many returned to Asturias and built large, stately homes. These homes were of a unique design, often with an American or Victorian influence. These dotted the Asturian countryside, and were known as "Casas de Indianos", "Homes of the Indians". The visiting Americans, particularly the children, were fascinated and amused by this cultural curiosity.

The Spanish relatives were impressed that Fernando's and Ignacio's U.S.-born children, as well as Giuseppina, were so fluent in Spanish. This surprise also extended to their familiarity with the local foods and customs. Fernando and Ignacio explained that parts of Tampa were very much like Asturian or Galician villages that had been extracted and moved across the ocean to that city in Florida, so far away.

The days that followed were spent "playing tourist" and visiting old friends and extended relatives. Fernando and Ignacio had arranged to hire the two cars and drivers for their entire visit. The drivers were

offered food and accommodations in a spare room at the Suárez house. The children, in particular, were impressed with the beauty and serenity of the Asturian countryside, particularly the rugged coastline. More importantly, they had bonded with their grandparents and other relatives beyond what their fathers had ever imagined possible.

Fernando and Ignacio grew more intrigued by the "Casas de Indianos." They inquired as to what the cost would be to construct one. The price was very reasonable, and they were giving strong consideration to building one large enough for both of their families to share. The idea was to visit often, and perhaps return permanently after retiring. After locating property for sale in the village of Somado, they arranged to meet with a building contractor to gather more information. Somado, or "Somao" in the Asturian language, was a small village about 10 miles from San Roman, with a view of the nearby Cantabrian Sea. It had become popular with immigrants returning from Cuba, and had many beautiful "Casas de Indianos."

Friday, July 17, 1936 was a particularly beautiful day. The Spanish sky was cloudless and of a deep blue color rarely seen in Tampa. The meeting in Somao with the building contractor had turned into a family outing. While Fernando and Ignacio would meet with the construction people, Sofia, Giuseppina, and the children would be driven to the

coast for lunch and a visit to the beach. The Spanish relatives, busy cutting hay for the coming winter, would not be joining them.

The meeting took place in a cafe in the middle of Somao. The contractor and an architect were waiting at the cafe when the cars arrived. After introductions and polite conversation, the wives and children departed. As the four men ate an early lunch, they discussed the general concept of the house. After lunch, they took a short walk up a hill to view the parcel of land that Fernando and Ignacio were considering purchasing. The view toward the sea was breathtaking. Suddenly, the men became aware of shouting in the distance. Glancing down toward the cafe, they could see a frenzy of activity. People were rushing about, some getting in their cars and speeding away. Others were rushing into the cafe. Though difficult to discern what was being said, it was obvious that something very profound was happening.

The four men quickly descended the hill, retracing their steps back to the cafe. As they approached the entrance to the dining room, they could hear the distinctive crackling sound of a radio broadcast. Inside, a crowd had gathered around a radio at one corner of the bar.

"Por favor. Que ha pasado?"

"Please. What has happened?" The contractor addressed the crowd, seeking an answer. One man turned toward them.

"Un grupo de generales del ejército han tumbado el gobierno en Marruecos Español, y parece que otros en otras ciudades por la península están haciendo lo mismo!"

This man had advised them that a group of Spanish army generals had toppled the government in Spanish Morocco, and other generals were attempting to do the same in other parts of the Spanish mainland peninsula. Apparently, a coup d'état was underway.

Fernando and Ignacio, realizing the gravity of the situation, knew they had to gather their families and leave Spain as soon as possible. Their wives and children were due to return to Somao in approximately one hour. Desperately trying to decide what to do next, they were distracted by familiar voices.

"Fernando! Ignacio! Por favor, que está pasando?"

Sofia and Giuseppina, speaking simultaneously, had rushed into the cafe and were frantically calling for their husbands, wondering what was going on.

Luckily, they had heard the news while having lunch at the coast and immediately headed back to retrieve them. They raced to the two waiting cars. Along with their children they hurriedly began driving toward San Roman.

As they approached San Roman, they noticed that the fields and farms were devoid of people. On entering the village, a large crowd, practically all of the local residents, had gathered at the small train station. One of the few radios in San Roman had been placed on the outdoor platform, at full volume. The visitors joined their friends and relatives already gathered.

The news was grim. While most of the efforts to take over major mainland cities had failed, Seville had fallen to the rebel forces. These forces were led by generals opposed to the democratically elected Republican government. They favored returning the monarchy and restoring the formal power of the Catholic Church. They had established a military foothold in Southern Spain, allowing Spanish rebel forces from the African colonies to invade the mainland.

Spain was at the beginning of a civil war. Fernando and Ignacio stared at each other in disbelief.

Chapter Forty-Six

The hours that followed were filled with confusion and chaos, fueled by rumors. The Spanish military, along with the citizenry, were fragmenting as people were aligning along ideological lines, choosing whether to support the uprising (the Nationalists) or supporting the elected Republic. It appeared most of San Roman was supporting the Republic. However, by nightfall there were reports of a few verbal and physical confrontations among friends and neighbors. Some of the more ardent Republicans began throwing rocks and attempting to set fire to the local church. The rebel generals, broadcasting from Spanish Morocco, framed the war as an attempt to save Spain from Communism. The Republican government accused the Nationalists of being Fascist puppets of Germany and Italy, both under Fascist dictatorships.

By the next morning, Spain had sealed its borders. Only foreign nationals were allowed to leave, and entry into Spain was limited to Spanish citizens and foreign journalists. The Suárez and Prendes families met at Ignacio's parents' farm in Cuero, a few miles from San Roman.

"Gaitero, esto es una locura. Tenemos que regresar inmediatamente a Los Estados Unidos. Hay rumores que los generales fascistas tienen listas de los emigrantes que marcharon para evitar el militar. A ellos que tienen más de cuarenta años los fusilan o los meten en la cárcel. A los más jóvenes los reclutan en su ejército. No sé si es verdad o no, pero tenemos que salir de España!"

Ignacio, visibly shaken, told Fernando that they needed to leave Spain as soon as possible. There were rumors that Fascist generals had lists of those emigrants who had left Spain in order to avoid the military. Those that are over 40 years of age are either shot or put in prison. The younger ones are recruited into their armies. He didn't know whether this was true, but they certainly needed to leave Spain.

Fernando agreed. In fact, the Suárez family had arrived in the village of Cuero with their bags packed, ready to travel. Some of Fernando's relatives had accompanied them. Fernando's and Ignacio's mothers, both crying, were consoling each other.

Ignacio's father had heard that there were several taxi drivers in the nearby town of Grado who were offering to transport foreign nationals to the port of Vigo, in the adjacent province of Galicia. It was approximately 250 miles away, and one of the few major Spanish ports that had not been sealed off. Fernando knew that there was a

U.S. Consulate Office in Vigo, something that might be of use to them. The area surrounding Grado had a high number of emigrants who had returned for a summer visit, many from Cuba, and some from Tampa. These taxi drivers quickly came to realize that this was a business opportunity for them, since most were scrambling to find a quick way out of Spain.

After a hasty and very emotional farewell to their friends and relatives, the visitors got into their hired cars, headed for Grado. The Suarez and Prendes families were in separate cars. Because of the gravity of the situation, they thought it best for the children to travel with their parents. The latest news reports indicated that most of Asturias was aligning with the Republicans, but neighboring Galicia was a mixed bag, with pockets of strong support for the Nationalists. Fernando was anticipating that they would be able to transit Asturias with no problem, but Galicia might be a different matter.

Grado was unusually quiet for a Saturday morning. As the largest town in the area, it normally would have been much busier. Apparently, many residents decided that keeping a low profile was in their best interest. There were several taxis parked adjacent to the town's main square, the drivers sitting on a nearby bench. The cars with the Americans parked alongside them. Fernando and Ignacio approached the group of drivers.

"Buenas. Nos dijieron que algunos aquí pueden ayudarnos llegar a Vigo. Es verdad? Somos ocho personas."

Fernando, bidding them a good morning, said they'd been told that some drivers might be able to take them to Vigo. He asked if this was the case and told them that they were a party of eight people.

The response was one of silence, and the drivers' body language indicated hesitation and nervousness.

"De dónde son ustedes? De Cuba?"

One of the taxi drivers responded by asking where they were from, wondering whether they were from Cuba. Fernando explained the situation, indicating that all but Ignacio and he were U.S. citizens. Apparently, word was out that transporting Spanish citizens across provincial boundaries was risky.

"Deberían hablar con Juan y con Manuel, pero ellos salieron esta mañana con unos Cubanos a Vigo. No sabemos cuando regresan."

The taxi driver explained that they needed to talk to Juan and Manuel. They had left early that morning for Vigo with a group of Cubans. He explained that they didn't know when they would return.

Fernando asked if they could negotiate for two of them to take their group to Vigo. They responded, somewhat apologetically, that they were family men and were not willing to incur the risks. Fernando and Ignacio understood, thanking them and returning to their hired cars.

One of their regular drivers, Serafín, was not by his car. Ignacio asked the other driver, Rufino, if he knew where he was. He explained that he had walked to the post office to make a telephone call. Suddenly, Ignacio feared that perhaps he had gone to inform certain authorities of his and Fernando's intentions. He wondered if perhaps Serafin was a Nationalist sympathizer, or perhaps the atmosphere of paranoia had simply affected his judgement. Serafin approached the group.

"Caballeros, tenemos que hablar. Vamos a sentar aquí en este banco, por favor. Ahora mismo llamé a la compañía en Oviedo. El despachador de los carros es un buen amigo mío. Él, como casi todos los empleados, son apoyadores de la Republica, y sé que puedo hablar con él en confianza. Él me dijo que pudiéramos llevaros a Vigo. Estos coches están alquilados por un tiempo fijo, y él no tiene que

saber adónde vamos. Tenemos que hablar de los detalles, porque hay un riesgo, claro."

Serafín explained that he called the company he works for in Oviedo. Unlike the local taxis in Grado, which were owned by the individual drivers themselves, Rufino and he leased their taxis from the company. The company owned and maintained the cars for a percentage of their earnings. The car dispatcher was a good and trustworthy friend. Like most of the employees, he was also a supporter of the Republic. Since the cars had been rented for another two weeks, it would be possible for him and Rufino to drive them to Vigo. Because there was some element of risk involved, they would have to discuss details.

There was an agreement that in addition to the price they had already paid, Rufino and Serafin would be given a bonus, plus expense money for the additional gas and food for their return trip to Oviedo. They would be taking small country roads, avoiding major cities and the more popular provincial border crossings. Serafin went to a local hardware store and purchased several of the most current road maps available, along with several large metal containers and some canvas material. Though not entirely accurate, the maps would provide a guide as they "hopped" from one small village to another. After examining the maps, the two drivers concluded that the trip would take

at least three days. The Spanish highway system was still in its infancy, compared to that of the U.S.A.

Being unsure of exactly what awaited them on the journey, they decided to stock up on food and gasoline. Extra gasoline was stored in the large containers covered with canvas and placed on the roofs of the cars, with the baggage. This was, of course, hazardous, but a necessary risk. Sofia and Giuseppina visited the local shops. They returned with numerous loaves of bread, cured meats, and some canned items, along with a can opener.

Within two hours they left Grado on the "Carretera General" ("General Highway") toward Salas. In Salas, they turned off the main highway and toward the southwest. Fernando felt more anxiety than he had experienced when he left Spain for Cuba at the age of 14.

Chapter Forty-Seven

As the "caravan" of two large cars passed through the small villages, people stared. Cars, particularly large ones filled with people and baggage, were relatively rare outside of the larger towns and cities. In many cases, as the cars approached the center of the villages, those outside would scurry back inside their homes, closing their doors and

windows. The atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and uncertainty was palpable.

After approximately six hours, the Americans arrived in the town of Grandas de Salime, having traveled a distance of about sixty miles. Luciano, fascinated with navigation and geography, had been meticulously noting their progress on the car's odometer. The town was in Asturias, but near the Galician border. Fernando turned to his driver.

"Rufino, por favor. Encuentres un café o restaurante para que podemos descansar y comer. Todos estamos cansados y ya son las seis y cuarto de la tarde. Creo que sería lo mejor si pasamos la noche aquí."

Fernando asked Rufino to locate a cafe or restaurant where they could stop for dinner. He suggested that it would be best to spend the night here, as they were all tired. It was now 6:15 p.m. Thanks to the long Asturian summer days, several hours of daylight remained. Though the town was small, this made exploring much easier.

Within minutes Rufino had located a restaurant and parked the car a short distance away. Serafín followed suit in the other car. The evening was pleasant, and many diners were sitting at outdoor tables.

As the travelers exited the two cars, they became the focus of attention. The small town of Grandas de Salime was not accustomed to visitors.

They were enthusiastically greeted by the owner, who quickly put several tables together to accommodate the party of ten. The owner told them he would be serving them. As he left the table, Ignacio whispered to Fernando, questioning if maybe he was a Fascist spy. The two men chuckled softly.

Dinner was predictably more than substantial. As they were being served their dessert and coffee, the cafe owner asked if they were headed to Vigo. Apparently, several other small groups had passed through the village the day before. Ignacio quickly replied.

"Pues somos de los estados unidos. Estamos aquí de visita y nuestro barco sale de Vigo en una semana. Queríamos ver un poco de esta parte de la tierrina, y visitar unos amigos cerca de Lugo en Galicia."

Practically before the proprietor had stopped speaking, Ignacio nervously began a hasty explanation of their presence. After immediately and emphatically saying they were from the United States, he explained that they were visiting Asturias and wanted to see friends near Lugo, Galicia enroute to catch their ship home from

Vigo. The server's quiet smile indicated that he knew the truth; his diners were yet more Spanish nationals, now living in America, desperately trying to avoid being trapped in Spain.

As the travelers were preparing to leave the cafe, the owner approached them.

"Hay una posada dos manzanas de aquí donde se pueden dormir y desayunar bien. Los dueños son buenos amigos míos. No tendréis ningunas problemas allí. Os deseo buena suerte, y un viaje muy seguro."

The cafe owner explained that good friends of his operated an inn about two blocks away. They could have a good night's sleep and a nice breakfast there. He assured them there would be no problem and wished them a safe trip.

As promised, their accommodations were excellent, the owners polite and accommodating. By 8 a.m. the two families were back on the road. The goal was to drive as far as possible while there was still daylight, approximately 14 hours. After an hour they crossed the provincial border into Galicia. The hotel clerk, sympathetic to their cause, had advised Fernando and Ignacio that there were pockets of strong Nationalist support within Galicia, and to proceed with caution.

Luckily, the crossing was not guarded; their decision to avoid the more populated areas had paid off. The crossing was uneventful, marked only by an old metal sign. There was collective relief at having successfully crossed their first hurdle.

The roads were better than expected, and the goal was to drive beyond the large city of Lugo. Several hours later they were approaching Lugo. Rather than driving through the city, the decision was made to circumvent it, going through the smaller villages surrounding it. This was a mistake. A roadblock consisting of several military vehicles lay shortly ahead of them. They were already conspicuous; any attempt to turn around and avoid it would certainly draw even more attention. The lead car with the Suárez family stopped a few feet from the barrier, the car with the Prendes family behind it. A uniformed man, apparently an officer in the Spanish army, approached the driver's side of the car.

"Papeles de identificación, por favor! Están viajando juntos?"

"Identity papers, please! Are you traveling together?"

The officer, not smiling, gestured to the other car, asking if they were traveling together.

Fernando answered that they were and explained that they, with the exception of the two drivers, were all from the United States.

Giuseppina and the children handed him their passports, Fernando presented his U.S. alien registration card and Spanish passport.

Rufino, the driver, presented his local identity card.

The officer ordered everyone out of both cars. After collecting identification papers for all ten people, he proceeded to meticulously read through each document. Occasionally, he would glance up, matching specific faces with specific photographs on the documents.

"Señor Suárez y Señor Prendes, parece que ustedes son ciudadanos españoles. Cuando marcharon de este país? Estuvieron en el militar español antes de marchar?"

The officer commented that Fernando and Ignacio were still Spanish citizens. He wanted to know when they left the country, and whether or not they had served in the Spanish military prior to leaving. These types of questions had become a "litmus test", a way of determining whether Spanish emigrants were loyal to the monarchy and the Church, or part of a communist attempt to take over Spain. Such hyperbolic thinking was permeating the entire country. Clearly, this military officer was a Nationalist whose sympathies lay with the Fascist rebels.

What followed were several minutes of propaganda as to why the current Republic was corrupt, and a disaster for Spain. This led to commentary concerning how easy the American life of luxury was, compared to Spain. The officer stepped away from the group to confer with other officers.

"Mira, Gaitero. Creo que este hombre está dando pistas de que quizás podemos pagar para evitar problemas. Todos los comentarios sobre la vida de lujo en los Estados Unidos, etc. Creo que son mensajes en código. Que piensas? Deberíamos tomar el riesgo de hacer una oferta?"

Ignacio shared that he thought the officer was hinting they could perhaps bribe their way out of any potential problems. He felt that the rambling about "the good life in the USA" was a coded message to "the rich Americans" that he was open to accepting payment for his cooperation.

Fernando agreed, and offered to handle the situation. Ignacio nodded in agreement.

When the officer returned, he simply held their papers, staring silently at Fernando and Ignacio. Fernando, addressing him respectfully, told him that yes, they had achieved financial security in the U.S.A. He

added that they were also known as generous to those less fortunate, anxious to assist others in need. Continuing, he commented that in the U.S.A. dedicated military officers were notoriously underpaid and overworked, and wondered if perhaps it was the same in Spain.

The carefully worded message seemed to work. With a smile, the officer responded that he felt his salary was a certain number of "pesetas" (Spanish currency) below what it should be. Fernando offered to "loan" him ten times this amount. The officer tipped his cap, smiling broadly. Fernando and Ignacio pooled their money and handed it to the officer. In exchange, the officer handed each of them a document as a "promissory note". These documents bore the seal of the Spanish military and would ensure that they could proceed to Vigo without any difficulty. The Spanish officer returned their identification documents and wished them a safe return home.

Chapter Forty-Eight

After two more nights spent on the road, the anxious travelers arrived in the large port city of Vigo, Galicia. Serafín and Rufino stopped at a gas station to refuel their cars. Fernando, explaining the situation, asked if he could use their phone to call the U.S. Consulate. After being assisted by a telephone operator, he was able to complete the

call. The representative gave him directions to the office, recommending that they present themselves as soon as possible, with all relevant documents.

After navigating a complex maze of narrow, meandering streets, the two cars emerged onto a broad, tree-lined street with numerous government buildings. Luckily, a U.S. flag was prominently displayed at their destination, making it easy to locate. Rufino and Serafín dropped them off at the entrance. They would park the cars and wait for them at the building entrance.

Two U.S. army soldiers guarded the entrance to the consulate. Normally this level of security was reserved for embassies, but the unstable situation in Spain warranted additional security. The eight Americans approached the soldiers. One of the soldiers stepped in front of the entrance, speaking to the group.

“Good morning. Are all of you American citizens?”

Fernando explained that with the exception of Ignacio and him, all were U.S. citizens. He added that he and Ignacio were Spanish citizens, but legal residents of the U.S.A.

After examining their documents, the soldier nodded, stepping aside and politely waving them through. He explained that they needed to go to the second floor and speak with the receptionist.

The reception area was filled to near capacity, with several people in line to register with the receptionist. The line moved quickly. The receptionist inspected the pertinent documents, making entries into a registry. Fernando handed her the documents for all eight of the Tampa people. She smiled, recorded their information, and returned their documents. She told Fernando that they were number 14 in line to see the consulate staff. She handed him a ticket with the number 14. She addressed the group.

“As you can see, we are extremely busy. We ask for your patience, as your wait could be several hours. I do hope you understand.”

The Suárez and Prendes families acknowledged her kindness with smiles and nods of agreement. They were thankful to be on what was essentially “U.S. soil”, at least in their minds.

As they took their seats in the crowded waiting area, Ignacio turned to Fernando.

“Gaitero, ahora entiendo mejor que nunca esa sensación de seguridad que viene con ser un estadounidense.”

Ignacio had commented to Fernando that now, more than ever, he understood that feeling of security that comes from being an American, referring specifically to the United States. Fernando responded.

“De acuerdo, Zapato, pero acuérdate que tú y yo no somos ciudadanos. Veremos que va pasar aquí.”

Fernando reminded Ignacio that they were not U.S. citizens, and wondered what would result from their meeting with the U.S. consul.

More than two hours passed, and the last number called was number nine. They were given permission to bring food into the waiting area. Luciano and Rafael volunteered to seek out sandwiches to bring back to the group. Their fathers cautioned them to not get lost, reminding them how easy it is to lose one's sense of direction in congested European cities. The boys expressed confidence but wrote down the exact address of their location. Soon they returned with substantial food for all. Their youth allowed them to view their situation as another great adventure.

“Number 14 please.”

After almost another two hours, their number was finally called. The eight Tampanians rose in unison, attracting some attention. Most other groups were no more than three people. After verifying that they were traveling together, a representative led them to the consul's office. They had been assigned to the consul himself, as opposed to an assistant. He introduced himself as Mr. Abernathy, greeting them warmly. He advised them that his Spanish was marginal and asked if he could speak in English with a consulate translator providing a Spanish translation. Everyone agreed.

Mr. Abernathy got directly to the point. The six U.S. citizens could return to the U.S.A with no problem, as long as they could obtain transportation. Fernando's and Igancio's status was less clear, and potentially problematic. Though they were legal residents of the United States, they were Spanish citizens. He explained that the civil war was only in its fifth day and chaos was everywhere. The U.S. currently was officially neutral, not taking sides in the conflict. This news was surprising, since it had been assumed that the U.S. would actively support the democratically elected Republic. The United States government was not officially accepting refugees, i.e., those Spanish citizens fleeing the war. Additionally, the Spanish immigration offices had been transferred from civilian to military control. Policies at the

points of embarkation were inconsistent, depending on whether local military authorities had sided with the Republic or with the Nationalist rebels. This was particularly an issue in Galicia, where the military loyalties were split between the two sides.

Mr. Abernathy apologized for not being able to give them a more precise answer, but this was the best he could do in a situation that was changing hourly.

Ignacio inquired about perhaps trying to get home via nearby Portugal, whose border was only 20 miles from Vigo. The consul advised them that only Portuguese nationals were being allowed to transit the border, so this was not an option. France was accepting some foreign citizens, including those from the U.S., but not Spanish citizens.

Fernando asked if there was an international telegraph office nearby. Mr. Abernathy explained that they had a direct link to Western Union in the consulate. Because of the current situation, they were allowing access to the service by U.S. citizens and anyone traveling with them.

“Zapato, podemos mandar un telegrama a Turiddu Licata. Creo que la familia Licata tiene algunas conexiones con el Señor Payne, el congresista de Tampa en Washington.”

Fernando, addressing Ignacio, suggested that they send a telegram to Turiddu Licata. He remembered that the Licata family had some connections to Representative Payne, the congressman from Tampa in Washington.

Mr. Abernathy supported the idea. He commented that any help available should be utilized as soon as possible, due to the confusing situation. He asked the translator to take Fernando and Ignacio to the communications station at the far end of the office complex. The other Tampanians could wait in the receiving area. They thanked Mr. Abernathy and filed out of his office.

Fernando and Ignacio composed a brief but clear message to Turiddu. They explained the situation was getting desperate, and any help would need to be arranged quickly. It was now late on a Tuesday evening in Tampa. Realistically, they did not expect a response until Thursday at the earliest.

The translator generously offered to arrange accommodations at a nearby hotel. He said that as soon as a response was received, the consulate would contact them at the hotel. Ignacio asked the translator to also arrange a room for Serafín and Rufino. Within a few minutes the arrangements were completed. Fernando and Ignacio

thanked the translator profusely for his help and returned to the waiting area to retrieve the others.

As had been arranged, Rufino and Serafín were patiently waiting near the consulate entrance. Apologizing for the long wait, Fernando explained the situation. The two drivers assured them that they understood, and were concerned about their situation. The cars were parked nearby and not far from the hotel. They retrieved their luggage and proceeded another 2 blocks to the Hotel Pontevedra. It was an impressive property, built in the early part of the 20th century. There were few guests, and this resulted in the hotel having a somewhat ghostly feel. Nonetheless, the accommodations were superb, and they all relished the idea of simply relaxing for a few days.

After an early breakfast, Fernando and Ignacio asked the concierge for directions to the Port of Vigo. They, along with Rufino and Serafín, would go in one of the cars to the main office of the port to inquire as to the possibility of obtaining passage to the U.S.A. They asked their wives and children to remain in the hotel, much to the dismay of Rafael and Luciano.

The administrative offices of the port were outside of the security zone patrolled by the militarized customs and immigration departments. The office was busy, and there was a line to access the information desk.

After less than an hour, Fernando and Ignacio were able to speak to a clerk. Apparently, there were no passenger ships scheduled to call on the port. However, several freighters bound for the U.S.A. were scheduled to depart within the next week. Many of the ships' captains were allowing small numbers of passengers for a negotiated fee. The clerk emphasized that all passengers would need to be U.S. citizens or in possession of official documents allowing them to enter the U.S.A. She also emphasized that this policy could change at any moment, and recommended that they obtain the necessary papers as soon as possible. Once this was done, she could put them in contact with the captains of the ships. Thanking her, they left the office and headed back to the hotel. Ignacio turned to Fernando.

“Otro ejemplo de cómo la desgracia de algunos son buenas oportunidades para otros. Por supuesto la señora con quien hablamos recibirá una comisión de los capitanes.”

Ignacio had commented that here was another example of how the misfortunes of some were good opportunities for others. He was certain that the helpful clerk would receive a commission from the ship captains.

Fernando agreed, adding that is the essence of capitalism. With controls, it was a good system. He added that the value of a service is whatever people are willing to pay for it.

Soon they were back at the Hotel Pontevedra, anxiously awaiting word from the U.S. Consulate.

Chapter Forty-Nine

It was now Thursday morning, the Tampanians' third day in Vigo. There was still no word from from the U.S. Consulate. Rufino and Serafín were still available to accompany the Suárez and Prendes families.

After breakfast at the hotel, the group decided to see the sites in and around Vigo. Primarily an industrial port city, Vigo had a fascinating historic quarter. It seemed that more people were speaking Gallego than Spanish. Fernando and Ignacio were able to communicate well in Gallego.

This was a result of their long friendship with Maruxa, their former landlady at La Gallega boarding house. They noticed that in some situations, people were hesitant to speak their native language. The Nationalist rebels were proposing the banning of all languages other

than Spanish, an attempt to unify the “Spanish motherland”, much like what Hitler and Mussolini were doing in Germany and Italy.

It was just before two o’clock in the afternoon when the group returned to their hotel. As they were walking past the front desk, a voice called out.

“Por favor. Señor Suárez. Tenemos un mensaje para ti.”

The concierge was calling for Fernando, advising him that they had received a message for him.

Fernando hurried to the desk. He was handed an envelope. A note inside requested that he call the U.S. Consulate as soon as possible.

“Tenemos que llamar al consulado inmediatamente.”

Fernando advised the others that they needed to call the consulate immediately. He suggested that they gather in his room to make the call. Within minutes Fernando was speaking with Mr. Abernathy. The news was good. The consulate had received a telegram authorizing the issuance of “safe conduct and U.S.A. entry” papers for Fernando and Ignacio. Apparently, the Licatas had contacted Representative Payne immediately. He then contacted the U.S. Department of State, explaining the situation. They were able to forward the authorization

directly to Mr. Abernathy. Apparently, the Licatas' "friendship" with the local congressman had very deep roots. Fernando turned to the other Tampanians.

"Bueno, como dicen. Él que tiene padrino, le bautizan."

Fernando had quoted an old Spanish saying: "He who has a godfather, is baptized." This was the Spanish way of saying that knowing the right people will open doors that might otherwise be closed.

Mr. Abernathy asked that Fernando and Ignacio present themselves at the consulate. He needed to attach the authorization to their alien registration cards. Additionally, the Spanish Republican government in Madrid had forwarded an authorization that would be added to their Spanish passports.

Within two hours, Fernando and Ignacio had returned from the consulate with all necessary documents for travel and entry into the United States. All that remained was to book passage. It was now after five o'clock in the afternoon and the port office was closed. They would return to the port first thing in the morning. Rufino and Serafín agreed to stay until the Tampanians had actually set sail.

There was a short line when they arrived at the port offices, one hour prior to opening. The eight travelers from Tampa appeared to be the largest single group. Within 40 minutes after the office opened, it was their turn to speak with the agent. She informed them there was a freighter scheduled to leave for New York on Sunday morning, which was two days away. She also advised them that the accommodations were spartan, but acceptable for eight passengers. The ship was due to arrive in Vigo later that afternoon. She offered to talk with the captain and then call them at the hotel. Fernando and Ignacio agreed, handing her everyone's documents. She quickly recorded pertinent data and handed the documents back to them. She assured them she would contact them as soon as she had additional information. As they walked back to their cars, Ignacio commented to Fernando.

“Creo que deberíamos quedarnos en el hotel. No quiero fallar esta oportunidad. Tenemos que hablar con la señora el momento que ella llama. Por supuesto hay otros que quieren tomar el mismo barco.”

Ignacio suggested that they remain in the hotel. They couldn't afford to miss the call from the lady in the port office. He felt there were certainly other people who were trying to take the same ship.

After an early lunch in the hotel, they remained in the lobby. They had advised the concierge that they were expecting an important phone

call. Rafael and Luciano were excited at the prospect of crossing the Atlantic on a freighter, their sisters and parents less so. They joked about an adventure similar to the serial adventure stories so popular at American movie theaters.

At shortly after four o'clock in the afternoon, the concierge approached them. A woman had called, asking for either Señor Suárez or Señor Prendes. Fernando and Ignacio rushed to the telephone booth; the concierge would transfer the call there.

Their contact at the port informed them the captain wanted to meet them at the hotel to discuss specific arrangements. This, of course, meant the price. Fernando and Ignacio agreed. The captain would be at the hotel at six o'clock in the evening.

At six o'clock sharp, a rather large, burly man walked into the hotel lobby. He appeared to be about the same age as Fernando and Ignacio, in his early fifties. There was no doubt that he was a ship's captain. He looked like the Hollywood central casting version of a seafarer, complete with a navy blue wool cap. As Fernando and Ignacio approached him, he extended his right hand in greeting.

“My name is Aaron Winchester. I’m the captain of the freighter “Phoenix”. Good to meet you gentlemen. I hear you need to get to New York. Let’s talk.”

Fernando, in his broken English, introduced Ignacio and himself to Aaron. He then suggested that Luciano serve as a translator, in order to avoid any miscommunication. The captain agreed. After more introductions, they took their seats and began negotiations.

The captain listened intently to the Tampanians’ tale of woe. He also asked about their backgrounds, curious about how they had ended up in Tampa. Surprisingly, he agreed to transport them for a fee that was quite reasonable. It seemed that his bark was worse than his bite. Beneath his gruff exterior there was empathy for their situation. He asked to view their documents. After a few minutes he handed them back and welcomed them “on board” the “Phoenix”. Fernando invited Captain Winchester to have dinner with them. He accepted their offer.

The dinner conversation was intriguing. Aaron explained that he had been born and raised in Amarillo, Texas. This was about as far from an ocean one can be in the U.S.A. An explorer by heart, he left home at the age of 16, riding the rails to California. His love affair with the sea began the moment he got his first view of the Pacific Ocean in San Francisco. After years as a stevedore on the docks of that city, he

became a crew member, eventually working his way up to captain. It was apparent that he identified closely with Fernando and Ignacio. He told them that he understood the need to uproot one's self in pursuit of a better life. He championed the cause of the common man.

After several hours of dinner and coffee, and engaging conversation, Captain Winchester excused himself. He thanked the Tampanians for their hospitality, and reminded them to be at the port office on Sunday morning at 7:30 a.m.

“Zapato, no solo hemos encontrado pasaje a los estado unidos, creo que también hemos encontrado un buen amigo. Quizás no hay un mal que por bien no venga?”

Fernando commented to Ignacio that not only had they found passage to the United States, but he thought they had also found a good friend. He added that perhaps some good can always be found in something bad.

Chapter Fifty

Sunday morning dawned particularly sunny and warm. Fernando considered this a good omen for the first day of their return trip to the

U.S.A. He and Ignacio had spent the previous two days arranging a wire transfer of the money to pay Captain Winchester. They arrived at the port office at 6:55 a.m., thirty-five minutes early.

Rufino and Serafín assisted them in arranging their luggage near the main entrance; surprisingly, they were the only ones there. Fernando turned toward the two drivers.

"Caballeros, tanto lo agradecemos lo que han hecho para nosotros. Por favor, que tengan un viaje a Oviedo sin problemas ningunos. Esperamos que las cosas mejoren en España."

Fernando thanked them for all they did to assist them. He wished them a return trip to Oviedo without any problems, and hoped that the situation in Spain would improve.

Fernando and Ignacio paid them the amount they had agreed upon, plus a bit extra. The two drivers were visibly moved, hugging and kissing each of the Tampeños. They shared a bond that was forged by adversity and danger.

A few minutes before 7:30 a.m. the agent with whom they had dealt opened the doors. By now, there were several more small groups in line. She escorted the Tampeños to a desk located toward the rear of

the large office. She quickly inspected their documents, making entries in a large book. Smiling, she returned their papers, along with their "tickets", which were merely letters typed on the Port of Vigo stationery, stamped with an official looking seal.

"Todo en orden, gracias. Su barco, el "Phoenix", saldrá a las once de la mañana, con la marea alta. Pagan al Capitán Winchester cuando lleguéis al barco. Os llevamos ahora en unos minutos."

The agent explained that all documents were in order and their ship would leave at 11:00 a.m., with the high tide. They were to pay Captain Winchester when they arrived at the ship. They would be taken to the ship in a few minutes.

The agent escorted them out of the office, pointing to an open area a short distance away. They would be picked up there and driven to their ship. They thanked her, shaking her hand. Rufino and Serafín assisted them in moving their belongings to the area indicated by the agent.

Within a few minutes a rather large van stopped next to the Tampeños. The driver got off the vehicle and introduced himself as Manolo. He verified they were booked on the "Phoenix" and began loading their baggage. Serafín and Rufino said their final goodbyes

and departed. Manolo helped the travelers into the van. Basically a cargo vehicle, it had been outfitted with crude benches for passengers. Vigo was a large port and the "Phoenix" was docked quite a distance away, too far to walk. The van proceeded very slowly.

After a few minutes the van stopped at a military checkpoint prior to entering the dock areas. The passengers were asked to get out of the vehicle and have their papers ready for inspection. Thankfully, the process was uneventful and anticlimactic. The officer was polite and wished them a safe trip home. Fernando and Ignacio expressed relief at passing this final hurdle. After another few minutes the van stopped again. Manolo spoke to the Tampeños.

"Bueno, aquí estamos. Su barco os espera."

He said they had arrived and their ship awaits them.

As the two families exited the van, Captain Winchester greeted them with a smile.

"Greetings! We couldn't have a nicer day to set sail. I expect a smooth ride out of the harbor."

The captain's words were reassuring. He escorted the Tampeños onto the ship and gave them a tour. The "Phoenix" was a medium-sized freighter, and relatively new. Their cabins were spartan, but more than adequate. They would occupy four cabins; the two boys would share, as would the two daughters. They could choose to eat with the crew or separately. They chose to eat with the crew, much to Captain Winchester's delight. Luciano was completely intrigued with the ship's bridge, the room from which the ship is commanded. The captain assured him he could observe the process as much as he would like. Luciano was secretly grateful for the outbreak of the war, something he wasn't willing to share with the others.

Fernando and Ignacio paid Captain Winchester their fare, handing him an envelope with cash. He thanked them and said he would leave them to get settled in their cabins. They would depart in two hours.

At precisely 11:00 a.m. the "Phoenix" sounded three short blasts of her horn. The ship began to move slowly as two tugboats nudged her away from the dock. The Prendes and Suárez males, at the invitation of Captain Winchester, were gathered on the bridge. The women declined, choosing to relax on deck on chaise lounges provided by the crew. Luciano could hardly contain himself, asking a myriad of questions faster than anyone could answer them. Fernando moved toward his son.

"Hijo, por favor. Deja que Capitán Winchester haga su trabajo, después quizás él puede hablar contigo."

Fernando cautioned his son to save his questions for later and let Captain Winchester do his job. The affable captain smiled, glancing toward Luciano. He continued explaining what was happening.

"This gentleman next to me is a harbor pilot. Major ports require that someone intimately familiar with a particular port command the ship into and out of the harbor. Depending on the specific geography, they are in charge of driving the ship a certain distance into the open sea. Vigo is a challenging port, with a very rocky coastline and strong currents. This gentleman will be in charge until we are well into open seas."

Captain Winchester stepped back and joined the visitors. Luciano couldn't absorb all this fast enough. After almost one hour of slowly maneuvering through the harbor, the ship passed the entrance to the port. The harbor pilot shook Captain Winchester's hand, and stepped aside. The captain took over the controls. The men watched as the harbor pilot descended a ladder and stepped onto a tugboat that was running parallel to the huge freighter. As the tugboat pulled away, Captain Winchester sounded three blasts of "Phoenix's" horn, the

traditional final "thank you" to the harbor pilot. Luciano was enthralled by both the science and the ritual of what he was seeing.

Captain Winchester issued orders to the engine room. Their speed increased quickly as the ship turned toward the northwest. He then turned toward the Tampeños.

"Next stop, New York harbor! Gentlemen, take a turn."

The captain gestured to the men to take turns at the wheel. Luciano, never shy, quickly grabbed the controls. After a few minutes, he reluctantly allowed the others to share in this incredible adventure. It appeared Luciano would be spending most of the trip in the bridge.

Captain Winchester and the crew were most accommodating to the Suárez and Prendes families. Meals were incredibly good, and dinner conversation was lively and engaging. Luciano and Rafael especially enjoyed the mariners' tales of adventure in various exotic ports. The boys felt as if they were living a serial from Saturday afternoons at the movies. Time was passing more quickly than expected. The weather had been cooperative and the "Phoenix" was a bit ahead of schedule.

In the afternoon of the fourth day, Captain Winchester asked Fernando to join him for a cup of coffee in his room. Initially concerned

that something was amiss, Fernando was more than relieved when the captain revealed what was on his mind. The proud father listened intently as Captain Winchester, speaking slowly, explained how impressed he was with Luciano. The young man's ability to grasp the basics of navigation was astounding. Fernando was aware that his son was excelling academically but hearing this from the captain was rather unexpected. The captain concluded by suggesting that Fernando should encourage Luciano to pursue an education beyond high school. Fernando thanked Captain Winchester for his kind words and encouragement.

At dinner of their sixth and final night at sea, Captain Winchester announced they would be arriving in New York the next morning. The exact time depended on the amount of maritime traffic and exact sea conditions, but they should be prepared to disembark by 9:00 a.m. at the earliest.

Fernando had contacted a few Spanish friends in New York who were involved in the cigar business. They were buyers and distributors who regularly visited Tampa when Fernando was employed at Sanchez y Haya. He hoped they could recommend a hotel in New York. The Alonso and Cuesta families had insisted on hosting the Tampeños until they could arrange transportation back to Tampa. None of the Tampeños had been to New York before, and they welcomed their

hospitality in such a large and fast-paced city. Their host families lived in the West Side of Manhattan, in an area known as "Little Spain".

This neighborhood, centered around 14th St. between 7th Ave. and 8th Ave., was home to about 15,000 Spaniards and was the center of Spanish life in the Greater New York area. Because of the cigar industry, there were strong connections between the Spanish communities of Tampa and New York. The "Phoenix" would be docking at the wharves of the lower east side, where they would be met.

The Tampeños awoke early the next morning and prepared for their arrival. From the decks of the ship, land was now visible as they paralleled the coast of Long Island toward the Port of New York. Luciano had been in the bridge with Captain Winchester since 5:00 a.m., not wanting to miss a thing. Just before 8:00 a.m. the ship slowed noticeably as the harbor pilot climbed aboard.

As the "Phoenix" gradually turned to the right, the skyline of New York was clearly visible. The Tampeños could hardly believe their eyes. Awe turned to raw emotion as they caught their first view of the Statue of Liberty. They were grateful to be "home".