

Part three: El Barrio Candamo / The Candamo Neighborhood

Chapter Thirty-Eight

"Por favor, Fernando. Llame a María Messina. Rompí aguas, y los dolores vienen muy fuertes!"

Giuseppina, in her now perfect Spanish, asked Fernando to call María Messina because her water sac had broken and her pains were quickly becoming very strong. María Messina Greco's skills as a midwife had become legendary throughout Ybor City and West Tampa. Though now married to Luigi Greco, the midwife was usually referred to by her maiden name, "María Messina". Mrs. Priede, a good friend and next-door neighbor, helped Giuseppina to her bed.

Earlier in this afternoon of October 25, 1921, Giuseppina's labor pains had begun. Fernando, aware that his two daughters, Carmela and Pilar, had become frightened, had taken them to the Busto home across the street. Complicating the situation was the fact that a strong hurricane was approaching the Tampa area. It was now 6:00 pm and unusually dark because of the thick cloud cover. The noise of the howling winds practically drowned out the frantic knocking at

Fernando's front door. Mrs. Priede ran to the door and opened it. Mrs. Messina rushed in, her husband close behind her. Fighting the steadily increasing winds, Mr. Greco managed to close the door behind them. Concerned about the storm, the midwife had asked her husband to accompany her. Mrs. Priede led the midwife into Giuseppina's bedroom.

Fernando was holding Giuseppina's hand, comforting her against the worsening pain. Mrs. Messina began examining Giuseppina, asking her some questions. This was Giuseppina's fourth delivery and she told the midwife that the pains were much worse than the previous three. After further examination of her patient, María asked Mrs. Priede to watch her. The midwife gestured to Fernando to follow her into the dining room.

Fernando grew concerned as he noticed the intense look on Mrs. Messina's face. She told him that she was pretty sure they were dealing with a breech birth. Normally, in a situation such as this, Mrs. Messina would transfer the mother to a hospital, but the hurricane precluded this option. She made it clear to Fernando that she would do her very best, but Giuseppina's life was in grave danger. Fernando's sense of despair was balanced by his knowledge of Mrs. Messina's skills. Formally trained in midwifery at the University of Palermo, she also had many years of experience.

"María, tengo confianza en ti."

Fernando told María that he had confidence in her. She embraced him, as Fernando broke down in tears. He regained his composure and joined Mr. Greco, who was seated in the living room. As he was taking a seat, the house went dark. Fernando lit some oil lamps, taking some into the bedroom. He checked the telephone, and it was dead.

The hours that followed were emotionally excruciating. Along with Giuseppina's moans and screams, the incredibly strong winds were causing the house to shake. Fernando found himself wishing the winds would get even stronger so that the sounds of Giuseppina's suffering would be drowned out. Mr. Greco tried in vain to console Fernando, who had resigned himself to the fact that his wife would probably die. At approximately 4:00 am, the sounds of a baby crying replaced those of Giuseppina's suffering. Fernando rushed into the bedroom, anxiously anticipating what he would find there. Mrs. Priede was holding a baby wrapped in blankets. Giuseppina was groaning softly. Mrs. Messina pulled Fernando aside and told him that his baby son was fine, but that his wife was bleeding uncontrollably and needed to get to a hospital quickly.

The Spanish population in Tampa had increased substantially between 1898 and the present, now numbering in the many thousands. The Spanish community was so large and powerful that it was able to sustain two major Spanish societies, each providing healthcare in addition to social and other services. In 1902, the Centro Asturiano (Asturian Center), was created. Along with the existing Centro Español (Spanish Center), these two organizations were the focal points of Spanish life in Ybor City and West Tampa, and each had an excellent hospital. While a sense of competition had evolved between the two societies, Fernando and his family maintained membership in both clubs.

"María, somos miembros de ambos centros. Cuál de los hospitales recomiendas?"

Fernando had advised the midwife that he and his family were members of both Spanish centers and wanted to know which of the hospitals she recommended.

"Tenemos que ir al que queda más cerca. Vamos a La Clínica Covadonga del Centro Asturiano. Debiéramos llevar el bebé también, por si a caso."

María Messina replied that they needed to go to the closer of the two, which was the Clínica Covadonga ("Covadonga Clinic") of the Centro Asturiano. The Centro Español hospital, though larger and somewhat better equipped, was much further away. It was on Bayshore Blvd, south of downtown Tampa and very close to Hillsborough Bay.

Because of the hurricane, portions of the Centro Español hospital were probably under water. Mr. Greco suggested they take his car. By now the hurricane's winds, while still strong, had subsided somewhat.

Fernando carried Giuseppina, who was barely conscious, to the car. Luigi rushed ahead of them to open the door of the car. María and Mrs. Priede, holding the baby, followed. Mrs. Messina had managed to temporarily slow the bleeding by giving Giuseppina a special herbal tea of yarrow and cayenne. Fernando's mind was racing to the point where he felt numb and incapable of showing emotion. Were the girls OK at the Busto home? Would Giuseppina survive this ordeal? Could they even get to the clinic?

The Suárez home was on the northern fringes of Ybor City. The clinic was situated in Tampa Heights, which is normally about a ten- or fifteen-minute drive. As they drove west on 21st Ave., Fernando was in awe of the damage surrounding them. Luigi was having to evade debris in the street. It was still dark, but on occasion the car's headlights would illuminate houses. Many had lost their roofs, others

were virtually destroyed. Luckily, Fernando's house and those near him seemed to have escaped severe damage. A few blocks ahead, on the right, they passed the site of the new Centro Asturiano Hospital, still under construction. He couldn't help but think that Giuseppina would have a better chance of survival had this new facility been completed. The difference in distance may well make the difference between her living and dying.

As Fernando heard his new son begin to cry, he gently hugged Giuseppina; Gaitero was sobbing softly but uncontrollably.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Mr. Greco was driving as fast as possible, maneuvering to avoid fallen tree branches and other debris. As they turned onto Michigan Ave., Fernando noticed that Giuseppina was bleeding again. The car made a quick right turn onto Ola Ave. Giuseppina's eyes opened and she gave a barely audible groan. The Clínica Covadonga lay one block ahead, at the intersection of Ola Ave. and Euclid Ave.

As the car braked to a halt near the clinic's entrance, Mr. Greco immediately opened the rear door and assisted Fernando in carrying Giuseppina into the hospital. María Messina had wisely began

honking the car's horn in a frantic effort to alert the clinic staff of their presence. Within seconds several nurses emerged, carrying oil lamps.

"Por favor! Por favor! Mi esposa, por favor!"

"Please! Please! My wife, please!" Fernando's pleas echoed through the dimly lit and otherwise quiet lobby.

As the nurses were placing Giuseppina on a gurney, a man in a white coat ran toward them. Fernando recognized him as Dr. Jorge Trelles. Dr. Trelles had been in Tampa approximately ten years and had earned the reputation as one of the best doctors in Florida. María Messina stepped toward the doctor. As he examined Giuseppina she relayed information softly in his ear. The doctor turned toward Fernando.

"Esta mujer necesita una transfusión de sangre inmediatamente. El problema es que, por culpa del huracán, nuestro suministro de sangre está agotado. También, por falta de electricidad, no podemos hacer las pruebas para confirmar su tipo de sangre. Sin una transfusión, ella probablemente se muere. Que me disculpen mis palabras tan fuertes, pero tenemos muy poco tiempo."

Dr. Trelles was brutally frank. He told Fernando that Giuseppina needed a blood transfusion immediately; without it she would probably die. The problem was, because of the hurricane, their blood supply at the clinic was depleted. Additionally, without electricity they could not quickly perform the laboratory analyses to determine her blood type. He apologized for his strong words, but time was of the essence.

"Hace unos años que me dijeron que yo tengo el tipo de sangre que puedo dar a cualquiera persona. Fue cuando me trataron aquí mismo para una úlcera sangrante."

Fernando told Dr. Trelles that several years ago, this same clinic told him that he had a type of blood that he could donate to anyone. He explained that he was being treated for a bleeding ulcer at the time.

Dr. Trelles ordered the nurses to rush Giuseppina into a nearby treatment room. He grabbed Fernando by the arm and followed the gurney. Another nurse took the newborn baby into another room for examination. Within minutes Fernando was on a gurney adjacent to Giuseppina. As Dr. Trelles performed a physical examination of Giuseppina, the nurses frantically began the procedure of transferring Fernando's blood directly into Giuseppina. The doctor constantly monitored Giuseppina's heart rate and blood pressure.

After approximately 45 minutes, Giuseppina was softly calling for Fernando. He turned toward her.

"Estoy aquí mi amor, estoy aquí mismo."

Fernando, with tears in his eyes, responded, "I'm here my love, I'm right here."

Gaitero felt relieved when he noticed that the color of Giuseppina's face had returned to its normal pinkish white from the earlier ashen gray. He glanced toward Dr. Trelles, hoping for some indication of what was happening. Rather than speaking, the doctor smiled broadly and gently nodded his head in the affirmative. Fernando reached over and gently grasped Giuseppina's hand.

After about another 30 minutes, a nurse told Fernando that the procedure was over. As she was disconnecting him from the equipment, she explained that they would give Giuseppina some medications for pain and to help her sleep. She also recommended that Fernando remain on the gurney for a bit longer. Giuseppina was wheeled out of the room. Twenty minutes later, the same nurse returned with a tray containing a large mug of café con leche and toasted Cuban bread with butter; this was the panacea for all ailments in this part of Tampa.

Dr. Trelles entered the room and sat next to Fernando. He told him that, after a lot of rest and nourishment, Giuseppina would be fine. His newborn son was healthy, though crying for his mother, and for food. Both men chuckled. The doctor recommended some minor reparative surgery after a few days of recovery from her blood loss. After a moment of hesitation, Dr. Trelles mentioned that although Giuseppina was anatomically able to conceive again, he recommended against it. He suggested that while he was doing the surgery, he could sever her Fallopian tubes, making future conceptions impossible. The doctor reminded Fernando that this procedure was strongly frowned upon by the Catholic church. That being said, Dr. Trelles said he was able to, in good conscience, present an argument that a future pregnancy would endanger Giuseppina's life. Fernando, though a believer in God, was not as observant of Catholic doctrine as was his wife. He advised Dr. Trelles that he was in favor of the proposal, but that he would discuss it with Giuseppina. As the doctor rose to leave, he turned to Fernando.

"Gracias a Dios que tu recordastes de tu tipo de sangre, porque no teníamos ni tres minutos para perder. Para sentirme asegurado, después de la transfusión, miré en los expedientes para confirmar lo que me dijiste. Algunas veces las complicaciones de dar sangre incompatible se presentan unas horas después. Estamos bien, Fernando."

With a grin, Dr. Trelles told Fernando that it was a godsend that Fernando had remembered about his blood type, since they didn't even have a few minutes to spare. The doctor, concerned about delayed complications from mismatched blood, confessed that he had checked the hospital files, and Fernando was correct. Gaitero had type O blood and was considered a universal donor. Fernando had saved Giuseppina's life.

After finishing his coffee and toast, he asked a nurse if he could see Giuseppina and the baby. She led him down a hallway which was dimly lit from the first rays of the rising sun. Fernando had failed to notice that the hurricane had passed. A gentle rain and a light wind were the only reminders of their hellish night.

They entered a large ward which was occupied by approximately 15 women. The beds were separated by room dividers draped with white cloth. Halfway across the room, the nurse stopped and gestured to Fernando to enter the "room". Mrs. Priede, always the loyal friend, was in a chair next to the bed. She was gently stroking Giuseppina's hand. The new mother was fast asleep. When Mrs. Priede saw Fernando, she rose and gave him a warm hug, kissing each of his cheeks. As he returned the hug, they both wept quietly. She offered him her seat, but Fernando declined. Mrs. Priede was an older woman, and Fernando felt badly that she had been through such an

ordeal. He apologized profusely; she whispered that it was fine. Giuseppina was like a daughter to her.

Fernando asked for his son. Mrs. Priede explained that María and Mr. Greco had taken the child to a wet nurse in nearby West Tampa, across the Michigan Ave. bridge. Dr. Trelles had thoroughly examined the infant and all was well, except that he needed to start eating quickly. Giuseppina would not be able to nurse for a day or two. Mrs. Messina always kept a list of women who had recently given birth. Many of these women were willing to help out in situations such as this; some expected compensation, others did not. Fernando's expression changed to one of surprise and concern. Mrs. Priede assured him that all was well and that his son was in good hands.

The thoughtful nurse brought some coffee and toast for Fernando and Mrs. Priede, along with another chair for Fernando. As they enjoyed their food, they reminisced about Asturias. Like most of Fernando's neighbors, Mrs. Priede was from the concejo ("county") of Candamo. This wonderfully kind woman was from the town of Grullos, not far from Fernando's native San Román. They were briefly interrupted when Giuseppina opened her eyes, smiled at them, and reached out for Fernando's hand.

El Gaitero's faith in humanity had never been stronger, and café con leche never tasted better.

Chapter Forty

The birthday cake with four brightly burning candles attracted the attention of the young boy. As he reached out to grab the candles, Fernando quickly pulled back his son's hand, causing it to hit the edge of the cake.

"Luciano, cuidado, no te quemes!"

Fernando cautioned his son to be careful and not burn himself. Though only four years old, the child had already earned a reputation of being bright, curious and assertive. The guests, gathered around the table, broke out in laughter as Luciano, with a big smile, began eating the frosting. As the crowd began singing a Spanish version of "Happy Birthday", Fernando lifted his son in his arms and kissed his cheeks. Giuseppina, standing beside them, cleaned her son's hand. Fernando put Luciano down, and he ran off to play with his sisters and other children.

After the cake was served, Fernando followed his wife into the kitchen. As she washed the dishes, he put his arms around her from behind.

"Gracias por darme cuatro hijos preciosos. Todos estan con nosotros hoy."

Fernando had thanked Giuseppina for giving them four precious children. She turned and faced him. With tears in her eyes, she hugged her husband.

Fernando and Giuseppina rarely spoke of their third child. Born after their daughters, Carmela and Pilar, their first son was named Gaetano, in honor of Giuseppina's father. In Sicilian culture, the first son is normally named after his paternal grandfather, and the second son after the maternal grandfather. This custom is not the norm in Spain. Despite his ambivalent feelings about his father-in-law, Fernando suggested they honor him by naming their first son after Giuseppina's father. The elder Gaetano was extremely dedicated to his family. He had come to love Fernando as his own son. Tragically, baby Gaetano died in 1920, a victim of the influenza pandemic which ravaged the world from February, 1918 until April, 1920. He was just shy of his first birthday. Fernando and Giuseppina had considered naming their second son after his deceased brother, but Giuseppina felt it would cause the child to feel as though he were a "replacement",

not his own person. Always grateful to St. Lucy, they chose the name Luciano, with Gaetano as his middle name.

Giuseppina, wiping tears from her eyes, suggested that they join their guests. Fernando was grateful that she had found solace in her Catholic faith, though he knew that a piece of the family's heart was forever broken. Following Dr. Trelles' advice, Giuseppina, with Fernando's support, had a tubal ligation following Luciano's birth. Luciano Gaetano would be their last child.

The next day was a bright, sunny, and crisp day. It was Sunday morning, the day before Luciano's actual birthday. Fernando was dressed and waiting on the front porch for Giuseppina and the children. The Suarez house was on the southeast corner of 21st Ave. and Ybor St. It was a large, but not ostentatious house, the most admired in the neighborhood. This area, between 21st Ave. southward to 19th Ave., and between 15th St. and Ybor St. was known as El Barrio Candamo, "The Candamo Neighborhood". This was because virtually every house had been built and occupied by Spaniards who had emigrated to Tampa from the county of Candamo in the province of Asturias. Most families had their roots in one of the many small villages of Candamo, such as San Roman, Ventosa, Cuero, or Grullos. Eastward from the Suárez home was a largely Sicilian

neighborhood. Culturally, this combination was ideal for the Suárez family.

Fernando reminisced about the night Luciano was born. The hurricane had caused almost catastrophic damage to Tampa and the surrounding area. Hyde Park and downtown Tampa had a tidal surge with water rising to the third floor level; many homes were completely washed away. West Tampa and Ybor City, while sustaining significant damage, were spared the flooding. Luckily, these neighborhoods were on some of the highest ground in Tampa. The cigar factories were purposely placed in these areas for this reason. To maintain pliability and freshness, the tobacco leaves were stored in the lowest sub-basement areas of the factories, the most humid areas. Because high quality tobacco from Cuba was very expensive, it was important that the leaves be stored in areas that were not prone to flooding.

Fernando thought it ironic that some of the poorer areas of Tampa were spared, while the wealthier areas sustained the most damage.

Fernando's thoughts were interrupted by Giuseppina's voice.

"Bueno, Fernando. Estamos listos."

Giuseppina told Fernando that they were ready. Fernando felt grateful as he saw his family smiling, dressed in their Sunday best. Today was

a special Sunday. Normally Fernando would drive Giuseppina and the children to and from Mass at Sacred Heart Church. While they were at church, he would join friends at the Centro Asturiano clubhouse, a short drive from the church. Afterward, they would eat lunch at one of Ybor City's many Spanish cafes or restaurants. Today, Fernando would join them for Mass, in honor of Luciano's fourth birthday. Later in the afternoon, they would attend the dedication of the new Centro Asturiano Hospital.

This would be followed by a dinner and entertainment at the beautiful Centro Asturiano clubhouse and theater.

Fernando and his family joined Giuseppina's parents and other relatives in pews toward the front of the church. In 1905, the old wooden structure was replaced by a massive, beautiful stone building. To the left of the Licatas was a beautiful stained glass window bearing the Licata name; this was in recognition of their significant donation toward the building of the new church. Fernando would not allow himself to imagine the source of much of this money.

The impressive new Centro Asturiano Hospital was located on 21st Ave., between 12th St. and 13th St., only a few blocks from the Suárez home. After the dedication ceremony, attendees were offered a tour of the hospital. Located just off of the waiting room was a

beautiful chapel. Inside the chapel was a statue of Our Lady of Covadonga, the patron saint of Asturias. The former, smaller clinic for the Centro Asturiano, replaced by this new, modern hospital, had borne her name. For a complex variety of reasons, Covadonga had become a symbol of hope and pride among all Asturians, religious and atheistic alike. In recognition of the clinic having saved Giuseppina's life, Fernando and the Licata family had donated the funds for the chapel, as well as for hospital equipment. This new hospital would also serve members of the Italian Club, as the Spanish societies were the only ones to have hospitals.

Fernando asked the Licatas to watch Carmela, Pilar, and Luciano. The children continued down a hallway, escorted by their grandparents. Fernando took Giuseppina's hand and gently led her into the chapel. They sat in one of the five pews. They were the only people there. Still holding her hand, he turned to face her.

"Pina, nada puede reemplazar nuestro precioso bebé, Gaetano. El dolor de esa pérdida siempre será más allá de palabras, lo sé. Pero, en total, tenemos tanto en nuestras vidas por lo que debemos estar agradecidos. Nos conocimos, nos casamos, y tenemos tres hijos que son el centro de nuestras vidas. He tenido éxito en mi trabajo. Tenemos amigos buenísimos. Tus padres me han aceptados como otro de sus propios hijos. Aunque no soy muy religioso, puedo decir

que somos bendecidos. El futuro parece muy seguro, sin límites. Te quiero con todo mi corazón."

Fernando, feeling introspective, had shared with Giuseppina his assessment of their lives. He acknowledged that the pain of losing their precious baby, Gaetano, was beyond words, and would always be with them. In spite of that, he felt grateful for so much in their lives. They met, they married, and have three children that are the central part of their lives. Fernando has done well in his work and they have many good friends. Giuseppina's parents have accepted Fernando as another of their own children. In his opinion, their future looks secure and without limits. Though he was not religious, he felt that they were blessed.

Giuseppina gently squeezed Fernando's hand. He recognized this as an affirmation of his words.

Chapter Forty-One

"Señor Suárez, la junta directiva está organizando una reunión a las tres. Dicen que su presencia es obligatorio. Me parece que es sobre algo muy importante."

Fernando's secretary, Miss Valdés, advised him that the board of directors had just called for a meeting, and that his presence was obligatory. She elaborated that it seemed to her that it was about something extremely important. Fernando glanced at his watch. He had about forty-five minutes to wonder about what it might concern.

As the assistant to the general manager of Sanchez y Haya, Fernando was usually privy to matters of concern to the factory. He had noticed, over the past several days, that several of the owners and board members from New York had come to Tampa. Ignacio Haya died in 1906, twenty-three years earlier. After that, the factory grew quickly, along with Tampa's cigar industry in general. The factory, after several moves, was now located in a massive four story building on 13th Ave. and 21st St. The 1920s, quickly coming to a close, had been a decade of incredible prosperity in the United States. This certainly extended to Tampa, which had become the undisputed "Cigar Capital of the World", as often proclaimed in advertising material. As 1929 was drawing to a close, several cigar industry journals were forecasting that Tampa's 287 cigar factories were on track to set a new record. The forecast was for more than 500 million hand-rolled cigars in 1929, far exceeding that of Havana. Fernando, benefiting from his literacy, had personally prospered as well. After Mr. Castañeda retired, Fernando was promoted, replacing him. Fernando completed several courses in business practices and accounting. Several private

Spanish language business schools operated in or near Ybor City. Additionally, he had taken advantage of free English classes offered at the Centro Asturiano, and had attained a limited, but functional, proficiency in the language.

It was shortly before 3:00 pm and Fernando made his way to the meeting room. The room was filled to capacity, something Fernando had never seen. Only men were present. The air was so thick with cigar smoke that it was difficult to breathe. Though Fernando's livelihood depended upon cigars, he was not a smoker. He felt very uncomfortable, but declined to comment. It was particularly hot for late October, which only added to the problem. Mercifully, one of the few other non-smokers began opening some of the windows. Though Fernando knew many of those in the room, there were several unfamiliar faces. He assumed they were board members from New York.

Shortly after three o'clock, one of the gentlemen, Mr. Pons, called the meeting to order. He wasted no time in getting straight to the point. Early in this afternoon of October 29, 1929, the US stock market essentially collapsed. The downward trend had begun over a week prior, with daily declines causing widespread concern. Many of the directors present had varied business interests and had probably sustained major financial losses. For many, Sanchez y Haya, Inc.

represented a large portion of their portfolio. The purpose of the meeting was to announce that there would be immediate and drastic cost-cutting measures put into place at the factory. This would include a major reduction in the number of employees. Many of the men present also had investments in other cigar factories, both in Tampa and elsewhere. Cigars were considered an expensive and non-essential indulgence. The fear was that the cigar industry would be negatively affected early and significantly. It appeared that the boom years of the 1920s were about to come to a screeching halt.

"También, hemos notado que en Nueva York hace unos meses que hay interés, entre los obreros tabaqueros, en el comunismo. Los sindicatos están promoviendo ideas peligrosas. En el caso de los obreros tabaqueros, estas ideas vienen de los lectores. Recomiendo que empecemos el proceso de quitar estos agitadores de las fábricas de Tampa. Pueden ser la ruina de la industria, o lo que va quedar de la industria."

Mr. Pons had advised the others that there was concern about general labor unrest. He and others had noted that in New York, labor unions were promoting dangerous ideas, a flirtation with communism. Concern about the stock market had been circulating in that largest of our US cities for some time. Many activists felt that capitalism was beginning to fail, and attention was turning to the Russian revolution, a

mere 13 years prior. Mr. Pons, continuing, said that in the case of the tobacco workers, these ideas were strongly promoted via the lectores ("readers") in the factories. That, along with the fact that the cigar workers in Tampa were highly unionized, gave him cause for great concern. He recommended that they begin the process of removing the readers from the factories of Tampa.

Fernando was growing increasingly concerned. Mr. Pons was well known throughout Tampa as a reasonable man, one not prone to hyperbole. The desperation in his voice added to the already tense atmosphere. In addition to owning one of the larger cigar factories in Tampa, Mr. Pons also owned interests in many others, including some in New York. Because of the vast number of cigar factories in Tampa, there had emerged a consortium of owners and investors which wielded significant influence and power. This was the group in which Fernando found himself. As Mr. Pons finished talking, the room was filled with the clamor of a collective angst; many were shouting out questions, others walked out, clearly agitated. Fernando knew that any attempt at removing the readers would be met with strong resistance. They had become not only a source of news and entertainment, but a cultural fixture onto themselves. The workers had developed a special bond with the readers. Fernando felt that suddenly, his professional future was no longer secure, and that the world as he knew it was about to change.

Chapter Forty-Two

The Great Depression had begun that fateful afternoon of October 29, 1929, now known as "Black Tuesday". Two years into this cataclysmic financial collapse, every part of the American economy had been severely affected. The cigar industry was changing rapidly. Massive layoffs, though necessary, fueled disillusionment of the capitalist system. Labor unrest was increasing. The year 1929 had been a banner year for the industry, with Tampa's 287 factories hand-rolling almost 500 million cigars. However, hard times were ahead for the "Cigar Capital of the World".

"Gaitero, que sorpresa! No esperaba verte aquí."

Ignacio expressed surprise at seeing Fernando. The two men embraced warmly.

"Yo sé que hay riesgo en lo que hago. Pero esta son mi gente, y tengo que mostrar apoyo a su causa."

Fernando, without hesitation, replied that he knew there was a risk in what he was doing. However, these are "his people", and he had to show support for their cause.

Fernando and Ignacio joined the throngs of people filing into the magnificent theater of the Centro Asturiano clubhouse. Many people approached Fernando, hugging him and thanking him for his support. The palatial building, at the southeast corner of Nebraska and Palm Avenues, was considered to be among Tampa's most impressive structures. The theater, ranked among the finest in all of Florida, had a capacity of approximately 1,100 people. On this October evening in 1931, it was filled beyond its seating capacity.

Several months prior, the cigar workers' union had called for a general strike. Central among the many issues was the subject of the "lectores" or readers. Factory owners had grown concerned that the readers were "poisoning" the minds of the workers by reading progressive, left-leaning newspapers and works of literature. The factory owners were barring the readers from the factories. Following peaceful demonstrations, many factories had locked out their workers, offering their jobs back at substantially lower wages. Negotiations were progressing poorly. The union leaders had called for a general meeting at the Centro Asturiano theater.

Fernando knew that as a manager, he was expected to support the factory owners. After much introspection, he decided that his loyalty

lay with the workers. He fully expected to lose his job, a price he was willing to pay.

"Zapato, hace años que no trabajas como tabaquero, y ahora es el dueño de un negocio privado. También me quedo sorprendido verte aquí."

As the two men were taking their seats, Fernando similarly expressed surprise at seeing Ignacio at the strike meeting. It had been years since Ignacio stopped working as a cigar maker. A few years after Fernando married, Ignacio married Sofia Faedo. Her family had a small dairy farm in the northwest part of West Tampa. The demand for dairy products had grown rapidly along with Tampa's population. Ignacio and Sofia had successfully built her family's business into one of the larger and better-known dairy farms in the Tampa area.

"Gaitero, como tú, mi corazón todavía queda con esta comunidad. También, el éxito de mi lechería depende mucho que la gente puedan comprar mis productos. También, es nuestro elemento.....recordamos de dónde vinimos, verdad?"

Ignacio told Fernando that his heart still remained with the community of the workers. He felt it was their basic element, remembering from where they came. On a more pragmatic level, he also reminded

Fernando that the success of his dairy business depended on the ability of people to buy his products. He had seen proof that a prosperous middle class was very good for private businesses.

There was a long table on the stage. Sitting at the table were four men and one woman. The first person to speak was Belarmino Pedroso. Though visibly older, his passion for, and dedication to, his struggle for the common person was more evident than ever.

"Al pueblo tampeño, le digo que ahora es el momento de unirse contra las fuerzas que quieren quitarles sus derechos. Su derecho a ganar un salario con el que pueda vivir de una manera decente. Su derecho a trabajar en condiciones humanas. Su derecho a escuchar a personas o ideas cuyos objetivos son darle una manera de mejorar su vida."

Belarmino appealed to the workers of Tampa to unite against those forces that were trying to take away their rights. He spoke of the rights to a decent wage and humane working conditions. Above all, he championed the right to listen to any person or idea, even those that conflicted with his political opinions. As he concluded, the audience rose to their feet in thunderous applause.

As the next speaker rose and approached the dais, the audience, still standing, began shouting words of adulation and praise. The older gentleman about to speak was Armando Nogueira Yglesias, the reader who had translated for Fernando the day he first arrived at Port Tampa. Now in his late 60s, he was no longer working as a reader. He was the owner and publisher of a progressive newspaper, "El Obrero Iluminado" ("The Enlightened Worker"). This newspaper was well respected by union leaders across the country, and local politicians vied for its endorsement during elections.

Armando spoke passionately and eloquently about the right of the people to be informed and educated. He warned that when ideas and free speech become the enemy, dictatorships can take hold. He cautioned that the elimination of the factory readers was about more than losing a form of entertainment. It was an attempt to deprive workers of an education, a form of control.

The evening ended with a frank and pessimistic assessment of what lay ahead. The reality was that the strike was going the way of the factory owners. Workers were desperate, as their savings were depleted. Jobs in other industries were all but nonexistent. Emergency assistance funds, such as those offered by the Centro Asturiano, were rapidly being spent. While the spirit of cooperation was impressive, it was probably not going to be enough to win the strike. The cigar

industry in Tampa was forever changed. Opportunity and security were no longer limitless.

As Fernando and Ignacio walked to the parking area, Ignacio reminded Fernando that his son's birthday celebration was scheduled for the next Sunday afternoon at his home. Ignacio and Sofia had two sons and one daughter. Rafael, their youngest child, was a bit older than Luciano. Like their fathers, the two boys were very close friends. Over the years, the special bond between Fernando and Ignacio had extended to their families as well.

"Hijos, vamos! Estamos un poco tarde. Zapato y la familia nos esperan!"

Fernando, always punctual, asked his kids to hurry up. They were running a bit late for Rafael's birthday celebration. They piled into the car, holding trays of Spanish and Sicilian food. Giuseppina, an excellent cook, had become legendary for being a guest that never arrives empty-handed.

Soon after crossing the Michigan Ave. bridge, Fernando turned right on Armenia Ave. This was a newer area of West Tampa, and known as "Los Cien" ("The One Hundred"). The name was taken from the fact that several of the large cigar factories in the area had built one

hundred homes and then offered them at cost to their workers. This was done as an incentive to draw and keep workers. They employed a lottery system to decide who could make a purchase, since the demand exceeded the supply. Large factories such as Gracia y Vega, Celestino Vega, Andrés Díaz, and Calixto Lopez were the dominant employers in this northernmost part of West Tampa. Soon they were headed west on Tampa Bay Blvd. After a few blocks, just past Tampa Bay Blvd. elementary school, the paved road gave way to sand and gravel. They rolled up their windows to avoid the dust. After a few more blocks, the roadway ended. Just in front of them was a large wooden house surrounded by beautiful live oak trees. Many horse-drawn wagons and automobiles were parked on either side of the gate. Beyond the house were large fields with what appeared to be an infinite number of cows grazing. The unmistakable combination of smells unique to dairy farms instantly transported Fernando back to his native Candamo, Asturias. To the left of a large, opened gate was a sign that read "Sunny South Dairy". As would frequently happen, Fernando was reminded of how he, Ignacio, and so many other immigrants had achieved the "American Dream". Because of recent events, he was no longer sure of how enduring this dream would be.

After lunch and the traditional birthday cake, Fernando and several other men entertained most of the guests with traditional Galician and Asturian bagpipe songs. Several couples performed the traditional jig

dances of these northern Spanish provinces. Called "jotas", they're lively Irish-like dances popular at festivals and parties. The children and younger adults had gone inside the house and were listening to jazz and a new type of American music called "swing" or "big band".

Following the music and dancing, most of the men retreated to play dominoes or cards, and discuss politics. The women were helping Sofia in the kitchen. A few months prior, Spain had formed a democratically-elected Republic, a staunch rejection of the monarchy and the Catholic Church. Believing a "new Spain" was emerging, many of the conversations were focused on the possibility of returning to their beloved homeland. Fernando and Ignacio were seated at a table, no one else was with them.

"Bueno, Zapato. Lo que yo esperaba, ocurrió. Hace dos días que me botaron de mi trabajo. Me dijeron que mi presencia en la reunión de la huelga la otra noche es el razón."

Fernando confessed to Ignacio that he was fired from his job at Sanchez y Haya two days prior. What he had predicted had, indeed, happened.

"Vaya, hombre. Que vas a hacer? Quieres trabajar aquí en la lechería hasta que encuentras algo mejor? La buena cosa es que, aunque hay la crisis, la gente todavía tienen que comer."

Zapato, shaken by the news, wondered what Fernando was going to do. He offered him a job at the dairy until he could find something better. Ignacio commented that although there was an ongoing economic depression, people still had to eat.

Fernando hesitatingly replied that the Licata family had offered him a position with the family business, and that he had accepted the offer. There was an agreement that Fernando would not get directly involved in any activity that was untoward, or illegal. Gaetano and his sons agreed, and Fernando would become the office manager and accountant at Licata's Fruits and Vegetables.