

Acclaim for Mario Escobar

“Escobar’s latest (after *Auschwitz Lullaby*, 2018) is a meticulously researched story, recreating actual experiences of the 460 Spanish children who were sent to Morelia, Mexico in 1937. Devastating, enlightening, and passionately told, Escobar’s novel shines a light on the experiences of the victims of war, and makes a case against those who would use violence to gain power. Although painful events in the story make it hard to read at times, the book gives a voice to so many whose stories are often overlooked, while inspiring the reader to never give way to fear or let go of one’s humanity.”

—BOOKLIST, STARRED REVIEW, ON *REMEMBER ME*

“In *The Librarian of Saint-Malo*, Escobar brings us another poignant tale of sacrifice, love, and loss amidst the pain of war. The seaside town of Saint-Malo comes to life in rich detail and complexity under German occupation, as do the books—full of great ideas and the best of humanity—the young librarian seeks to save. This sweeping story gives us a glimpse into the past with a firm eye towards hope in our future.”

—KATHERINE REAY, BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
THE PRINTED LETTER BOOKSHOP

“Luminous and beautifully researched, *Remember Me* is a study of displacement, belonging, compassion, and forged family amidst a heart-wrenching escape from the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War. A strong sense of place and the excavation of a little known part of history are reverently handled in a narrative both urgent and romantic. Fans of Arturo Pérez-Reverte, Chanel Cleeton, and Lisa Wingate will be mesmerized.”

—RACHEL McMILLAN, AUTHOR OF *THE LONDON RESTORATION*

“An exciting and moving novel.”

—PEOPLE EN ESPAÑOL ON *RECUÉRDAME*

“Escobar highlights the tempestuous, uplifting story of two Jewish brothers who cross Nazi-occupied France in hope of reuniting with their parents in this excellent tale . . . Among the brutality and despair that follows in the wake of the Nazis’ rampage through France, Escobar uncovers hope, heart, and faith in humanity.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY ON *CHILDREN OF THE STARS*

“A poignant telling of the tragedies of war and the sacrificing kindness of others seen through the innocent eyes of children.”

—J’NELL CIESIELSKI, AUTHOR OF *THE SOCIASLITE*, ON *CHILDREN OF THE STARS*

“*Auschwitz Lullaby* grabbed my heart and drew me in. A great choice for readers of historical fiction.”

—IRMA JOUBERT, AUTHOR OF *THE GIRL FROM THE TRAIN*

“Based on historical events, *Auschwitz Lullaby* is a deeply moving and harrowing story of love and commitment.”

—HISTORICAL NOVELS REVIEW

Remember Me

Also by Mario Escobar

Auschwitz Lullaby

Children of the Stars

The Librarian of Saint-Malo

Remember Me

A Spanish Civil War Novel

MARIO ESCOBAR



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

Remember Me

English Translation © 2020 Thomas Nelson

Recuérdame

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Concerning the song in chapter 6: There's no traceable author though several singers have covered it. It was a popular protest/rallying song for Madrid during the siege.

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To my children, who are around the age of the Children of Morelia; may life never lead them into exile, and if it does, may they be as brave as the Republican children during the Spanish Civil War.

*To Elisabeth, my beloved wife,
my mother country, my flag.*

To my grandmother, Ponciana, and my grandfather, Tomás, who endured the ravages of war and the hatred between brothers and sisters.

To my mother, Amparo, who shed countless tears for lost dreams and sowed stars in my heart.

I weep because, since I'm fully a Spaniard and fully a Mexican, I feel like, when it's all said and done, I've got no identity at all.

Emeterio Payá Valera, one of the Morelia children

A Note from the Author

The Spanish Civil War was a river of tears and blood. All war is terrible, of course, but when it occurs between brothers, the violent conflict becomes tragedy. The wounds stay open for decades and never fully scar over. There are no just wars! The victims were the same as always: the civilian population, the bystanders who never wanted to fight yet were obliged to pay with their lives or lose their loved ones in the cruel barbarity of the conflict that was a training ground for World War II.

The coup d'état of July 17, 1936, which led to a long and brutal war, started off like a party. That is how the Spanish poet Juan Ramón Jiménez described it in a letter that sought to raise support for the Republic's cause. The letter was read aloud in New York that same summer:

I've seen it with my own eyes: During these first months of the war, Madrid has been a tragic, crazed party. The jubilation,

A Note from the Author

a strange joy of a bloody faith, rebounded on all sides; it was the joy of being convinced, the joy of willpower, the joy of a favorable destiny—or not.¹

The party came to an abrupt end as the people learned from the harsh lessons of bombs and bullets that what was being ripped away was the future.

Antonio Machado realized at once that the civil war was much more than a conflict between Spaniards. He said:

The civil war, so ethically unequal but, in the end, between Spaniards, ended a few months ago. Spain has been sold abroad by men who cannot be called Spaniards . . . Such that now there is nothing but a Spain invaded . . . by foreign greed.²

For me, writing this book has been a long, difficult, internal, and external journey. The civil war has marked my life since childhood. My parents were children during the war, and my grandparents endured great hardships throughout the conflict, especially my mother's parents. My grandfather, Tomás Golderos, fought and went missing on the front, leaving behind four children and a wife who suffered the harsh Francoist repression. The conflict's fallout made such a big impact on me when I was younger that every year on Christmas Eve I would pray that Spain would never experience another civil war.

Remember Me is the story of three siblings who are sent to Mexico in hopes of being reunited with their parents after the war

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- 1 Juan Ramón Jiménez, quoted by Antonio Machado in his prologue from 1937 to J.R. Jiménez, *Guerra en España. Prosa y verso (1936-1954)*, rev. and expanded, Madrid, Point de Lunettes, 2009, 7. (Translated from original Spanish.)
 - 2 Antonio Machado, *La Guerra. Escritos: 1936-39*. Ed. por Julio Rodríguez Puértolas y Gerardo Pérez Herrero. Madrid: Emiliano Escolar Editor, 1983. (Translated from original Spanish.)

A Note from the Author

and who must face the dangerous journey of exile. It is the story of thousands of children who left and would never return either to their homeland or to their homes, to the true mother country of family. And it is the story of children who found themselves lost and alone in the world, with no one to embrace them or point out the way they should go.

Remember Me is the collective story of the Children of Morelia. Some 460 children between the ages of four and seventeen were sent from Spain to Mexico in an attempt to escape the terrible ravages of the war. The children traveled under very difficult circumstances to Veracruz in the summer of 1937. The Ibero-American Committee for Aid to the Spanish Peoples oversaw the logistics of getting the children out of the country. Carmela Gil de Vázquez and Amalia Solórzano, the wife of President Cárdenas, were the driving force behind the effort.

The adventures of Marco, Isabel, and Ana Alcalde are of course a tribute to the Children of Morelia, but they are ultimately a tribute to all the children of the Spanish Civil War who were sent to safety in exile in the Soviet Union, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, Argentina, and Chile. They had to leave behind what they loved most—their parents—and, in many cases, they were exiled forever.

My hope is that *Remember Me* pays homage to the exiles of all wars—to those who have lost their homelands to the brutality of human violence.

Prologue

Madrid

June 20, 1975

My hands shook with the letter I had just received, postmarked from Mexico. The memories of the sad, exciting journey of my childhood returned to remind me that, at the end of the day, I belonged nowhere. I wiped my tears with my shirttail and studied the sender's name: María Soledad de la Cruz. That girl had stolen my heart nearly forty years earlier. For a long time I had tried to convince myself I was a Spaniard, that my time in Mexico had been a kind of daydream. I had awoken from that dream as abruptly as the bombs had started falling over Madrid in the summer of 1937. I had gotten used to the black-and-white city Franco's followers ran like military barracks for nearly forty years—so used to it all that the memories of life in Veracruz, Mexico City, and Morelia were no more than distant, imagined ghosts. They were Don Quixote's

Prologue

loquacious deathbed visions after the entrance to his library had been sealed shut. I had spent the intervening years remaking my life, and I had a job I loved. I had inherited my father's printing press. For so many of us, the civil war had taken health, property, and existence itself. For me, it had also ripped away the future.

I thought about María Soledad de la Cruz's eyes, which still shone out bright from those eclipsed years. They were so black the light disappeared in her pupils but came back out through her thick lips in the first stolen kiss there in Cointzio.

I opened the envelope and read the short letter with a lump in my throat. Then I looked at the small black-and-white photo hidden in the mustard-yellow envelope. It was the same girl with black braids and pearls for teeth, the one who had taken up shop in my heart and who reminded me yet again that, being fully Spaniard and fully Mexican, I could lay claim to no homeland. I still could not forget it. It was my bounden duty to remember, like my mother told me that day in Bordeaux, the last day of my old life and the first of a journey I never could have imagined.

Part 1

Bombs All Around

Chapter 1

The Search

Madrid

November 14, 1934

For children, war feels like a game at first. They have no idea that behind the gunshots and uniforms, the marches and rallying songs, death clings like mud to shoes and leaves footprints of blood and flesh, forever marking the lives of whoever falls into its infernal clutch.

The Spanish Civil War began long before soldiers took up arms on July 17, 1936. At least it had begun for us, the children of poverty and misery.

First thing that morning, I heard someone beating on the door of our house in the La Latina neighborhood. We were still in bed: my two sisters and I, my parents, and the girl who watched us while my

mother worked in the theater. Instinctively, my sisters and I ran to our parents' room. Isabel, with her white cotton nightgown, trembled and shrieked as she clung to our mother. Ana sobbed in my arms while our father masked his fear behind a smile and told us nothing was wrong.

María Zapata, the girl who helped around the house, also started to cry as she followed my father like a scared puppy to the door. The rest of us hunkered down in the main bedroom, but when I heard the shouting and skirmish in the hallway, I left my little sister in our mother's lap and headed for the door without a second thought. While not particularly brave, I wanted to help my father. I was still young enough that my dad was the invincible, mythic hero I longed to become. I stood trembling at the doorway of the small room we called the study, which was just a six-by-nine-foot room stuffed with books and papers. The walls were caving in and the shelves bowed, but to me that room was the hallowed halls of wisdom. However, right then it felt like the entrance to hell itself. Papers flew about as the gloved hands of the Social Brigade tore brightly colored spines from books yanked off the shelves. Nearly all the books were from Editorial Cervantes, a publishing house in Barcelona for which my father's printing press sometimes did work. My father raised his hands in despair, each ripped spine and crumpled page falling like the lash of a whip on his back.

"We don't have any banned books here!" My father's strangled shout interrupted the chaos of military boots and police barking. The sergeant turned and punched him square in the mouth. Blood gushed from my father's busted lip, and I, horrified, saw a terrified look on the face of the man I had always believed to be the bravest soul on earth.

"You piece of red trash! We know you're one of the leaders of the printers' union! On October fifth your people attacked the State

Remember Me

Department, and you're part of the Revolutionary Socialist Committee. Where are the books? We want the union's papers and the names of everyone on the committee!"

The sergeant was shaking my father, who, in his silly striped pajamas, looked like a marionette in the man's hands. I knew the books they were talking about were not in the study. A few days before I had helped my father hide them in the dovecote on the roof of our building.

"I'm an honest worker and loyal to the Republic," my father answered, more calmly than I expected. His collar and the front part of his shirt were red with his blood, but his eyes had recovered the courage that always guided his steps.

Yet he doubled over when the sergeant punched him hard in the stomach. The officer shoved him, and the guards fell upon him with their nightsticks. My dad sank to the floor, screaming and flailing his arms like a drowning man grasping for oxygen at the bottom of the ocean.

"Boy, come here!" the sergeant barked at me, and for the first time, I looked him full in the face. He was like a rabid dog with spittle flying from his mouth. His thick, black mustache made him look even wilder. He grabbed my shirt and yanked me out of the study to the living room and threw me into a chair. I landed abruptly, and the man crouched down to get his face right in front of mine.

"Look, kid, your daddy is a red, a communist, an enemy of peace and order. If you tell us where the papers are, nothing bad will happen. But if you lie to us, you and your sisters will end up in the Sacred Heart Orphanage. Do you want them to shave your mother's hair and lock her up in the prison of Ventas?"

"No, sir," I answered. My voice shook, and I nearly wet myself from fright.

"Then come out with it before my patience runs out," he spluttered, more foam gathering at the corners of his mouth.

“These are all the books my dad has. He’s a printer, you know . . . That’s why we have so many.”

The sergeant lifted me up by the folds of my shirt and shook me with violence. My feet flailed aimlessly in the air until he dropped me onto the floor. Then he turned and raged back to the study with great strides.

“Let’s go! We’re taking the adults with us!” he snarled.

“What do we do with the kids?” one of the guards asked.

“The orphanage. Let them rot with the lice and bedbugs.”

I ran to the door of the living room. One of the police officers was dragging my mother out of the bedroom, and I threw myself upon him, grabbed his neck, and bit one of his ears. Bellowing, the officer let go of my mother and tried to shake me off.

“Marco, please!” my mother yelled, terrified at seeing me on the police officer. The officer wrestled me off and threw me against the wall. He pulled out his nightstick and raised it to strike, but my mother grabbed his arm. “Please, he’s just a child. Don’t hurt him,” she begged through her tears.

The sergeant appeared in the hallway. Two of his men were hauling my father off. His face, nearly purple, was covered with blood, his eyes swollen. He groaned in pain. My little sisters ran to him, but the sergeant shoved them back. Moving forward with the rest of the group, he called out, “Grab the brat!” But before the other guards could reach for me, I opened the door to the hallway and tore down the stairs.

The last thing I heard as I raced away was the voice of one of the policemen and my mother’s screams as they flooded the entry stairway. Her voice swelled like thunder and lightning until it broke into muffled sobbing. Pain seared my chest as I raced down the street. I did not stop until I reached the Plaza Mayor, where the street cleaners were hosing off the cobblestones. I leaned against one of the columns in the plaza and wept bitterly.

Remember Me

The war started a long time before 1936. By then it was already coursing deep in the blood of the entire nation. That day I understood that people can be right and still lose, that courage is not enough to defeat evil, and that the strength of weapons destroys the soul of humanity.

Chapter 2

María Zapata

Madrid

November 14, 1934

I don't remember how long I walked. I was cold, but I hadn't even noticed I was wearing my pajamas and some old canvas shoes. I felt like I was in a nightmare I couldn't wake up from. The scenes I had just witnessed at home repeated themselves endlessly before my eyes: my mother screaming, my sisters clinging to her nightgown and crying, my father's lip split open, the blood dripping down his stubbled chin. I couldn't shake from my mind the image of the policemen with their nightsticks and the sergeant who threatened to take us to an orphanage. When I neared University City, I finally noticed where I was. It was my first time in the northwest corner of Madrid, but I had heard about the redbrick buildings and well-tended lawns. I raised

my eyes and studied the snowcapped mountains in the distance. They seemed close enough to reach out and touch, yet somehow so far away, like the peace that had reigned in my home until that morning. I slumped down beneath a statue of a horse. My head dropped to the side, and I fell fast asleep.

I have no idea how much time passed like that before a female voice and a soft hand woke me. “What are you doing here? Are you all right? Are you lost?”

Just inches from my dirty, tearstained frame, a girl with green eyes and a lovely oval face was smiling. I had no idea how to respond. Of course I was not all right. I was terrified and half crazed, but at my age it wasn’t easy to express my feelings, much less explain them.

“Do you want me to walk you home?” she asked. “Where do you live?”

A group of girls was waiting for her a few yards away. A couple of them told her to come back and to leave me alone. “Sorry, I can’t just leave him here,” she called back to them. Her waist was barely covered by a short purple jacket, and her loose hair streamed around her face but could not hide her beauty. “I’m Rosa,” she said. “Rosa Chamorro. What’s your name?”

I looked up at her and started to cry. It felt like a cowardly thing to do, just like it was cowardly to run away and leave my family in the hands of the savage police, but I couldn’t help it. Tears are sometimes a child’s only option for relief. As we grow up, crying becomes taboo. We’re told not to show our weaknesses but, instead, to endure pain, loss, and sadness without letting tears wash through our hearts and clear away whatever is constricting our souls.

The girl helped me up with her left hand. In her right, she carried a notebook and a pair of black gloves. Her friends went on, exasperated with her, and she and I walked a mile or so back toward central Madrid.

“I’ll get your trolley ticket, but you have to tell me where you live. Your parents are probably worried about you.”

The pain in my chest intensified at the mention of my parents, but I held myself together. In a voice raspy from crying, I told her I lived in La Latina neighborhood, near the San Ildefonso school.

She nodded. “I live . . . well, not close to there, but it’s not out of the way.”

We waited at the busy stop crawling with college students. In my neighborhood there were no college students. Laborers’ children learned a trade, and at twelve, thirteen, or fourteen we were apprenticed out to start helping support the family.

As I looked at the law textbook pressed against the girl’s notebook, someone approached. He wore a striped suit, like a gangster in the movies, with his hair greased back and a short little mustache that contrasted with his childish facial features.

“What are you doing with this rapscallion?” he asked, nodding to me. “I didn’t know you were babysitting vagabonds these days.”

“He’s not a vagabond. He’s a lost child.”

We got on the trolley, and the guy turned his nose up at me as if he were dealing with a pest. He positioned himself next to Rosa and continued, “He’ll be the son of some red, I just know it. The police are flushing out everyone who participated in the strike last month. These people are destroying Spain. They’re like rats. We’ve got to get rid of them before they become a plague.”

The girl pursed her lips. “It’s none of your business, Fernandito,” she said. Fernandito was one of her older brother’s friends. A diehard Falangist, he was repeating his first-year classes for the third time.

“Hey, but you’re my friend’s sister, and I’ve got to protect you from riffraff. It’s not a good idea for you to be traveling alone on the trolley. It’ll be dark before long, and Madrid is crawling with crooks and criminals.”

Rosa sniffed. “I can watch out for myself. I don’t need you to protect me from anything.”

Fernandito rolled his eyes. “Girls these days think they’re so independent. You can go to college and wear your little miniskirts, but things are about to change. This sacrilegious, atheistic Republic won’t last long,” he said, regurgitating what he had learned in meetings with José Antonio Primo de Rivera, a silver spoon Andalusian who tried to copy Benito Mussolini’s fascist ideas but had been upstaged by a certain Austrian named Adolf Hitler.

My father would tell me about all of these things after listening to the radio in the afternoons after work. I loved listening to him. Huddled up next to him on the rug, it was the only time in the day when we were alone together. Then he would stretch out in our one shabby recliner and motion for me to crawl up next to him. I loved resting my head on his chest and hearing his heartbeat while the radio played songs by Gardel, one of my dad’s favorites. My mother listened to the radio in the mornings, but she preferred Imperio Argentina.

Fernandito gave me a shove right as we rounded a curve, and I nearly fell out of the trolley.

“Leave him alone!” Rosa snapped.

A man in a worker’s uniform turned and pierced Fernandito with a cold stare. “This guy bothering you?” he asked Rosa.

Fernandito dropped his thuggish posture and skulked away to another part of the trolley.

The trolley reached Plaza de España and then kept going along Gran Vía to Plaza del Callao.

“I know my way from here,” I told the girl when the trolley paused in front of the Callao theater.

“Don’t worry. It’s still pretty early, so I can go with you.” We walked along Preciados Street, but she stopped in front of Café Varela. “Let’s go in and get a bite. I imagine you haven’t eaten all day.”

Remember Me

We went in, and the warmth brought me back to myself after all day on the cold street. People stared at us. No one failed to notice that a kid in dirty pajamas was spending time with a pretty college girl, though it was hard to say which stood out more in that provincial Madrid environment.

A waiter wearing a white jacket more decorated in braids than an army general's greeted us ruefully, not wanting his other tables to be disturbed by our presence. Interest waned, however, and within a few minutes the restaurant's customers had returned to their monotonous lives and I was eating a delicious, steaming steak sandwich.

"I take it you were hungry?" Rosa asked, bathing me in the angelic glow of her smile.

I nodded, my mouth full. "Thank you for everything."

"Don't mention it. Sometimes a chance meeting is a gift from heaven, if you know what I mean."

I did not know what she meant. The only heaven my parents believed in was the one that could be "stormed." I knew that phrase from the philosopher Karl Marx because my dad had used it once when the neighborhood priest upbraided him on his way home from work for not taking us to church.

"I don't know what's happened to you," she said, "but I assume it was something terrible. Leaving your house in your nightclothes and wandering all that way . . ."

I wanted to trust her, but my father had told me we could never trust anyone outside our class. I still had not learned that sometimes children have to show the way when their parents get turned around.

"The police came and took my parents. They were looking for some papers because my father is a printer. I mean, he has a little workshop near the house. My mom is an actress. She works for the Jacinto Guerrero troupe."

"I've never been to the theater," Rosa said. "My father's modern,

but not *that* modern. He lets me go to the movies some Sundays, but doesn't the playwright you're talking about do musicals and revues?"

I nodded and wiped some of the steak grease off my chin. "I've been a lot. My mom takes us to the rehearsals and sometimes there are snacks. The actors are really picky, and there's always chocolates and treats."

Rosa took the napkin and cleaned off the rest of my face, then paid for the meal. It was even colder out on the street when we went back out, the day darkened by gray clouds that threatened snow.

"Brrrr!" she squealed. Then she opened her coat and used it to shelter us both as much as she could.

Before long we were at the entrance to the building where my family had lived until that morning. Few people were out in the streets, and I hesitated, unsure of what to do. The police had taken my parents and probably my sisters too.

"It's been nice to meet you, but you still haven't told me your name," Rosa said.

"Marco Alcalde, at your service," I answered, just as my mother had taught me.

She reached out her hand and shook mine, fragile and cold. "I hope things work out for you, Marco. I'm going to leave you with a quote. I memorize one every day, to help me learn how to live. People think that existence is just one big improvisation, but really it's a rehearsal. The phrase is from the philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset: *Loyalty is the shortest path between two hearts.*"

Rosa turned and walked back to Mayor Street, and I stared after her retreating figure. She had kept the pain and terror at bay and helped me do something other than obsess about what had happened that morning, but as I walked up the dark stairs, my mind replayed it all again. I was trembling as I reached the landing at our door, more from fear than from cold. With not even a whisper of hope,

I knocked. I kept knocking, then pounded the door in desperation. Our apartment was my refuge—the thing that separated me from the savage world outside. Finally, I heard footsteps. Someone opened the peephole, but it was totally dark where I was on the landing.

“Who is it?” the nervous voice of María Zapata asked.

“It’s me!” I answered, surprised and also hopeful. Perhaps I was not wholly alone after all.

María timidly opened the door, as if she could not actually believe it was me. She pulled me to her in a tight embrace and caressed my hair. “Oh, my boy, I was worried sick for you!” She brought me inside, heated water in a big pot for my bath, and gave me clean clothes.

“Have you eaten?” she asked. “The sergeant let me keep your sisters here, but they’re asleep. The poor dears have had a terrible time of it today. I didn’t take Isabel to school because I was too afraid. They’ve whimpered in bed all day, like the grief has gotten all balled up in their throats and can’t move an inch.”

That day I learned two lessons I will never forget: No matter how bad things get, someone is always willing to lend a hand; and sometimes you must lie to the villains. My teachers had always taught me that lies limp along for a short time while the truth takes long, confident strides. But I had to protect my family, the most important thing in the world to me. And my father had already warned me that the people in charge of keeping the peace were often the lackeys of the powerful.

Chapter 3

Victory

Madrid

July 18, 1936

I remember it was a Saturday. I didn't usually keep track of the days of the week when we were off school and had nothing to do but laze about and play outside. A year and a half had passed since the terrifying morning when the sergeant hauled our parents away. For a full week my sisters and I hunkered down in fear with María Zapata, and then one day, with no forewarning, our parents appeared at the door. They had been released without explanation. Their bodies healed, and we slowly returned to our normal routines as a family, though we never forgot that violation of our peace.

I had turned thirteen a few weeks before that day in July 1936, and my parents faced the dilemma of wanting me to stay in school

yet not having the funds to pay for it. They could perhaps ask for help from the party, as it was always in need of lawyers and other professionals, or perhaps I could be apprenticed to Dad's workshop once summer was over. My mother wanted me to continue my studies. She was as committed to the party as my father, but she was unwilling to reject her troupe director's offer to pay for my first semester of high school. Mom always said that pride was a luxury poor people couldn't afford. On the other hand, my father surveyed my sisters' worn-out shoes and the scant food he managed to bring home and preferred to set me up at the printing press so I could learn a trade or to take me to work sites to learn construction, which earned decent wages.

The heat was unbearable that summer in Madrid. The trolleys sped along Mayor Street, and people meandered, trying to stay out of the sun in the hottest hours of the day. There was a war going on, but no one seemed too concerned, perhaps because bloody party infighting had been happening for so long. On July 14 the funeral of the leader of the extreme right, José Calvo Sotelo, had been held, and tensions were as high as the summer temperatures.

Just a few weeks before, the city had smelled of winter's hot chocolate and churros. Now the aromas of frying lamb intestines—our beloved *gallinejas* and *entresijos*—and of Spanish tortillas and freshly sliced hams filled the streets. Older men sat and lingered over conversation at their customary cafés. They rambled about a little girl who had been run over the day before; the actress Tina de Jarque, star of the Teatro de la Zarzuela, and her fine pair of legs; and the murder of “Pepe el de los perros,” a young man found dead on the road between Húmera and Pozuelo. Pious women gathered at the doors of the church of Jesús de Medinaceli to ask for three wishes. There were no strikes in the city that day, which was noteworthy given how often anyone and everyone—from woodworkers

to government clerks to elevator operators—marched and went on strike in recent months over the slightest provocation. By the afternoon, rumors were spreading that a military uprising had occurred in Ceuta or Melilla, but this news was far away, no cause for concern.

That night as we sat down to supper, someone knocked at the door and shouted, “Francisco, the workers are taking up arms! The prime minister has resigned. The Civil Guard is loyal to the Republic, but the governor is afraid the military will attack the capital tonight.”

My father was wearing breezy pants and a sleeveless shirt, so he went to the bedroom for his short-sleeved shirt and hat. Then he took his pipe from the shelf and kissed my mother on the forehead.

“Francisco, please be careful,” my mother pleaded. I could see she was trembling, despite the heat.

“Don’t worry, darling. This’ll be over after maybe four gunshots. There’s nothing more cowardly in this world than a fascist.”

Before my father realized it, I was following him down the stairs.

“Where do you think you’re going, little shrimp?” my father’s friend asked, gently pulling me back by my collar.

“I want to go with you. I’m practically grown now.”

“And you think killing a man is a game?”

“We’re not going to kill anybody,” my father interrupted, sliding his arm around my back. “Don’t you remember what happened in Africa? Those cowards at the military base are all full of talk about the fatherland and honor, but they’re a bunch of traitors. Besides, Marco is thirteen years old now, almost a man. He should see with his own eyes how the fascists are gift wrapping the revolution for us that we’ve been awaiting for so long. They’ve choked at the ballot box and know we’re for real this time. We won’t let them steal our liberty again.”

The three of us headed for Monteleón Station, where some activists with the National Work Confederation passed out guns and

greeted workers with raised fists. Excitement sparked in the air even though it was nearly eleven o'clock at night. With the guns, we headed to Luna Street, where most of the union headquarters were located. I was surprised to see a boisterous multitude coming down the street with arms raised high, begging loudly for weapons.

"Let's head to party headquarters at the Segovia Bridge. They'll know what to do there. These anarchists are incapable of organizing things," said my dad's friend.

We spent most of the night walking through the city, which seemed to be one big street party. Sunday dawned as we made our way down Segovia Street into the socialist sector. People were running this way and that, and the general jubilation seemed to celebrate the military uprising rather than fear it.

"Where's Largo Caballero?" said my father to a girl who held an armful of folders and documents.

"In a meeting," she answered, not pausing.

My father had known Largo Caballero since they were kids, when they lived near each other in Madrid's Chamberí neighborhood. Father walked into the meeting room without knocking, and we followed. Half a dozen men were deep in discussion around a table.

"Mr. Alcalde, come in; don't be so calm about it," Largo Caballero goaded. Then, lifting his fist into the air, he said, "Comrades!" to which everyone responded in kind. "The fascists have opened up the doors of paradise for us. We failed in '34, but this time no one will stop us. We'll flush the cowards out of government and get someone with guts. It's time for the brave to step forward," he continued.

I did not understand why everyone was so happy, but their optimism was contagious. People were hugging and singing, speaking of how they would create a new world, a world without classes or injustice, a world where all men were equal and those who did not want to be part of it would meet death.