

HARD TIME
KILLING
DAWOOD

THE MOST WANTED
TERRORIST IN THE WORLD

(Translated by the author)

To Abhinav Shokeen, *in memoriam*.

In politics, my dear fellow, you know, as well as I do, there are no men, but ideas; no feelings, but interests; in politics we do not kill a man, we only remove an obstacle, that is all.

— Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*

*Pathar puje Hari mile / Toh main puju pahaad / Tante te chakki bhali / Pis khaye sansar Kakar
pathar jod ke masjid lai banai / Ta chadh mulla baag de kya bahra hua khudai.*

(If God can be found in a stone Idol / then I ask the mountain: / Why not worship the mill that gives us the meal to eat and survive? After the construction of the mosque with rocks and stones / the imam shouted from the roof: / is God deaf?)

—Kabir

Today I got this desire, and tomorrow I will get that one; all these riches are mine, and soon I will have even more. Already I have killed these enemies, and soon I will kill the rest. I am the lord, the enjoyer, successful, happy, and strong, noble, and rich, and famous. Who on earth is my equal?

— Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa, *The Bhagavad Gita*

Preface

On May 1st, 2011 visits to the White House are cancelled without previous notice. At 11:00 P. M., two MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters depart from Jalalabad's airport, in the East of Afghanistan. There is a team of special SEAL agents on board. The mission is named Operation Neptune Spear.

It is a full moon night and the pilots of the helicopters, with night-vision goggles, fly without any lights over the mountains that run the border with Pakistan. They shut their radio signals down and a strange calmness can be found in the helicopters. Fifteen minutes later, they descend towards a valley.

The Black Hawks fly for 162 miles at 20 feet of height, dodging the trees, in order to avoid being detected. An unmanned plane sends a live signal to the small room in the White House where the operation is being followed. At 1:00 A. M., they reach their target: a house in Abbottabad's northern Pakistani city. The SEAL enter the main building and continue their way towards the stairs, where they find some walls that they open with explosives. After facing some resistance, they finally meet Osama Bin Laden and shoot him at point-blank before moving his body to one of the helicopters and fleeing the scene.

Within minutes, in the city of Karachi, a telephone call woke up a man in his mansion, called The White House designed to the image and likeness of the residence in Washington of the President of the United States of America. The chief of the secret Pakistani services, known by its initials ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence), informed him to gather the indispensable things, as in twenty minutes an army convoy would come to pick him up and move him to a secret place. Very briefly, the official announced to the civilian what had happened to Osama Bin Laden a few minutes earlier.

That man whom the Pakistani government was protecting with so much zeal for fear of a kidnapping by the North Americans was called Dawood. This is his story.

1.

The fog was concealing the moon in the sky of London. It had stopped raining a few minutes ago, and the pavement was reflecting the milky clarity of a night without stars. It was nine o'clock at night when a taxi coming from Heathrow airport, after crossing Hyde Park Corner and sliding the corner of Buckingham Palace Road, stopped in the opposite sidewalk of the Grosvenor hotel as per the passenger's indication.

After a few seconds, in which the passenger was observing attentively in all directions to ensure himself that nobody suspicious was marauding, nor that any vehicle had been following him, the door opened and the man went down with eager willingness and remained standing in the sidewalk. He closed the door without making any noise.

From where he was standing, under a scarce light, it was difficult to guess his features and origin. While the taxi started its way until it got lost after turning the corner, the medium-sized height man lifted the neck of his jacket, which covered his face, and observed with caution the whole street and the parked vehicles.

With hurry and lightly waved, as if she was arriving late to some appointment, a woman of approximately seventy years, dressed of light blue, was walking along the sidewalk towards him. She was pulling a Pekinese dog from a leash that, evidently, needed to take some air. The dog stopped scarce feet from the man, and raised the paw along the trunk of a tree to do his needs.

—Oh, Baxter, you're so naughty... —said the lady pulling the leash.

A boy riding a bike passed by at great speed, zigzagging the lady and the dog. Another young person with his hands inside the pockets of his shabby jeans and guided by his knees crossed in front of him, humming a rap song. Some other innocent passers-by were walking in the opposite sidewalk.

The man did not see any danger. He raised his head; opposite him, there was the luminous clarity of the luxurious hotel.

He crossed the street walking accurately and lightly, as someone used to walking in a conglomerated cosmopolitan city. The night was slightly fresh, so he hurried to enter the warm foyer.

At the entrance of the hotel, there was a doorman stuffed in a strident flaming red uniform with distinctive white gloves, a top hat and the name of the hotel embroidered in black; he greeted him politely, with a professional smile, before taking a few strides forward to open with mechanical precision the rear door of a taxi that was arriving at that precise moment, helping the passengers to get out of the vehicle.

After having crossed the entrance, the man passed the first desk where a uniformed receptionist was marking directions on a map of London for a tourist, who wanted to be present in the West End Queen's Theatre for the musical *Les Miserables*. After, opposite the reception there was a large group of Japanese tourists who were registering. He crossed cautiously the foyer with the assurance of someone who knows perfectly the area that he treads, and took the elevator up to the fourth floor. There he crossed the corridor and stopped in front of the room number that he had been given.

He remained calm, listening to see if he could perceive some unusual noise from inside that could alert him of any danger. Behind the door, the distinctive voice of a North American news network presenter could be heard.

After ringing the bell, an old, skinny and bald man opened the door, inviting him to enter with a slight gesture of the hand.

—I'm glad to see you, Mr. Dawood —Ramachandani said to his guest, closing the door after him with a latch.

Ramachandani was a lightly hunched man of approximately seventy years of age and of arrogant aspect. He was a famous attorney in India, perhaps the best. The thick and matted eyebrows gave his face an almost aggressive look, and his voice was authoritarian. He had a reputation for taking charge of celebrities' cases. Among his clients were wealthy industrialists, politicians, Bollywood movie actors and other personalities of the social elite. Many of them lived with a foot abroad and another in India, all of them ready to spare no expense to make their problems with the law disappear. His fees were not amongst the most economic, he charged astronomical figures; nevertheless, his clients, who possessed an image in front of the public, knew the confidentiality with which the lawyer was protecting them.

The guest crossed the corridor of the wide suite, while he covered with a glance the whole haughty place. There was a small dining room in an annex, and to the other side, a luxurious lounge decorated with furniture of mahogany wood. When he had finished his examination, he arched eloquently the thumb towards the lounge, a majestic, imposing room, and said to Ramachandani:

—My dear friend, we'll talk there.

It was a modulated, almost musical voice. It could have belonged to one of these announcers of radio or television that advertise pharmaceutical products with so much persuasion and charm that the listener almost regrets not being sick in order to go to the drugstore and try them. To the left side, there was an enormous velvet sofa chaise longue; facing it, on the wall, the latest and biggest flat screen television. In a corner, near the chimney, there were two big armchairs; furniture initially created to support the heat in the former English houses and, nowadays, according to the interiors designers, to allow to enjoy a bit of privacy and to avoid distractions. To the right of the room, a bar, a round table surrounded with chairs of straight backs, a grand piano with his hassock, and another dining room table on top of which there was a great silver platter with fresh fruit.

The attorney Ramachandani, even if he was used to dictating orders and being obeyed forthwith, before the presence of that man, he was feeling as an insignificant entity that has been called to give explanations on something that he has done badly or a silly idea in other words, because, for Dawood, Ramachandani was nothing but a man like any other.

Without a word, with a completely impassive face, like a man who is resolved not to be surprised of anything or even show the slightest reaction to what he hears or sees, crossing his legs elegantly, Dawood sat down in one of the wide ear muffed armchairs upholstered with soft chenille. Then he started balancing his right foot; leaned forward and noticed that his black shoe had a small spot, possibly for having crossed the water puddles of the sidewalk. He turned slightly, and from a tray filled with grapes and Belgian chocolates that was on a side table, took a red fabric napkin and cleaned his shoe. Then he wrinkled it like a ball and threw it

with mastery, as a basketball player, towards the small wastebasket that was in the corner nearby, tossing it in the interior.

—Ah, *voilà!* —he exclaimed smiling, lifting his arms with closed fists.

Outside, it began to rain. The persistent water clattered in the balcony window. Dawood turned and observed the dancing raindrops in the window at his back.

Ramachandani, standing opposite to him, extracted a bundle of small cigars from his pocket, lit one with a match and a cloud of dense and yellowish smoke remained floating in the ambience. He looked for a place where to deposit the match; he decided to throw it inside the wastebasket. For a moment he thought of throwing it from the distance but he lifted his eyebrows after realizing the dumbness of this infantile action, then he approached and dropped the extinguished phosphorus inside the basket with gentleness.

—Do you mind if I smoke? —he asked, realizing that he had not mentioned it before.

—You are one of the few people I've seen supporting a cigar with the index and the thumb — mentioned Dawood while stretching himself in the sofa—. Go ahead, but don't be nervous and switch off the TV from the other room, please.

Ramachandani did what he said, returned and sat down opposite him with both elbows on the armrest. He joined his hands keeping them hard pressed, with the cigar in the middle, while both men looked at each other. After this almost furtive gesture that lasted a moment, suddenly the attorney returned to his habitual serenity.

—Do you want a cigar? —asked Ramachandani lengthening the bundle—. They're Turkish, as you like them. I've bought you a pack from an import shop in New Delhi.

Dawood accepted one, and the attorney lighted it.

—Thank you —he said exhaling a cloud of perfumed smoke. The spirals stayed around him for an instant forming a bit of a gray atmosphere—. I admire your taste, Ramachandani. Every pack that you buy in India of these imported cigars represents a cent of benefit to me. Did you know that? It isn't a great thing, but, believe me, it mustn't be ignored after a year it means a good sum. The same sum for each of the packages of chewing tobacco, from that I receive quite big benefits... But I'd like to inform you that I'm going to quit smoking. I'm coming to a point in which I'm not interested in tobacco anymore; probably it's the age... Probably be because of the TV advertisements, I'm not sure..., but the point is, that kind of marketing achieves that you detest everything that they're trying to sell. Whenever a cretin goes on television showing a bottle of shampoo or toothpaste, I take note not to buy it —he inclined forward and smiled, in a rather wolfish way—. Now I exercise daily, every morning, in the gym that I've installed in my house. I take care of my health. Yes, don't put that idiot face, I know that after this meeting you will tell others how you've seen me and even the most minimal details; if there's some change in my physique, or stature, nose, hair, eyes... any cosmetic surgery... Probably they'll ask you even about my behavior. What might you tell them to satisfy them? That I'm arrogant, dangerous, cautious, meticulous, sure of my immunity in Pakistan? Keep that pack. Let's go to the point. As I've already informed you during our brief conversation by phone, I want to return to India.

—Before meeting here, in London, I had to speak with my contacts in the Indian government —he said fixing his black eyes shaded by the aggressive eyebrows in him—. But, tell me

sincerely, Mr. Dawood, why do you want to return to India? You mentioned that you want to defend yourself from the accusation of having been the one who planned the terrorist attacks of Bombay in 1993, but isn't there any other motive?

—Let's see, my dear lawyer —he answered with a smile denoted irony—. In my youth, I fell in love with a woman who left me, or rather, who I allowed to go away from my life because of the pressure that I could realize her parents were practicing on her. I swore to myself that I would never trust a woman and that I wouldn't let anyone hurt me again. That meant for me a time in my life of solitude and frustration and I became slightly more violent with my enemies. Certainly, I had many relationships of just one night stand, but without any commitment, you know... and without trusting anybody never again. I didn't love a woman up again until a lot of time later. If you really want to know if I just want to return for some skirts motive, you're wrong. I'm not even interested anymore in the latest or ex Miss India or Miss World or any Bollywood actress —he put the cigar in his mouth and expelled a smoke puff; then he held the cigar with his left hand, studying it thoughtfully. When he spoke again, his voice was slow and soft; dangerously soft—. I didn't commit that outrage in Bombay in 1993. I wasn't the author. I want to defend myself. The Indian government doesn't stop accusing me for all the offenses and crimes that happen in Indian soil. Enough already! If we were in 1947, they'd accuse me even of the partition. I am a gangster, a gangster! I've raised an empire with my own hands. I agree: I have committed crimes, but I'm not planting bombs around and I don't kill my own compatriots as if I were an Islamist madman.

—Back in India there are many people who don't consider you to be a trustworthy information source about what you've done or haven't done. But I agree with you. In India, certain politicians have been using you to criticize Pakistan and as a way of satisfying the public opinion in search of a culprit for the offenses and crimes but you know who executed the attacks. You know who all the accomplices are. Many of them living in Pakistan, others will be in Dubai, but I'm sure that all of them have a common denominator: it won't do to them any favor that you return to India. The culprits and those who have given them help of any type don't want to see you in India due to what you can say against them and their interests.

—You forget to mention that someone who gave coverage to those who put the bombs is at present in India. If I return, I want my conditions fulfilled. As I told you already by phone, I don't want to be imprisoned in a jail. I can be put under house arrest. From my residence I will organize my defense with my team of lawyers, which I haven't designated yet, but I count on you. I won't get tired of repeating it: I have never put any bombs either in Bombay or anywhere in India neither planned any attack to its citizens. I am not a Muslim madman jihadist, for God's sake! What those men do is extract one or two phrases from the Koran out of context, distort them a little here and there so they have a way to feign that they have a divine justification. My father was a good believing Muslim. He believed in the respect to all, in the solidarity among different beliefs. He was a police officer in Bombay, did you know that? When I was a child, he used to read me the Koran at night, and although many years later I haven't any interest at all to read it, I realize that on no page it says it's necessary to massacre women and children to please Allah. When I read in the newspapers and hear on television the word war, it hurts me, there's something that corrodes me in my interior and that I need to extract out. Because I have been at war all my life, all my life has been a conflict.

—Mr. Dawood —he spoke slowly—. We agree that many other crimes have been attributed to you. So, why don't you allow to be related to the facts that we've been speaking about? You

let it be, you let it through and you can continue your life full of luxuries in Pakistan, in the Arab Emirates, Qatar... and you forget about 1993 Bombay attacks.

—Professional pride! —answered Dawood without a hint of humor, with a very serious face—. What happened in Bombay on March 12th. 1993 doesn't correspond to my style. When the history of our time is written I wish my role to be described with accuracy, or at least try to..., but without distorting the facts and presenting myself as the embodiment of a devil, enemy of the humanity. Have you understood me?

Ramachandani got up and returned to the lounge with a copy of a magazine in the hand.

—Look —he said exhibiting the last weekly edition of the magazine of national circulation, India Today; in the front cover there was a prominent photo of Dawood with black aviator glasses, sat in a wide tilting leather seat and with a red peak jersey, sleeves folded. Below the photo, a title in big characters announced THE MOST WANTED TERRORIST OF THE WORLD.

—They haven't portrayed me badly, have they? —he said with an ironic tone, and snorted—. They should frame this photo and every morning, move incense sticks around it in circles, reciting once and again *Om Namaha Shivaya*. Don't you see? What can I say? They even use me to sell magazines. The cheeks are a little exaggerated, perhaps... This is what I'm trying to explain to you: *the multimillionaire villain attracts the Indian society*. The mass media inflate my image in an exorbitant way. They just love to remind the public the same photo over and over again... They've used this photo countless times! The reason is that I have a perspicacious expression in this photo, that's it! They want to make their readers understand that I represent the climax of power, the calculated evilness! After this dog's vomit that the written reportage must be, I'm sure that the viewing of American wrestling that comes on TV must be comforting. And I told you, if I there's something I hate in this life, this thing is called, te-le-vi-si-on.

—But what the report says with all probability is true —he took the magazine from his hand and sat again. Leaving the copy aside, on the table, he asked—: Are you happy?

—I have loads of money. Then, who the hell is interested in being happy?

—Very well, then, I imagine that you have an acceptable family life in Pakistan.

—I have no family life.

—I don't understand.

—What's necessary to understand? Let's say that I'm a big cinematographic production, but with absence of a solid argument, as the movie critics write often about Bollywood movies. I know where you want to go, Ramachandani. In your job, there's a time to ask questions and another to let the speaker boil up until he sees red, isn't it true? Every gangster with experience knows it. It's like chess or boxing. You try to whip me so that I lose balance. You are an old rat. Don't continue with your circumlocutions or we will finish this meeting before you imagine. Don't play with me.

—If you return to India, someday you'll need me, and I'll be the only one who won't have a stone in the hand, although the most probable thing is that by that time I won't be up to the case.

—Oh, don't tell me that! You are a great artist doing propaganda about yourself. Now I understand why your fees are the highest in all India, or perhaps I should say of south Asia.

—On the following day of our phone conversation —he said after a moment—, I traveled to New Delhi and met the Secretary of the Interior Minister. After exhibiting the case before his office, he proved to be quite reticent in wanting to fulfill a terrorist's demands. But privately, in his residence, nevertheless...

—Look, Ramachandani —said interrupting the lawyer while he inclined forward to shake the top of the cigar with his finger, so that the ash would fall down on a thick crystal ashtray—. I've been capable of paying a first class ticket for you so far, of paying this suite in advance, and above all, I take a risk coming here personally to speak with you face to face. Look, I'm already fatally tired of so many accusations. They've already accuse me even of the terrorist attacks in Africa against Israeli interests, and of alliances with Islamist terrorist groups. I'm tired of all this aggressiveness from people towards me, of the politicians, of the journalists of investigation, Indian correspondents abroad, of the fact that the whole world has something against me, of receiving blow after blow on the head. I'm done suffering even with the entire world, and I'm not like that: I love life, love India, love to travel, love women. Until now, the only thing that I've wished for has been to hide. First, I went into exile in Dubai, where they gave me refuge; later, when I was running for my life, I left to Pakistan, where the government has been protecting me in order not to be extradited. Now I want to return to India to defend myself and to be able to sleep in peace for ten entire years —after a silence, he squashed the cigar in the ashtray and continued—: The bad thing of these rhetorical politicians is that they only act and think in accordance to their regulation book. Let's see, tell me, what did the so called secretary of the Minister tell you?

—Mr. Dawood, I understand that you must be quite excited, but you have to understand that you have been labeled like the most wanted terrorist of the world. You are a nuisance for many people in India. There are many ministers who have been getting favors from you via third persons who wouldn't like to see you in India. They are afraid that you can uncover the whole framework of corruption in which they were living when you were in India years ago and take to waste all their work to clean their public images. You have to understand that they don't want you to come to India under your conditions. I'll tell you clearly: the moment you set a foot in India, they'll put you straight in jail. They will sentence you publicly using their related mass media, and that's it.

—But what criminal is capable of telling the Indian government: "You must know that out of love for India I am ready to return, but you will only judge me for my crimes; I want to defend myself from the accusations of the brutal terrorist attack of Bombay in 1993. So, to study my defense, I want to be under house detention till I prove my innocence."

—No. Let's understand it in this way. I am a lawyer, you are my client and I have the duty to speak to you frankly. If someone asks me: "How would you define the famous gangster, Dawood?" Leaving aside my personal opinions, I'd say to him: "He's a man who, from his miserable origin, has raised an empire by means of muscles and the use of his intelligence." And if they asked me: "How is it possible to become a Dawood nowadays?" Even admitting that achieving success in the business by the muscle method drives to no more than a not completely acceptable fame in certain spheres, certainly it needs a minimum intelligence, without mentioning less advisable elements, as an absolute absence of conscience and other resources —the lawyer extinguished his cigar against the thick crystal of the ashtray that was

on top of the side table—. Since the beginning I've admired your courage, your attitude and decision, but... leave aside patriotism. The opinion that they have of you isn't going to change at all because you want to return to India showing that you are a real patriot. Years have gone by Mr. Dawood, and the corrupt proprietors of big industrial enterprises, multinationals businessmen, stockholders and politicians that accepted your big bribes, don't want to see you again, not for a hint, in India. That's why they have pressed in every way to label you on a global scale as a highly dangerous terrorist. You know too much. You let the cat out the bag and the current government can stagger.

—Nevertheless...

—Nevertheless, as I was saying there is a possibility.

—Which is?

—Certain people with private interests can make the current Prime Minister accept all the conditions that you want to return to India.

—Provided that...?

—That you travel to Buenos Aires to murder a person.

Dawood gave a jump in his seat.

—Where?

He took a cold shower, shaved, and wrapped in a thick bathrobe prepared to change his clothes.

In order to avoid examinations from private investigators, officials, agents of the intelligence or the police, all his clean clothes had been sent by private mail directly to the hotel from the most prestigious boutiques in London, Italy and France: shoes, socks, underwear, his favorite Paco Rabanne perfume, deodorant, shirts... He knew that in the airports, after checking in his baggage, the foreign intelligence offices were capable of adding in any place of the fabrics of his clothes any minuscule device through which they might locate his presence in any place and who knew, even to listen to his conversations with some satellite help.

Ramachandani left for the airport in order to take his flight back to India. Dawood was thinking of all what he had said to him. He had asked him that he should have an assistant to help him carry out the operation. Dawood thought at once about Sultan, his friend and personal assistant in charge of his business in India. By that time, he had telephoned him giving instructions on the matter. They would see each other in Buenos Aires. He had always showed the maximum consideration with his assistant and friend since childhood. Both knew that this relationship reinforced each other, and that it was working.

Once they had murdered this person in Argentina, he would shelter in the embassy of India, from where, with absolute secrecy, he would be sent with a diplomatic passport in a flight to New Delhi. Once there, he would travel to Bombay, where he would stay in his mansion under house arrest until they pronounced sentence for the crimes that he had committed in the past,

and, also, he would defend himself from the accusations that were over him about the attacks of Bombay in 1993. Everything seemed very simple to him. That was precisely the motive of his worry.

He called the reception. The few high class vehicles booked to travel to the airport had left. As they had informed him by phone, there was a great private event in the hotel, and the numerous guests from that party were making use of the vehicles for pickups and drops. Rejecting the idea of taking a local cab, he preferred to go down to the foyer and wait patiently at the bar. In half an hour he would have a private car, the receptionist had said on the phone. He still had a lot of time ahead: his flight to Buenos Aires would not depart until nine hours later.

The elevator stopped in the next floor. The door opened with an amazing slowness. An elegantly dressed couple entered; the lady stayed on one side while the man remained impatient, seeing that the door was still not closing and let a sonorous snort out. He would not be over forty years. He was tall and muscular. <<*One of those guys that rely all his eloquence on the force of fists*>>, thought Dawood observing him from the corner of his eye. The man had an aggressive face with dark curled hair and coming gray on both sides. He dressed with an excellent suit and tie. His eyes were cold and hard. He has the eyes as those of a sewer rat. In the past, I already met subjects like this more than once in India. They show a lot of manliness but when there's danger, like rats, they remain undecided, move frantic up and down looking for what to do and where to go, and that's their perdition.

—*Maldita sea* —the man said in Spanish.

The door closed finally and the elevator descended again to the ground floor.

The man was accompanied by a beautiful young woman, with an expensive night garment; her face was of a marmoreal paleness, her age seemed to range between thirty five and forty years old. Her fair hair was brushed gently, with a low bun, typically Spanish. The oval of her face was perfect and it finished in a delicate chin. She had used a stick of subdued tone for the lips, undoubtedly to reduce the captivation to her sexy mouth, which, nevertheless, could not be more seductive. She wore an extraordinary brilliant golden ring in her left hand ring finger. <<*But in her face there are traces of suffering and dark pouches* —Dawood was thinking from his innermost thoughts—. *I am a businessman. Everything what I owe is thanks to my deep knowledge of the human beings and to certain basic rules. I'm sure that the man ill-treats this poor wretch physically. If he gives me a motive, as small as it may be, I'll drub him in such a way that he'll never be able to raise his hand against a woman again.*>> Dawood's rough life had put him in touch with violent deaths in many occasions, and one more corpse would not take his breath away, not even for a second. But ill-treating physically a woman was upsetting up to the last stronghold of his hard sensibility.

After the elevator came to the foyer, the Indian, pressing tight the opening button, he indicated with courteousness with the other hand the exit while pronouncing in Spanish with good accent <<*Por favor.*>> The man ignored him but the young woman made an elegant but

light head movement at the same time that her blue and luminous eyes expressed towards him a radiant contentment for such a gesture.

He crossed the foyer following the direction that the slender, high and exuberant figure of that young woman was taking, whose arm was seizing her companion. From behind, he could admire her very beautiful sunbathed legs. He lost sight of them on entering a commemoration room at the side corridor. From the foyer, Dawood could hear many voices and loud music coming from there and, full of curiosity, he decided to go inside with the intention of calming down in the middle of a strange crowd.

Wonderingly, he saw that that spacious private lounge was decorated to imitation of a German brewery. The bartenders wore a German *tracht* hat and on it, they had traditional decorative hair called *gamsbart*; their pants were knickerbockers, and they wore a long white apron. One waiter with a tray filled with sausages walked towards him in a hurry and they almost collided; another was serving high glasses of crystal full of beer to a group of four elegantly dressed elderly men who seemed really pleased for being in that folkloric ambience. A big sign on the wall with German Gothic lithography, said: *Willkommen Kamerad*.

That private celebrations room was full of people; everyone seemed to be enormously amused. Even the barmaids were dressed in coloring pledges of a German traditional suit called dirndl.

The music playing at high volume was from Wagner; Adolf Hitler was an enthusiast fan of the composer who, through his music, immortalized the heroes of the northerly mythology. Back in 1924, he affirmed that he saw that the future of Germany was evident in the composer's music. Also, he was influenced by the writings of Wagner's son-in-law, the British theoretical racial Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and became a friend of his children, particularly of his daughter-in-law. After Hitler turned into chancellor of Germany, his fascination for Wagner turned to be a type of national cult.

Among the bedlam of laughs and voices and the classical background music, the whole set was calculated to produce the impression of a happy Nazi world, and there was no doubt that they had achieved it.

No one seemed to notice Dawood's presence while he dodged the obstacles that came on his way to the bar located at a side.

Soon they began to play fragments of the opera *Rienzi*, followed by *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* -The main singers of Nuremberg-, the only one of Wagner's mature works in which there are no elements of magic or supernatural powers; homage to the bourgeoisie of the medieval Germany, to the contrapuntal music of Bach and to the Teutonic spirit.

Trying not to stumble over anybody, he finally reached the bar. The bartender was the only one that paid attention to his presence, perhaps because of his physical look as he was out of tune with the rest of the guests. The Indian had very brown skin, with facial features very different from those of the others. A person who did not know that he was Indian, would say that perhaps he could be a Mexican and even the living physical presence of the Hollywood actor Charles Bronson.

—A beer and a sandwich —he said.

—Yes, sir.

His ears were becoming accustomed to the confused voices, music and laughs; he began to distinguish a few of the voices amidst the hurly-burly; German, Spanish and even Italian were spoken, and there was even a group of Arabs with their traditional outfit speaking in their language.

He lifted the neck but he did not see the couple with whom he had coincided in the elevator. Nevertheless, a strong smell of perfume came to his attention. An attractive woman stood close to him. Dawood observed her: slender and bended like a young tree and with beautiful open and bronze-colored hair, shining like old gold under the powerful lights of the room.

On having noticed the persistent look of that stranger, the young woman turned and fixed the look in him with annoyance.

—The Asian hotel employees are despicable —she said to her two friends with a strong British accent, and both looked up to the interior of the lounge, looking for someone among the crowd as if calling for help.

The bartender, who had heard the comment when he was serving the beer and the plate with the sandwich, made a commiseration grimace to him as he lifted his eyebrows, as indicating that that woman was not to be messed with. Dawood limited himself to smiling. <<*She's beautiful, fascinating, and possesses a marked personality* —he thought—. *In sum, a woman with character.*>>

—You aren't a guest of this party. But you are a guest of the hotel, aren't you? —the bartender commented, waiting for a tip for having unmasked him.

—Indeed, I'm in suite 456 —he answered showing the electronic key of the room with the number written on it.

The man changed his visage; that room number was sufficient to allow him any caprice; that suite was usually reserved for heads of state and foreign dignitaries.

—Oh, in any case, there's no problem —said the bartender with a smile—. You can stay here as long as you want, sir, but limit to this area close to the door, don't go further on, because there are safety guards from a private company that frisk the guests before entering that private room down there. I believe that, inside, they'll meet privately.

—Chill out, man. I'm leaving shortly for the airport. I'm waiting for the hotel car. Your English accent is different.

—I'm Scottish —he said inflating his chest with certain theatrical pride.

The bartender was rattling the bar with his fingers following the music. He looked at Dawood with more thoroughness and realized the expensive clothes in which he was dressed. Once Dawood lifted the arm to drink the beer, he noticed his predominant and beautiful watch.

—It's surprising what a good glass of cold beer and a sandwich can do to a man —he mentioned with desire of beginning a conversation even if it was a very dumb one.

—Ah, yes? Tell me about it —Dawood said after giving the drink a good gulp before biting the sandwich.

—I've seen people who stayed three days sleepless and that, after a beer and a good sandwich, they've continued an exhausting march across miles of muddy areas.

—If the secret of this treatment could be packed and sell in pills or something like that, I would invest in it. An entrepreneur would gain millions.

—Ha, ha, ha —he laughed before going to attend a group of persons.

Dawood turned and leaning his back on the bar with the beer glass in one hand, he observed the festive ambience. The people gathered that night had something in common more than the mere fact of dressing elegantly, listening to classical music and sharing laughs and happy moments. The band had its syncopated melodies calculated to produce a speeding effect in the conversation and in the drinking: an increasing excitement could be evident in the ambience.

<<Here I am, killing time before going to the airport; with a thick German beer and a sausage sandwich while I keep telling myself that it's wonderful to keep on living one more day —he thought to himself—. The word lucky is the most suitable one once seen my precarious situation. I only need that someone recognizes me and takes a photo of me surrounded by these group of crazy people and print it with the heading: "Dawood finances neo-Nazis with millions of dollars". Poor wretches, what a madmen's band. Interpol should be chasing these people and its activities be watched with magnifying glasses by all the Secret Services. These people are really a danger to society. The one that I'm going to eliminate in Buenos Aires, yes, sure he deserves it; he's the mastermind behind a terrorist attack on a Jewish center. Ironically, exactly the same victims that these poor wretches in this room wanted to erase from the face of the Earth.>>

Everybody was speaking in a loud voice in that commemoration lounge. Every guest was holding a glass or a pitcher of beer. From where he was standing, he heard the beautiful voice of a pretty and fascinating woman who would be approximately fifty years old, but very well fit. She was immersed in an animated conversation with a group of gentlemen. Dawood managed to understand only few words, since her British accent was very fast and unintelligible; it almost looked like a dialect: "... Weber". "... meeting". "Oswald Mosley...".

—Ah, Mosley! —said Dawood interrupting her aloud in a cheerful mood, while he observed more thoroughly the woman's naked legs—. Ah, Mosley, Mosley. Old Mosley...

—Do you know him? —she said irritated, holding a glass in her hand which looked like an accessory to her physical appearance.

A gentleman next to her lifted his arm as if trying to get the attention from someone at the end of the room.

—Yes, I've heard of that fellow called Mosley, and Irving, and Hitler... But to say that I know him in person, pretty, I wouldn't distinguish him from the bottom of a dirty Indian cow.

The woman turned her back to him.

—He's drunk —she mentioned in low voice—. So vulgar.

Two well-dressed muscular men approached with diligence, accompanied by an organizer of the party. He was of medium-sized high, with a prudish thin aspect, a French beard and greased hair brushed backwards.

—Get out of here —he said, flanked by the two muscular towers.

—That black spot you have in the chin might perhaps be a goatee —Dawood said with sarcasm.

—You aren't a guest of this party —he added with certain roughness.

His companions remained immobile, awaiting orders with their arms crossed.

—Yes, I've already realized...

—Mark, Eric, make sure that the gentleman gets out of here.

Dawood left an excessive tip on the bar, lifted his index to his eyebrow greeting the bartender and before going away among the numerous guests, followed by the two muscled men, he said to the lady and her group:

—*Tschüss*. (Bye)

2.

It had been twenty minutes since they had left the area of the city where they stayed, a hotel inside a peripheral quarter of Buenos Aires, a place where the dregs of its unhealthy ambience lay. Any kind of diversions that are not found there is because they have not been invented yet.

They continued their way down May avenue up to the Congreso, hence they turned right for Callao and its emblematic architecture until they reached Corrientes street; the longest avenue and axis at night of the cultural and Bohemian life; luminous boards that announced movies and theaters; vehicles do not cease on that road; music, animation, restaurants and cabarets spectacles; ambulant flower shops and magazines and coffee-shops opened at any time.

The night had fallen rapid and humid. It had stopped raining a few minutes before. Behind were left the streets that were an ember of light of entertainment and now they were circulating towards the direction of the boardwalk. The lampposts that were illuminating the highway shone on the vehicle wet surface. The air was pure and fresh. The sky showed an almost black blue sowed with shining stars, but the moon was coming out, partially covered by clouds

A passenger of the black car, which was decorated with multiple flowers all over its body, was observing the clean deserted streets as they bordered the beach. <<*This is so different to my place of origin* —he was thinking to himself—. *What would happen if I decided to settle in a country in South America? Here, in Buenos Aires, everything seems nice, the streets are arranged, the climate is good, and the women beautiful. Also, neither the noise nor the contamination to which I am used to exist.*>> The pinched Argentine local driver was in the front seat, and in the copilot one, Sultan, his Indian partner and closest friend, with a rifle machine gun under his feet.

Dawood lowered the window to receive the fresh air in his face.

In the beach, in the distance, the shine of braziers of barbecues was perceived, where people would be cooking roasted meat. Touching gently the rims of his mustache while he looked through the window, he remained plunged in his thoughts. Only two full days had passed since Ramachandani had given him the information about the person who he would have to kill.

In London, the lawyer had given him a few precise instructions about who he had to meet after his arrival to Buenos Aires.

He crossed avenue Eduardo Madero on foot and then Independence Avenue. The shop windows were full of products and articles for Mother's day, which would soon be celebrated. He was feeling slightly exhausted because of the flight and the jet lag; only a few hours had passed since he had landed in Argentina.

He reached the restaurant Casa Julio, which Ramachandani had mentioned for the meeting; a small but happy place closed to the palace of justice and near to Teatro Colón. From the

sidewalk, he put his face against the glass; his eyes, like small clandestine cameras photographed the interior. He could identify the individual he had to contact to receive instructions among the numerous customers. He was fat; he seemed from North America, and the type of men who move in the shadows around the corridors of the political leaders' offices who, for self-interest, manipulate the countries destinations no matter how far they are geographically. That man, who was sipping some mineral water, gave the impression of big power.

After entering, he walked between two slot-machines played by people of old age. From the small but very modern speakers, the song sang by Jorge Cafrune *No soy de aquí ni soy de allá* was playing. He crossed the dining room and approached the table covered with an impeccable red and white checked tablecloth, placed under a wheel of a cart hanging on the ceiling, improvised as a huge lamp. He was not surprised about the arrogance of that man, who did not bother neither to stretch his hand nor to stand up. The North American's wide square face fell down like creases on his neck; the tie and suit made him look like a statesman or, rather, a businessman.

—Ah, Mr. Dawood, sit down, please —he said softly.

The North American was thinking in his innermost thoughts about the first impression that the presence of the famous person Dawood, was causing him: <<*Not very tall man, very black and smooth hair, mustache look-a-like to Charles Bronson, attractive presence, I'd say between forty five and fifty years, strong; sure he's capable of smiling at the time of killing someone. He believed that the Indian person who was in front of him was actually what he appeared to be.*>> With a quick look he saw that he had manicured nails; his light blue suit was from Savile Row, his shrill silk tie from Gucci, his wrist watch Vacheron Constantin was striking and beautiful at first sight, and to round it off, he flooded the ambience with a soft smell of Paco Rabanne perfume. <<*There's no doubt that this despicable Indian has an air of good taste; a man with money in abundance.*>>

—You shouldn't know my name or attempt to make any inquiries —he added slowly while his hand swept the crumbs of bread that were on the tablecloth, which he put inside the cup that he formed with the other palm of his hand and, finally, deposited on his wide plate, where the remains of a sandwich of a grilled sausage flavored with too much sauce were. The Indian deduced that this would not be the first that he had eaten during the wait—. You are very elegant, Mr. Dawood. You look like a stock-market investor. I guess that the hotel manager where you stay feel proud to have as a guest such a distinguished person... But as you are dressed I wouldn't recommend you to go through certain streets of this city.

Dawood observed him closely. He knew right away that the man was not reliable and that henceforth he should be careful. He hardened his expression.

—The money.

—It's here —he said dragging a thick package under a napkin fold on the surface of the table.

Dawood took the money with amazing skill, as fast as a single wink, without anyone noticing how his hand had made the bundle disappear.

The American knew enough about violent men to be aware of the type who was opposite to him. However, he was cautious. Leaned back in his seat, he looked at his plump hands on top of the curve of his belly and then looked at the Indian with some indifference.

—There you have two hundred thousand dollars. I'll give the rest in this same place at 2:15 P.M., the day after tomorrow. Remember, as soon as you have complied with your work and collected the cash that I'll give you, you have to go without any delay straight to the Indian Embassy —after a pause, shaking his index finger to give emphasis to his words while he outlined a forced smile, he added—: Of course, only if you eliminate the target for which you have been hired.

—Do you know how to hunt Tigers in the India?

—How would I know about it? —he asked chuckling.

—You tie a goat to a stake and then you hide.

—Ah, I understand, and I suppose that the goat doesn't turn out well so often, does it? —he said with irony.

—The idea of me being the goat would disturb me. Have you understood? It would bother me a lot. I'll be here within two days, in this same place, at 2:15 P.M. —said Dawood—. You should only worry about being punctual and bringing the rest of the money.

—All right, as you say. It doesn't matter to me whether you come or not. I'm just an intermediary... so to speak. My clients...

A waitress approached to serve the nearby table while singing loudly the song that was sounding through the speakers, causing that more than one client to smile at her with admiration.

*[...] Me gusta el vino tanto como las flores,
y los conejos, pero no los tractores,
y el pan casero y la voz de Dolores,
y el mar mojándome los pies.
No soy de aquí..., ni soy de allá,
no tengo edad, ni porvenir,
y ser feliz es mi color de identidad. [...]*

Dawood took a quick look. The hairstyle, face and the voluptuousness of the young woman's figure reminded him immediately of Renée Perle; the young Hungarian Jewish, muse of the French photographer Jacques-Henri Lartigue. It was not that Dawood was such an educated person or art lover, it was that once while in London shopping in Harrods, the cover of a very thick book of photographs in black and white struck him; the sensual portrait of Renée Perle appeared on it. He bought it, and since then the voluminous book occupied the center of the coffee table in his office.

The waitress, pushing a trolley with wheels, served joyfully the nearby dinners a dish of *alfajores* with *dulce de leche* and a plate of strudel.

Dawood held her gaze. Then he realized that the fat man's mouth was watering as he glanced at the puff pastry dessert. He was certainly a politician or a Government official of a very important office, and as a good head of department, he would be dealing with expectations to climb position.

—You were saying something about your clients... —Dawood interrupted him—. By the way, it's a beautiful designation.

—Yes... my clients, your acts of violence... they regard them as mere actions of war between offices —he raised his hand to draw the waitress' attention. She approached, still humming the song. Dawood smelled her perfume, observed the curvature of her breasts, her mouth, her eyes—. *Por favor* —said the American—. Bring me two *milhojas*. To take away. One moment! —putting his index and thumb on his chin, he added with a thoughtful tone—: but... don't add sugar on top, only whipped cream. *Muchas gracias, señorita*.

—Gentleman, I don't have too much time —said Dawood leaning on the table.

—Very well. Tonight you'll have a local driver at your disposal outside your hotel. He'll let you know that he's waiting for you. To make you familiar with the area, he'll lead you exactly to the path that the Iranian will take on the way to his residence, he'll also provide weapons to you and to your assistant, that I know nothing about who he is and what his name is, and I don't care. It's your problem. Another thing: don't leave the hotel. Stay all the time in your room, watching television, sleeping or reading until tomorrow night when you leave by car to carry out the mission. Don't expose yourself publicly. Coming here is reckless. The longer you stay on the street, the more chances there are that someone will recognize you and spoil the mission. Have a good day.

A few miles away, another car drove through the streets. The driver was a middle-age man of strong build; he was very tanned, had populated eyebrows and black ebony hair. His name was Muhammad, and just five years before he had been appointed as bodyguard at the Embassy of Iran in Buenos Aires. The other occupant of the car, sitting at the back side, was a man of about fifty-five years of age, with white hair, corpulent, neatly dressed in suit and tie. His name, Hamid Farhadi. After leaving a social party he had the gentle air of someone who is satisfied with having made some friends who were influential people from the economic and political sphere of Argentina. As usual, he had been gallant, charming and witty, and his compliments to the beautiful women had been highly appreciated by them.

—Faster, Muhammad —said the passenger to his driver.

He lowered the window, supported his chin with his right arm and felt a complacent freshness in his face. He breathed a sigh of weariness, as if he had to worry about many things. <<*What hell of a country. I wish I went away from here soon. Truly, ours is an important civilization, not only because of our craftsmanship, but also because of our architecture, tiles, carpets, our literature! And here, nothing started but long after 1492. Uff! And everything smells like meat and fish. The food served at the party was disgusting. For what reason did those Jews scum come here? Here I get nothing but headaches. At last, within a week, I'll be enjoying some rest at my farm in Isfahan.*>> With the air beating his face soundly, the Iranian felt a moment of relief and wanted to forget about women, liquor, that although he had drunk little, was the cause of his light headache; the accumulation of problems represented by his personal wealth, power and enemies. All these together were causing him a nagging headache.

Hamid Farhadi had left the *palacio Duhau*, acquired a few years ago by the hotel chain Hyatt, where he had attended a party organized by a very wealthy Iranian businessman. He was satisfied by how the Argentine Government was concealing the issue of the attack against the AMIA (*Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina*), the most important Jewish Center in the country where more than 80 people were killed and 300 injured: the greatest attack suffered by Jews since World War II. Above all, the Argentine media had to avoid mentioning that the attack had been perpetrated by Iran, while at the same time, emphasize silencing the accusatory proof that might appear against the Argentine politicians in the current Government.

When they were in an avenue practically without any circulation in the South of the city and bordering the sea, a car with a strange decoration but equipped with a powerful engine specially commissioned for this mission, emerged quickly from the darkness. Although that did not happen unnoticed for the experienced Iranian driver, he reduced the distance between both cars after he could see through the rearview mirror that the vehicle was decorated with flowers, bouquets and colorful balloons. *No doubt*, thought the driver, Muhammad, *they're some newlyweds*. He smiled with complacency while remembering his past wedding night in a village lost inside Iran, exclusively dedicated to animal husbandry and famous for the artisan manufacture of carpets.

Any professional gunman would have spent days and weeks preparing for the scene of the murder; the speed and distance of the cars, measuring angles of shooting, the type of weapon required to stop the target vehicle, among other things. But it was not Dawood's case, who moved by his talent, instinct, spontaneous inspiration and patience, cunning and, above all, by his keen sense. In the most difficult moments when a very difficult problem was posed or when fear could take possession of the mind, he was able to display a pragmatic and logical concentration more effective than any psychological preparation or spontaneous enthusiasm.

Inside the car, while caressing his mustache, Dawood recalled how he had the idea of decorating the car in that particular way, so festive. Many years back, other people had used the same method in order not to raise suspicion when they approached their victim as much as possible.

Dawood's older brother was Sabir. He had recently celebrated his second wedding anniversary with his attractive wife, who was again pregnant. For him, this was not an impediment to continue frequenting a famous brothel in the red light district of Bombay called *The House of the Congress*. There, prostitutes entertained rich clients. Most women had been forced from her teens, kidnapped from their villages of origin in the interior of India and subsequently raped; long before reaching the age of twenty had they been aware that such was their fate in life. They just had to know how to survive, to stay alive. Throughout a normal day's work they pleased up to twenty-five men. They lived in very narrow apartments next to the brothel.

One of those girls, named Chitra, awaited eagerly the arrival of a customer in particular, Sabir. Chitra enjoyed how he used to recite in bed verses in Urdu from the classical literature. For Sabir, being with her caused him a pleasant feeling of reliving the past, the time of adolescence, of impetuous romance. Chitra's vivacity was the antidote to boredom.

Both went together to see films in cinemas, ate at street stalls, visit fashionable restaurants, tried a new pizzeria or restaurant that had opened recently in the Marine Drive promenade, and some weekends, went for a picnic on the outskirts of the city. This did not go unnoticed to the Bombay gangsters. Or even when Sabir, in a public park, put some ice cream on Chitra's face, and among laughs, he licked her face no matter what the people around would say or think. He behaved recklessly and impulsively, and was publicly exposed to possible actions of rival gangs, which were always on the lookout for their enemies, waiting in the shadows for someone to lower the guard and so be able to attack him in a bolder way at the most unexpected time.

One day, he took Chitra for a ride through the city in his new Mercedes car. She switched on the radio and began humming a popular song from the soundtrack of a recently released Bollywood film.

—What a boring song —he said.

—Don't be silly, dear.

—Dear? *Dear, dear, dear...* —Sabir pronounced the word with a different tone, whistling it rhythmically.

—Well, so... How about love? —asked Chitra throwing back her black hair with an elegant gesture from her arms, which made her firm breasts tighten sharply under her light summer dress.

—Ah, no! —he said faking a face of disgust—.That sounds as if we were teenagers in love and still in College.”

Through the rear mirror, he saw that a car was following them and that it was decorated with flowers and balloons of different colors. Sabir smiled thinking about how the first night of pleasure of the recent marriage would be accomplished. Chitra did not stop humming the song and at the same time, she caressed his cheek and buttered him up. Suddenly, Sabir realized that the fuel tank was almost empty. They were passing near a gas station, and he did not want to miss the opportunity to fill the tank. So he turned the vehicle to the opposite direction. He noticed that the newlyweds' car had stopped at a certain distance; but he did not give it any importance. He went into the gas station.

When he had parked the car and set out to open the door, the vehicle with such a striking decoration, stopped suddenly at some distance parallel to them. Sabir, outlining a smile from ear to ear, was ready to congratulate the couple; however, at a glance, he saw that inside there were no newlyweds but six men heavily armed with pistols and rifles. He bent down quickly to reach the glove compartment where he had his gun, but it was too late. A burst of bullets covered the vehicle. Although eight bullets impacted his body, Sabir got out drawing his revolver. Bullets pierced his chest like a sieve while he screamed in agony; only managing to shoot twice in the air before dropping dead on the pavement. In the interior of the vehicle, Chitra lay on a pool of blood which was wrapping the new Mercedes car upholstery while the music of the radio played nonstop.

After days of pursuit through all Bombay, Dawood finally had got to avenge his brother's death by killing the perpetrators one by one in cold blood.

—We already have them —said the Argentine driver with his particular English accent pointing towards the Iranians' car.

—Are you ready, Dawood? —asked the copilot turning his head back.

—Of course I am. But Sultan, why do you have this face? I thought that you weren't concerned about this mission. I thought I heard that you were calm.

—Well... that was yesterday...

—Ah! —said Dawood sighing deeply, and added in ironic tone with a smile—: One lives fast these days, huh? These kind of businesses don't live out of love and kisses. I don't think it'll give us any trouble. You take care of the driver, who will be armed and I'll go for the target — holding the driver's shoulder, he added pointing to the road—: After that bend, rather than accelerating, get parallel to the car. Just drive along their side. *Entiendes, amigo?* (do you understand, my friend?)”

—*Entiendo, señor.* (I understood, sir)

When both cars were at the same height, both Muhammad and Hamid turned to observe with complacency the passengers of that car with such a striking decoration. What they found were not reciprocal smiles from a newly married couple, but a tongue of fire that rippled throughout the body car. Muhammad stopped the car suddenly.

After overtaking them, a few feet away, the argentine driver made the vehicle cut the darkness like a knife in a sudden semicircle movement and quickly approached the Iranians at high speed, with the high lights on.

—Give me your gun! —Hamid shouted to his driver, full of panic.

He tilted towards the front seat and realized that Muhammad had his head on the steering wheel, shot dead. Desperate, he tried to get the Glock pistol that Muhammad always kept on his jacket chest. But the position in which he was laying and his excessive weight prevented him from moving the body. He raised his head and saw that two men came out from the attackers' car; one of them approached the car carrying a gun, walking calmly, while the other, armed with a machine gun, stayed in front of the vehicle, keeping watch.

Without further delay, Hamid opened the door with the intention of running away, but the man with the revolver, of medium stature, dark skin and black moustache, pushed him quickly back into the interior of the vehicle.

—*Salam Alaikum* (greetings). Is your name Hamid Farhadi? —asked the stranger.

—*Sí...* Yes, but... —he babbled, trying to buy some time—. You... are you...? Who are you? Are you a hit man? I can pay you. I can give you money if you let me go. You'd just have to take me to an address... I'll give you dollars. American dollars!

The mustache man raised his gun by placing it at point-blank range. The victim looked at him with fear on his face. That gaze, according to Dawood's experience, interpreted that he was asking for final mercy.

—One moment, one moment —begged the sweaty Iranian pathetically—. Tell me your name... Who are you?"

—*Mazha naav Dawood aahe.*

—You're Indian! But... what the hell does an Indian do here? —he asked with a decomposed livid face.

—Not Indian. Bully Kutta —he replied smiling.

He raised the gun slowly towards his face. He pulled the trigger. The sudden impact hit him fully in the face and he fell back on the seat; next, his body received four more bullets.

Dawood Ibrahim Kaskar was born in the State of Maharashtra, in India. There, his exiled Muslim ancestors of Konkani origin found a place to live. In 1498, the Portuguese Vasco da Gama reached India, more exactly Kerala, and later went to Goa. Although he was not the first foreigner to disembark in those lands, since Marco Polo cited India in his Book of Wonders, and long before, Alexander already had ventured into Indian territory according to the Indika book written by the Greek Megasthenes. But after Vasco da Gama's arrival, Portugal defeated the place rulers and settled there as a Portuguese colony. With the arrival of Christianity and the help of the Inquisition under the polite invitation <<turn yourself or die>>, many of the indigenous population was forced to leave. Others stayed and endured the konkani language, which nowadays is the official language of the State of Goa. The Konkani culture received much perso-Arabic influence, since Goa was historically an important trade center in the Indian Ocean. Those who decided to go into exile were established, in many cases, while maintaining their language and culture, on the shores of the neighboring States of Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra.

Due to his criminal activities, he could not return to his country of origin, and privately among the inner circle of his friends, Dawood referred ironically to his personal situation that he felt like a Bully Kutta without a homeland; a name of Persian origin of a strange breed of ferocious dog originating in the lands of the Punjab, used for clandestine fights. That territory is dramatically mentioned in the annals of history during the India partition in 1947; that Indian Northwest land was divided between two Nations recently born, India and Pakistan, which led to the exodus of millions of people, and the killing of innocent men, women and children, on both sides of the new created border.

This was not the first time that he had murdered a person.

He had already done so in Bombay in the early 1970s.

The day was getting dark. He looked like one of so many young people who were walking on the street back home after work. Only that he was going to commit a murder. He was aware that it was just a new profession that he was going to start; finally, he was going to commit a horrible crime. The victim had given him enough reasons. He just had to be careful not to meet anyone else in the apartment except the man who he was resolved to kill.

He moved quickly along the street as hundreds of fellow human beings. A double-decker bus just crossed by slowly, some passerby went in, but he did not. Anyone would think that he was a person who did not have large resources; the way he was dressed was more typical of a young hand worker, perhaps from the nearby port docks. Perhaps he was on his way to meet a girlfriend. But Dawood, nineteen at that time, had never had a girlfriend.

A stench of cheap fish came from the Bengali market nearby. He observed a high and grey building from the sidewalk in front. One of the apartments on the sixth and last floor was lit. Curtains waved by the fresh air from the proximity of the sea covered the window to avoid prying eyes, but the interior filtered light showed that the occupant of the apartment was inside.

He crossed the street; a piece of an old newspaper pushed by the wind jumped towards the entrance of the building and escaped after flapping. He began to climb the dirty stairs. Parts of the walls were covered with a reddish color, which was nothing more than dry spitting stains of chewing tobacco.

There was light at the corridor. On the sixth floor, he rang the bell of the left apartment and kept one ear close to the door, trying to listen to someone in the interior. He hoped to find just the person he wanted to see.

A few steps sounded from behind the door. There was only one person inside, no one else was heard. The door opened.

Naseeruddin Dada should be about forty years, was physically large with a lush mustache; his hair, slightly grey, denoted that he had not dyed it black for many days, as it used to be common in him. He had pronounced dark circles under his eyes. He wore a white inner shirt and a cotton checkered blue sarong, colloquially known as *lungi*, which reached till the ankles and surrounded his wide waist.

By his outward appearance, he gave the impression of a mature buffalo milk home delivery vendor and nothing indicated him to be the ferocious and feared head of the local mafia.

—You! —he exclaimed; his prominent teeth required cleaning: he had chewed too much tobacco and eaten too many sweets. His breath was foul and smelly—. *Kya baat hai?* (What?) Soon I'm going to give you what you deserve. Have you come to beg my pardon? No, you've come to ask me for money, haven't you? Your father has become an old retired police officer who doesn't have a rupee to feed your family, right? You miserable, get out of my sight!

Dawood remained in silence, paralyzed, not knowing how to react.

Naseeruddin took a few steps forward with a gesture of disgust.

—*Bewakoof* (idiot!) —he said raising his fist in a threatening way—. If you don't go away, I'll call my men and finish you today myself. Out! Get out!

Dawood knew that none of his minions were in the vicinity that day. He remained paralyzed, still not knowing how to react. He could feel how his sweaty hand, hidden inside his shirt, was wetting profusely the grip of the *Katta*, a homemade revolver.

The mobster had no qualms about spitting on him. The reddish clot from the chewing tobacco fell on the young's feet, dirtying his rubber sandals and also part of both his naked legs.

That sentenced him.

Dawood took a step backwards. He pulled the weapon from inside his shirt. He aimed the view at the man's chest. The hand that was holding the revolver was shaking. He fired.

The man fell back to the ground.

Lying down face up, he was still alive. The blood flowed in abundance from his chest, staining his white shirt.

No believing what had happened, the mobster raised slowly his wide neck to look at his executioner and began to scream for help with all his strength.

—*Madarchod!* (Son of a bitch!) —he said; minor blood clots appeared on the corners of his lips.

His cries became mere weak moans within seconds. Bloody spittle began to flow from his twisted mouth.

Dawood crossed the door threshold and leaned over to watch him closely. He was so close that he perceived his smelly breath and the irregular rhythm of his heart. With his neck veins swollen, Naseeruddin moved slightly with much effort and looked at the young man with fear. Unbelieving the kid's guts and audacity, he knew he was going to die soon.

The boy was restless. He turned outside. From the entrance, he looked towards the back of the hall, entered again in the apartment, approached again the mobster's lying body, who did not stop bleeding profusely, and turned nervously towards the window. He looked askance at the street in case one of the man's henchmen had heard the shot and was entering in the building to help his boss. It was a small, sparsely furnished apartment: a living room, two bedrooms, bathroom, a tiny kitchen and a narrow and long corridor that crossed it. It smelled much to dust and gloom.

He did not know how long it would take him to die or even if he could survive. <<*What if the bullet has not entered inside enough to kill him?* —he thought to himself—. *And what if they find him wounded, take him to a hospital and gets healed? Then he'll come to get my father, my brothers, my sisters, my mother! No matter how far I flee, he wouldn't rest till he got me and killed me in the cruelest way.*>> He sensed that there was no time to lose. He returned to the mobster.

To make it better, he leaned slowly on a table cabinet located just at the entrance. He aimed the gun at his head but failed to keep his arm rigid, since by putting his weight on the furniture, it bobbed due to the ground uneven surface. The mobster watched him with his eyes on fire, in panic, while he hissed inconsistent guttural sounds and tried to unnecessarily drag him from the leg to avoid what was going to happen; however, the pain from the bullet retained in his chest prevented him from full mobility.

The young man was modifying his position slightly to ensure the aim. Again, he found support for his elbow on the edge of the cabinet and with the other hand holding firmly the wrist, he fired. He managed to introduce the bullet at the base of his skull, which broke it as if it was a porcelain figurine.

It was time to go.

After that second detonation, the neighbors had no doubt that they were sounds from shoots. The residents started to appear from the windows of several apartments, exchanging arguments among them of what could have happened.

Leaving the apartment with haste and nervousness, he found at the bottom of the corridor a corpulent figure which stayed still observing him. Immediately, a man and a woman peeped from the opposite apartment. But as soon as the neighbors noticed the shine of the metal gun that was seized on his hand, all of them went back to their respective homes locking the doors.

No one dared to interfere, not out of fear of a stray bullet, but not to witness what was happening; not because the police could question them about the crime, but because, as it used to happen, the mafia could retaliate against any witness of their illegal activities.

Protected by darkness, Dawood ran out. As he came down running, the murmurings and comments from the scared and fearful neighbors from different floors echoed through the stairwell, which diluted as soon as the windows and doors closed.

After reaching the ground floor, Dawood hid the revolver in the belt of his shorts and covered it with the shirt.

He walked back to the streets, in the opposite direction, following the same route that he had made minutes earlier. A passing-by rickshaw driver rang the horn and made him a sign with a distinctive nod of the head, as they usually do to call their customers, but the young man did not pay any attention, and the vehicle followed its journey through the busy traffic.

His walk was now firmer and more resolute. <<*I shouldn't be afraid of death* —he thought as he made his way among the passersby—. *It's something sudden, fast. It doesn't hurt.*>> There was a smile of pleasure on his face. He found death as something as wonderful as breaking an egg; It was stupid to be scared of death in that inhospitable world. He felt sublime, mesmerized, invincible and immortal.

In Bombay, a gangster had been born.