

Chapter V

*This about thrashing you are advising me
why don't you start doing it yourselves?*

J. D. Perón -Labour Day- Plaza de Mayo 1st. May 1952.

1st. May 1955... delivered a bitter speech where he didn't stop mentioning his "mob of arsonists and murderers". Those he referred to, each time he was wrathful were at Barrio Norte, whose houses he'd put on fire with gas oil and their dwellers he'd hang from the street-lamps of Bs.As.

(Ref.: <http://josefrig.tripod.com/violencia.htm>)



Madness started up country against priests which also included their families Two of my father's brothers, who were priests came to my grandparents's house looking for shelter. Lots of churches and the Cathedral of Buenos Aires were burnt down.

On the walls there were graffities of all kinds: "The church only illuminates when it's on fire".

Somebody hung a huge placard in front of my house: "Be patriot, kill a crow". Crows were called the priests due to their long black cassocks.

The grown ups at home are all wide-eyed, pale and worried. They talk slowly, reply angrily and whisper among themselves. The big sink and all the basins of the house were full of water. Including the washing mashine was full of extra water. All the buckets, pots and big tins were also full of water.

Water and more water....

- "Several churches of Buenos Aires were burnt" I heard the grown ups gossiping...

I see guns, four, five, six black, silver, all big ones. Bulletes of different sizes; above all "real" bullets. They frighten.

- "But, what's the matter? what's happening? Can anybody explain to me?". I ask in anguish.

The two priests in long black cassocks are down-hearted and terribly worried.

They are standing, quiet, neither moving nor sitting. My father is at home with other two brothers. They go up and down the ladder to the terrace carrying up big bags full of

sand. They have sawn some pipes and taken them to the terrace. What are they doing? They gather and make hats and caps. - *“What for?”*

I don't understand anything.

They have decided to resist as much as possible.

They send me to the grocer's to buy rice and spaghetti.

- *“They won't harm a child”, they say. (will it be true?)*

I swallow painfully; walk slowly without looking right or left. I'm shaking inside, but the last thing I must do is to run.

There are very few people near the house, but there are lots at the corner on both sides of the street.

While I'm walking to the grocer's, the grown ups don't give heed, but the kids look at me and whisper among themselves. The older ones don't move.

They just look with their hands in their pockets.

At the grocer's, the owner's kids ask if they should wait on me. They are answered affirmatively. While they are doing it, I listen to some persons talking, but I don't turn round to look at them

- *“The little blond one belongs to the house of the priests”*
- *“Yes “the gringo”, we call him”.*
- *“And, who are his parents?” “Whose son is he?”*
- *“I don't know, I think he's the son of the traveller, although other people say, he might be the son of one of the priest, who knows....”*

On returning home, I observe by the corner of my eye a lot of kids have got stones in their hands.

The first one they throw hisses big, dark and black over my head. I can't pretend I'm fearless any more and I start running desperately. I run in zig-zag. It's a strategy I started practising some days ago when they began attacking me, to make it difficult for them to hit me.

Three big boys are standing in front of me with stones in their risen hands ready to throw them to me. There were only 30 meters to the door. They cornered me against the wall and surrounded me. They insulted me:

- *“Son of a bitch”. “Goddamn priests”.*
- *“Do they, by chance, know anything about my mother?”*

My heart throbs fast and hard. I have difficulty for breathing. They laugh and enjoy holding me like a cornered prey. The grown ups don't say anything, they just look side wards... as usual...

Luckily, I see my aunt coming boldly out of the house, (I had never been so happy to see her) and walk directly towards to the menacing group; the gang turn round to look at her, I take the advantage of their slackness, I rush to the open door of the house.

One of the tough guys, called Eusebio, intercepts her with his bike and abuses her. She snatches the bike from him, taking it from the handlebar and rising it over her head, threatens to smash it. The guy runs away trying to get shelter.

My grandfather comes out and protects her with his body. While she is coming into the house, she throws the bike to the floor in front of everybody.

A clear, strong voice of a man bullies:

- "We are waiting for the order to start cutting throats".

The heavy wooden door is shut violently; it's made secure with a huge bar and furniture is pushed against it. Buckets, pots, bowls, oil tins full of water are ready in case of fire.

Barrio Belgrano of Rosario is getting dark, the suburb with four squares facing about one another, with the clock in the middle. On Zuviria St. a lot of about one hundred people on each side, standing about fifty meters from the house, start to sing their partician march.

I escape to the terrace to peep what's going on. The scene is terrific.

The people of each side of the street have lighted torches. They are singing louder and louder, and more and more people are coming. My father scolds me when he sees, and sends me to join the women.

Grandmother, aunt and I are sheltered in the hen-hut. It stinks. The hens and the cock are crouched on their sticks, probably infected by the fear.

Through a hole in the wood of the hen-hut. I can watch what's happening on the terrace. All of them are pushing bags "dressed up" with hats, caps and pieces of pipes similar to shot-guns against a low wall, overhanging along the front of the house.

At the demi-darkness they are a perfect sham of a dozen hidden armed people who are waiting quietly, mixed among them, (my grandfather, my father and my four uncles) are moving taking position without showing themselves too much.

Even my father with a gun in each hand runs and jumps along the front wall, as wide as a brick. I who know the trick, am quite affected on watching so many "armed" men on the roof.

Suddenly before such display, the singing of the partician march lowers its volume until it disappears. Just a few voices that little by little stop.

A long time passes by and nobody speaks at home....waiting. All of us are very happy and even laugh. Grandfather tells everybody that in Italy at the First World War he put the corpses of his friends to defend an old house making the enemy believe they were more people, to give the reinforcement time to arrive....

I fall a sleep. My last thought is: "If the hens get asleep on the stick, will they fall on me?"